Introduction to Special Issue[1]
College Sport (In)Equity: Working Within and Beyond the Law to Achieve Intersectional Racial Justice Praxis

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Field Building in Momentous Times

In October 2020, we submitted a proposal to the Spencer Foundation for a field-building grant to gather an interdisciplinary and innovative group of college sport scholars to envision and work toward radical changes in intercollegiate scholarship, practice, and teaching. Fall 2020 was plagued with efforts of higher education to 'return to normal' in the face of growing globalized and interrelated threats of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Blackness, and authoritarianism. As no surprise to sports scholars, intercollegiate athletics were central sites and symbols across these interrelated current events. During the brief lockdown of college sports – the shuttering of the Winter and Spring 2020 NCAA championship season – high-profile athletes used their platforms to draw attention to a range of movements. Athlete activism connected the ongoing and unprosecuted police killings of Black people and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and Brown communities to the exploitative labor relations embedded in amateurism and revenue sports – where Black athletes are hyper-concentrated.

As high-profile athletes raised public awareness of broader social movements, a fallacy emerged that positioned racial injustices as primarily *external* to sports. Return to play, i.e., bringing back college football and basketball in Fall of 2020, was the salve to heal the racial strife outside of sport. This rhetoric obscured the racial conflicts and inequities internal to athletics. A challenge for all activist movements is how to maintain momentum and public attention long enough to carry forward meaningful reform against entrenched and hegemonic structures (Cooper et al., 2019). Creating sustained, prolonged, and ongoing movements for change requires collaboration across diverse constituency groups, disciplines, and identities (Collins, 2005). It also requires utopian imagining, pushing beyond the imposed cultural, institutional, and legal limits that uphold status-quo power relations (Kelley, 2018). Finally, it requires reflexivity, or learning from and improving upon historical activist efforts (Freire, 1996).

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During the Summer of 2020, we were faculty at the University of Oklahoma, engaged in multiple efforts to reform racial exploitation at our own institution (see "A case of interest divergence" and "Interventions in support of anti-racist praxis in athletics" in this special issue). We had prolonged conversations about how to harness the momentum of this rare cultural moment of public interest into broader social change. We wanted to do so in a way that drew upon past and existing expertise. We discussed ways that we could conceive of and work toward transformation in college sports. We recognized that novel reform would also require transforming how we do scholarship, how we teach, and how we relate to one another within and beyond the academy.

We also wanted to explore connections between racial and gender movements. We were two years from Title IX's 50th anniversary. Coverage of Title IX's 40th anniversary brought ill-conceived analyses, histories, and think pieces that: (a) centered women athletes and ignored the impact of Title IX on all of education; (b) divorced Title IX from an intersectional analysis incorporating race, class, sexual orientation and/or other forms of power, and as a result, centered white[2] women athletes; and (c) presented 'women's issues' as separate from and in conflict with the racial exploitation facing men's revenue sports (Buzuvis, 2014; Whiteside & Roessner, 2018). In designing the colloquium and this special issue, we have actively sought to counteract those reductionist and ahistorical approaches.

While the Civil Rights Act, including Title IX, prohibits explicit race and gender discrimination in educational and employment settings like college sports, these laws cannot fully address race and gender inequality. For example, women athletes have yet to achieve 'equal' status as they remain in sports with less resources, funding, and media attention (Messner, 2002; Milner & Braddock, 2016; Musto, et al., 2017). Furthermore, Title IX disproportionately benefited white women, who are 71.7% of women athletes (Lapchick, 2020). Lastly, United States (U.S.) college sport includes over 520,000 athletes (NCAA Media Center, 2022), yet People of Color are concentrated in only three sports: track & field, basketball, and football (Lapchick, 2020). Reforms through the NCAA legislative processes are similarly constrained. Although the NCAA is a member institution governed by higher education administrators, it is also a separate entity that can operate as a legal body with its own enforced regulations. Moreover, U.S. law has reaffirmed the NCAA's authority to restrict student athletes (Colombo, 2009).

With these lessons and goals in mind, we proposed a field-building grant that provided the time, space, and community to radically revise future possibilities for college sports as an institution. Our vision was inherently intersectional, interdisciplinary, and interrelated. In changing college sports, we saw the need to change the conditions for college athletes, the media coverage and narratives of college sports, the researchers who study college sports, the practitioners who work within college sports, and those who teach future practitioners and leaders of college sports. Guided by Black feminist activist scholarship (e.g., Collins, 2005; Crenshaw, 1988; 1989) and transformational educational theories (e.g., Freire, 1996; hooks, 2014), we proposed a closed

[2] Throughout the special issue, all references to the racial group "white" are uncapitalized. While APA style guides encourage authors to capitalize all racial descriptors, critical race theorists, researchers, and activists have moved to capitalizing Black (and other racial categories of color) and uncapitalizing white. Capitalizing both wrongly places Black and white as equally positioned racial groups without acknowledging that the white racial/ethnic group's claim to identity and culture is predicated on the subordination and domination of racialized minorities. By uncapitalizing white throughout our special issue, we hope to remove some of the implicit legitimacy whiteness cultivates for white identities, white culture, and white supremacy.

colloquium of critical scholars spanning these interest groups and areas of expertise. The articles in this special issue arise from our grant-funded colloquium *College Sport (In)Equity*.

Colloquium Format

The Spencer Foundation funded our field-building grant to host a closed, virtual colloquium throughout 2022 (see Haslerig & Hextrum, 2023 for full description of the colloquium and our attempts to create a revolutionary academic space to present research). In 2021, we invited scholars across diverse disciplines, research agendas, institutions, and identities to submit brief abstracts aligned with the grant objectives. Invited participants exhibited critical praxis – interweaving teaching, scholarship, and activism – throughout their work (Freire, 1996). Only invited presenters and discussants attended the colloquium. This closed format fostered a collaborative, in-progress, and creative event. The event included panel presentations with an assigned discussant. Presenters and discussion facilitators posed questions to inform a larger group discussion. We ended each day with a discussion that crossed panels to brainstorm recommendations emerging from the presented research and that connected to the colloquium aims. The colloquium emphasized dialogic engagement and structured collaboration rather than individualized, recounted research agendas.

During the final session of the colloquium, we discussed whether and how to publish our research findings and dialogue in an academic venue. We decided to create an open-access special issue to help with the publishing demands of academia and to ensure the content could be disseminated beyond academic paywalls.

Peer Review Process

As stated in our vision for the colloquium, we reimagined how to conduct, present, and disseminate public scholarship on college sports (Haslerig & Hextrum, 2023). Throughout the past three years, colloquium participants have received peer feedback from preeminent scholars on their initial proposals, elongated abstracts, presentations, and conference papers. We provided extensive guidance on how discussants (during the colloquium) and reviewers (for this special issue) should engage with scholarship. We encouraged discussants and reviewers to embrace intersectionality and interdisciplinarity in how they conducted reviews. We facilitated this process through an intentional and strategic pairing of reviewers with content. We recognized the broad expertise in our group – all contributors had a robust understanding of (re)production and contestation of power in college sports. But we wanted to push contributors, including ourselves, into uncomfortable and novel terrains with our work. To do so, we: (a) paired discussants and research papers to cross identities and identity-related scholarship in intersectional ways (e.g., pairing a Black man who is an expert in the exploitation of Black men in sport as the discussant for two white women presenting on Title IX); (b) pushed disciplinary boundaries (e.g., pairing a historian as a reviewer for a sociological researcher); and (c) elevated graduate student expertise and embraced bottom-up mentoring (e.g., including graduate students as discussants as well as recipients of feedback).

Through the collaborative format of the colloquium, we observed participants' work grow and expand from this structured feedback. Rather than invite new, external reviewers into the feedback cycle, we conducted an internal, non-anonymized peer review. We believed that doing

so would ensure that reviewers were aware of the deep colloquium discussions and could push papers to engage across themes and live up to these radical aims. We also requested that reviewers assess how much the article contributed to ideas and extended conversations raised at the colloquium. In doing so, we positioned thinking, writing, presenting, conversing, and reviewing as a collaborative process intended to build the field of college sports and push forward innovative scholarship.

As a result of the deep engagement during the colloquium, we were unable to anonymize the review process but still upheld rigorous academic standards. All papers were peer-reviewed by at least two scholars. In addition, our articles were refereed by Jennifer Hoffman to ensure that our reviews were independently collated and received a legitimate editorial review. We are deeply indebted to her for her continued intellectual engagement with this special issue as a reviewer and managing editor. We believe this review process ensured rigor and generative feedback while also adhering to the collectivist and collaborative vision of the colloquium.

In Memory of Dr. Kristina Marie Navarro-Krupka

While we were completing this special issue, we lost an integral athletics and higher education scholar-practitioner, Kristina Marie Navarro-Krupka. The vast network of collaborators, colleagues, and friends who mourn Kristina's death is a testament to the power of the scholarly community she built and an affirmation of the potential for theory-rich, critical, and applied research to impact people and institutions. The imprint of Kristina's scholarship was already apparent in citations across this special issue and journal at large. But with her passing, we want to dedicate this issue to her memory.

Inside the Issue

The articles presented in this special issue arise from the nearly three-year effort described above. Through ongoing and reiterative feedback both in live virtual sessions and written peer review, scholars collaboratively re-envisioned scholarly approaches to college sport equity, focusing on three areas: scholarship, praxis, and media engagement. The 50th anniversary of Title IX, in concert with the current wave of athlete activism, provide an opportunity to explore the limitations of legal approaches and re-envision new pathways for critical sport scholarship, policy, praxis, and activism to advance racial justice over the next 50 years. Questions raised by this special issue include:

- To what historical, ongoing, and contemporary problems and tensions does justice work in athletics need to respond?
- What are the limitations of relying upon or working within legal and NCAA legislative processes for solutions to issues of exclusion and inequity? How do current legislative and policy reforms illuminate these issues?
- How can more intersectional and interdisciplinary approaches advance racial and gender equity in intercollegiate athletics?
- What populations and theories are often underexamined in college sports scholarship? What questions, approaches, theories, and methods should we be engaging as critical sport scholars?

- What shifts to our scholarship, theory, methods, praxis, and media engagement strategies are necessary to move the field forward?
- How do we use research to (re)shape and inform media narratives?
- What is the role of scholars in creating awareness of critical sport scholarship and media (re)framings?
- How can critical scholarship shape our praxis and approach to teaching, training future practitioners, & working with practitioners?

Contributors addressed these questions by exploring a range of topics, settings, and populations associated with college sports. In the **lead article**, *Contemplating a 21st Century View of Title IX's Application to College Sport*, Ellen J. Staurowsky offers an innovative historical and contemporary assessment of Title IX that challenges the reductionist accounts of gender progress. Her approach excavates the way the law continues to harm and marginalize those facing intersectional and systemic forms of oppression. **Next**, Jay Coakley, C. Keith Harrison, and Jean Boyd in their article, *Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Opportunities for Black College Athletes: Strategically Facilitating Academic Achievement and Successful Career Transitions*, discuss the potential for NIL to support Black college athletes' agency and propose a structure for realizing that potential. The **third article**, *Exploring the Influence of Black Liberatory Theory on Collegiate Sport Reform Initiatives* by Brandon Wallace, contextualizes NIL and larger athletic changes by tracing Black social movements and intra-Black political divergences.

Deepening the volume's exploration of labor exploitation in college sport with the **fourth article**, Sara E. Grummert's piece *Antiblackness and Carcerality: Implications for the Study of College Athletics* rigorously locates intercollegiate athletics within the "carceral continuum" of "antiblack state projects" – an intertwined and mutually informing set of discourses, logics, institutional systems, disciplining practices, and power relations that reproduce and normalize the "abjection of Black people generally" (p. 83). The **fifth contribution** by Siduri Haslerig and Kirsten Hextrum, *Interventions in Support of Anti-Racist Praxis is Athletics*, considers how to resist antiblackness in athletic departments. Using Critical Race Studies, they offer a theory of change that includes formal (i.e., graduate classes) and informal (i.e., workshops and trainings) anti-racist curricula across the university to prepare future practitioners and to provide current athletic department staff with opportunities for life-long learning.

The **sixth article**, by Simran Sethi and Kirsten Hextrum, *An Examination of the Assimilative and Anti-Immigrant Policies, Practices, and Cultures that Harm International College Athletes* introduces to the literature nation/nationalism as a form of global systemic and intersectional oppression undergirding college sports. Rather than embracing the linguistic, cultural, racial, and national diversity ICAs bring to college campuses, they meticulously document the ways the U.S. government, the NCAA, higher education institutions, athletic departments, and coaches impose assimilation of white, Anglo-Saxon American norms onto ICAs. Sethi and Hextrum also offer an alternative model for an integrative, holistic form of support to improve ICA's collegiate athletic experience. The **seventh contribution** revisits questions about reforming the racist conditions plaguing college sports. In *A Case of Interest Divergence: An Athletic Department's Anti-racist Book Club*, Kirsten Hextrum and Siduri Haslerig grapple with designing and implementing anti-racist programming for athletic department coaches, staff, and

administrators during a time of resurgence in state- and national-level racial justice movements and white supremacist violence.

The issue **concludes** with Johanna Mellis, Derek Silva, and Nathan Kalman-Lamb's piece, *"In the Arena": Reflections on Critical Public Engagements on College Sport.* Offering an unflinching autoethnographical view of the backlash they've received as hosts of a critical podcast, "End of Sport," Mellis et al. nonetheless argue that "public engagement should not be principally about self-promotion, but is part and parcel to our research and our moral obligation to the peoples and groups in which we co-construct our scholarship" (p. 186). Indeed, the colloquium served as a forum to work through the consequences so many of us had seen from our critical engagement with sport. As a diverse and intergenerational group of contributors, our experiences have vastly differed in terms of the cultural context, accessibility of large public audiences, our relative vulnerability (which also has varied across any one of our given careers), and the lived impacts of our critical scholarship and choices about public engagement.

Across the special issue, contributors advance research in intersectional ways. They each excavate overlapping forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, capitalism, and nationalism, among other forces that are foundational to the U.S. and to college sports. As part of this project, contributors highlight underserved and understudied populations, e.g., international college athletes, trans* athletes, and Black women, and offer novel insights to foster more inclusive athletic experiences. As activist scholars, many contributors reflected in the dialogue sessions and through their writings on the toll such work has on our scholarship, teaching, and relationships. These reflective pieces substantiate the importance of community building as a critical praxis to sustain us in this work toward creating lasting change.

As organizers of the colloquium and editors of this special issue, we are encouraged by the critical and imaginative research presented here. We had the pleasure of building a community with scholars throughout – and beyond – the grant period. In presenting this special issue, we invite others to carry forward the critical research aims, approach to review, and collaborative methods discussed. As an interdisciplinary team of scholars, we invite contributors and readers to share this content with broad audiences and incorporate these insights throughout their practice, activism, and teaching.

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Contemplating a 21st Century View of Title IX's Application to College Sport

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Abstract: Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 is arguably one of the most consequential pieces of legislation to affect change within college sport. In retrospect, Title IX's influence on college sport programs and its governing bodies is a lesson in what legislation can achieve when promoting gender equity within an entrenched male hegemonic system and what its legal limitations are in a predominantly White system of college sport. Title IX's implementing regulations reflect a negotiated settlement between commercial, economic, and state interests invested in men's sports and women sport advocates who leveraged the optics and reality of outright gender discrimination (Hextrum & Sethi, 2022; Staurowsky, 2023). The result in the late 1970s was a series of "last stand" protections for men's sports, contained in such mechanisms as the "contact sports exception," designed to resist the incursion of women into those all-men's spaces. Connected to the idea that in the athletic arena, "separate" could be "equal," the framework of a gender binary was embedded in the regulations (Staurowsky et al., 2022). This paper examines the limits of Title IX's liberal feminist conception of equality through Title IX's impact on the college sport system and compliance; Title IX's embrace of "separate but equal" and fears regarding strong women; and the insulation of men's sports from women through the contact sports exemption. It further explores Title IX, race and intersectionality in college sport and the NCAA's pretense of leadership regarding gender equity and gender discrimination.

Keywords: College sport, Title IX, intersectionality, gender and race intersectionality, transgender, contact sports exception, gender binary, gender equity

Title IX Athletics Regulations as a Negotiated Settlement

It can be argued that Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 has rightfully earned its reputation as one of the most consequential pieces of legislation to affect change within college sport. According to National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) data, athletic participation opportunities for women athletes have grown from 29,977 in 1971-1972 to 229,620 in 2021- 2022 (NCAA, 2022), representing an increase of 666 percent over its 51-year history. In retrospect, Title IX's influence on college sport programs and its governing bodies is a lesson in what legislation can achieve when promoting gender equity within an entrenched male hegemonic system and what its legal limitations are in a predominantly White system of college sport.

Title IX's regulations pertaining to athletics were a negotiated settlement between powerful commercial, economic, and state interests invested in men's sports and women sports advocates who were leveraging the optics and reality of outright gender discrimination (Hextrum & Sethi,

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2022; Staurowsky, 2018; 2023; Staurowsky et al., 2022). The result in the late 1970s was a series of "last stand" protections for men's sports, contained in such mechanisms as the "contact sports exception" that was designed to resist the incursion of women into those all-men's spaces of baseball, basketball, football, ice hockey, lacrosse, and wrestling. They further defined "contact" as a men's preserve in the first generation of women's sports under Title IX. Intimately connected to the idea that in the athletic arena, "separate" could be "equal," a conception in other areas of civil rights law that has long been challenged, the framework for college athletic programs to operate according to a gender binary was embedded in the regulations (Hoffman, 2017; Staurowsky et al., 2022).

Thus, we arrive more than 50 years after the passage of Title IX to the moment when dozens of colleges and universities attempted to eliminate and/or successfully eliminated women's athletic programs during the COVID pandemic of 2020 in open defiance of compliance regulations (Whitaker, 2020). This created a whole new generation of women athlete plaintiffs burdened with the task of challenging the very administrators who claimed to welcome those athletes to their respective, so-called institutional families (Bailey Glasser, 2021; Haurwitz, 2018).

In 2021, the second-class treatment women experienced at the NCAA Women's Final Four National Championship was documented on social media by University of Oregon player, Sedona Prince and others. Photos of the fully equipped weight room available for the men's tournament were posted side by side with the stack of weights the women were expected to use went viral. Contrasts were also shown between an abundant buffet of food available for the men and pre-packaged and limited food options for the women. Criticisms arose around the marketing of the men's and women's tournament, with recognition made to the fact that the men's tournament was afforded exclusive rights to the term "March Madness". The results of an independent report commissioned by the NCAA in the aftermath of that public embarrassment revealed that

> The N.C.A.A.'s broadcast agreements, corporate sponsorship contracts, distribution of revenue, organizational structure, and culture all prioritize Division I men's basketball over everything else in ways that create, normalize, and perpetuate gender inequities. At the same time, the N.C.A.A. does not have structures or systems in place to identify, prevent or address those inequities. (Kaplan et al., 2021, p. 2)

In the weeks and months following, NCAA leaders were forced to admit and concede that they had failed to provide equitable treatment to women athletes in multiple championships across all three divisions.

Law professor Kimberly Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality, describing it as "a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (Steinmetz, 2020). The lens of intersectionality reveals additional barriers to success women athleties of color and sexual minorities face because of the compounding influences of racism, transphobia, heterosexism, and sexual prejudice (Staurowsky et al., 2022). This paper explores the limits of Title IX's liberal feminist conception of equality through Title IX's impact on the college sport system and compliance; Title IX's embrace of "separate but equal" and fears regarding strong women; the insulation of men's sports from women through the contact sports exemption; Title IX, race and intersectionality in college sport; the manipulation of

Title IX by the NCAA and the case of NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Tournament in 2021; and the NCAA's pretense of leadership regarding gender equity and gender discrimination (Staurowsky, 2023).

Title IX, Its Impact on the College Sport System, and Compliance

Characterized by legal scholar Erin Buzuvis (2021) as the "little statute that could," Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 has been rightfully credited with affecting change within college sport. While there is no question that opportunities for women in the college sport system have expanded in the five decades since the passage of Title IX, the path generally taken in terms of Title IX athletics compliance within college and university athletic departments is typically circuitous at best and short of the mark at worst (Staurowsky, 2016; Staurowsky et al., 2020; Staurowsky et al., 2022; Staurowsky & Rhoades, 2020). In a survey of 1,155 college sport leaders conducted in 2019, only 44% indicated that their institutions had "strong" or "very strong" records of Title IX compliance (Staurowsky et al., 2020).

Studies conducted independently by the Women's Sports Foundation (Staurowsky et al., 2020; 2022), Champion Women (Hogshead-Makar & Poyer, 2020), the Chronicle of Higher Education (Jenkins, 2019), USA Today (Jacoby et al., 2022), and a law firm commissioned by the NCAA (Kaplan et al., 2021) support a conclusion that there is widespread lack of Title IX compliance in college and university athletic departments. For example, "in 2019-20, of the $241,450,778 spent on recruiting athletic talent to compete at the college level (in both two-year and four-year institutions), 30% was spent on recruiting female athletes ($75,290,142)" (Staurowsky et al., 2022, p. 11). Furthermore, in an analysis of athletic scholarship dollars allocated to men and women athletes, nearly half of 107 NCAA Division I institutions fell short of the Title IX standard (Jacoby et al., 2022).

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, women and men athletes sued or threatened to sue their institutions for Title IX violations arising from administrative decisions to cut certain sports when schools were often not in compliance to begin with. From the outset of the pandemic in 2020 through 2021, administrators at Brown University, William and Mary, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, East Carolina University, Dartmouth University, Clemson University, University of St. Thomas, LaSalle University, and Dickinson College all had to roll back efforts to eliminate programs because those actions only amplified existing Title IX inequities (Bailey Glasser, 2021).

Although more than five decades have passed, gender equity within athletic departments is hardly secure. Because no school has had its federal funding removed as a result of non-compliance with Title IX in the area of athletics, institutionalized gender discrimination continues (Staurowsky et al., 2022). "In a regulatory environment where those being asked to comply see little downside in not complying, the approach is more about managing perceptions than actual compliance" (Staurowsky & Rhoads, 2020, p. 387). The fact that an athletic department may contract with a consulting firm to assess gender equity and Title IX compliance does not mean that there is a commitment to compliance. As one consultant observed, compliance was "just a little game you have to play for a while" if an athletic department is under scrutiny (Libit & Cyphers, 2020, para. 97).

Among the lingering concerns that remain more than 50 years after Title IX's passage is whether or not the embrace of the concept of "separate but equal" in the Title IX regulations as they pertain to athletics has structurally reinforced a system that perpetually devalues women, sets the interests of men in opposition to women within athletic departments, undermines women's power within athletic departments, and preserves gender stereotypes. Even as women athletes emerge in the 21st Century as powerful leaders, activists, and performers, their power is viewed alternatively as admirable and inspiring by some, mildly unsettling by others, and in need of regulation by some portion of the U.S. populace. As a consequence, we confront the reality that as progress under Title IX has been achieved, the full enfranchisement of women in the realm of college sport as authoritative voices and impactful actors continue to meet resistance that emanates from enduring preconceptions around womanhood, strength, and physicality.

And that reality is happening within a larger legal, social, and political context where the state interest in women's bodies is evidenced in the historic reversal of a woman's constitutional right to an abortion by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* issued just a day after the 50th anniversary of Title IX in 2022. It is further evidenced in the 23 states that have passed laws restricting transgender girls and women from competing on teams consistent with their gender identities (Barnes, 2023); the tracking of high school girls' menstruation histories (Darvin et al., 2023); the continuing use of sex testing regulations that harm all women athletes but have a greater impact on women athletes of color (Human Rights Watch, 2023); and the control, surveillance, and disciplining of women athletes of color (Foster, 2003). The next section explores these issues further.

Title IX's Embrace of Separate But Equal & Fears Regarding Strong Women

"Too strong for a woman." That is what the godmother of Title IX, Bernice Sandler, was told when she applied for seven tenure-eligible faculty positions at the University of Maryland and was turned down for all of them, with two additional rejections following thereafter in 1969 (Sandler, 2000). Having been a member of the department as a doctoral candidate and a part-time instructor, she sought answers as to why she was summarily passed over. Reasons included a belief that women disrupted department politics, women were intellectually inferior and too emotional, and given that she was a mother, the demands of family life would interfere with her work. Ultimately, she was also told that the men in the department found her to be too outspoken in offering her opinions and views. She had, in the words of one of her colleagues, "come on too strong for a woman" (Sandler, 2000, p. 9).

Sandler's singular moment was connected to a larger pattern that she wrote about at a time when terms like *sexism* and *sexual harassment* had not yet entered the American lexicon (Ware, 2014). In her accounts of efforts to find relief for women facing sex discrimination in colleges and universities in the 1960s, the federal laws that did have a provision prohibiting sex discrimination did not cover women working in higher education. Dr. Sandler (2000) described finding Federal Order 11246 as a "eureka moment." That Order was issued by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 as part of an effort to ensure equal employment opportunity. The order was issued two years after Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech.

Dr. Sandler's work with the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) led to a class action

lawsuit in January of 1970 against every college and university in the country that received federal financial assistance. That lawsuit alleged violations of Federal Order 11246 as amended by President LyndonB. Johnson (Miller, 2020; Sandler, 2000). That was followed by more than 250 individual complaints to the federal government (Griggs, 2019; Miller, 2020; Sandler, 2000).

The groundwork done for that case became the foundation for seven days of hearings conducted in 1970 by the House Committee on Education and Labor called by the chair of the subcommittee on education, Edith Green (D-OR). Those hearings resulted in a 1,300-page report documenting the magnitude of unfair treatment women were being subjected to in U.S. colleges and universities. The enactment of Title IX happened two years later, championed by Green along with U.S. Senator Birch Bayh (D-IN) and Representative Patsy Mink (D-HA).

Once passed, resistance came not from those concerned about educational policy but from those representing powerful and monied men's college sport interests. NCAA and college conference leaders, athletic directors, football coaches, and college presidents created a long road ahead in terms of Title IX compliance (Staurowsky, 2003; 2023).

The NCAA in partnership with its member schools and the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) lobbied members of Congress initially to exempt all athletic programs from Title IX. Failing that, efforts were made (unsuccessfully) to exempt the revenue-producing sports of football and men's basketball. Insight into the fervor with which Title IX was perceived to be a threat to football is captured in a statement made by Senator Roman Hruska (R-NE) in July of 1975 as part of a hearing record held to amend the legislation. Hruska mapped out a doomsday prediction: "Should substantial portions of football revenue in excess of profits be diverted to title IX compliance, a serious decline in the quality of the football program would result" (p. 28, para. 5). Hruska's position was consistent with a talking point that had found its way into the deliberations of the day that raised the question of whether Title IX was "going to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs in those colleges and universities with a major revenue producing sport?" (p. 12, para. 2). Notably, while Hruska advocated the adoption of protections for football consistent with the views of the Nebraska head football coach Tom Osborne, he dutifully included a letter from the women's athletic director at the University of Nebraska, Aleen Swofford, who made it clear that the women's athletic program was opposed to any effort to undermine Title IX protections. Publicly, however, he not only ignored the position of Swofford and the women's athletic department at Nebraska but actively worked against them (Hruska, 1975, p. 26).

Efforts to create the Title IX regulation intended to guide athletic departments in their assessment of compliance areas and evaluation of equal treatment three years after the statute was passed garnered so much attention that it caught government officials off guard. Casper Weinberger, then serving as secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare observed before a House education subcommittee hearing in June of 1975 called to address concerns about the regulation raised by the NCAA that, "I had not realized until the comment period that athletics is the single most important thing in the United States" (Associated Press,1975). In response to NCAA concerns that complying with Title IX would destroy the economic foundation of intercollegiate athletics, Weinberger offered an assurance that the regulation did not require equal funding for women's sports, just that opportunities needed to be made available. He went on to assure the committee that Title IX did not require women to

participate on football teams. According to an Associated Press (1975) report, Weinberger added, "It does not mean the National Collegiate Athletic Association will be dissolved and will have to fire all of its highly vocal staff" (para. 12). The orchestrated narrative pitting the interests of women athletes in opposition to football and other men's sports developed early, enduring for decades into the 21st Century.

Insulating Men's Sports From Women Through the Contact Sports Exemption

Through public hearings, private communications, and lobbying efforts leveraging relationships between state institutions and their legislators in Congress in the 1970s, the all-men's NCAA strategically influenced negotiations around the meaning of equal treatment and how it would manifest in the Title IX regulations and interpretations issued by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Not only was a gender binary embedded in the Title IX regulation, measures were taken as Weinberger noted to ensure that there would be no incursion of women into the sport of football (Associated Press, 1975).

The doctrine of separate but equal in athletics was justified primarily on two grounds: age and access. As the editors of the University of Pennsylvania Law Review explained in 1976,

> …the acceptability under Title IX of fielding separate male and female teams in a particular sport should depend on the age level of the students involved. It might be argued that there are sufficient physiological differences between the sexes not only to justify but to mandate separate-but-equal in this context. Where boys are physically stronger and larger than girls, Lau and Griggs alert us to the danger of impermissible de facto exclusion of girls from teams selected on the basis of competitive skill. In such a situation, separate teams might be not merely acceptable, but mandatory to prevent unequal access to competitive athletic activities (University of Pennsylvania Law Review, 1976, pp. 837-838).

The express mechanisms to fulfill that guarantee are two exceptions: the competitive skill exception and the contact sport exception. Keying off of the assumptions about biological differences already certified in the permission given within the regulation to maintain separate-but-equal athletic teams, committing in effect to a college sport system locked into a gender binary arrangement, there was an additional layer that strong women would not permeate the boundary and find their way into the most valued and valuable men's sports of football, basketball, ice hockey, baseball, wrestling, and boxing. Some vulnerabilities already existed on that front because there was a provision that allowed women to compete on men's teams when they did not have a team of their own. Thus, in those transition years when men's teams far outnumbered women's teams, qualified women athletes started to compete on men's teams in swimming, diving, tennis, and golf (Stein, 2012).

Given the political and social context in which the regulation was issued in the 1970s, concerns existed that female athletes would not be as skilled or strong enough to compete with male athletes (notably as the Penn Law review editors point out there was an awareness that this assumption should not be applied to younger athletes) and should co-ed teams exist, female athletes would be displaced by male athletes. As Reddy (2021) notes,

> In many ways, sports are a performative proving ground for strength. Within this context, discriminatory and exclusionary efforts make sense, as they stem from efforts to preserve the symbol of strength that sports stand for by excluding those who are either perceived as 'weak' or as a 'threat' to the norms in sports. (para. 1)

That said, legal scholar Deborah Brake (2010), in her critique of Title IX's acceptance of separate teams, observed that it does not come without a cost. She noted that the act of separating women from men in athletic competition perpetuates the existing gender hierarchy dominated by men's sport interests, leaving it unchallenged. The separation itself sends a message that men athletes are better than women athletes with long-standing gender-based assumptions driving logic. Thus, efforts to avoid gender-blind selection "would leave female athletes with fewer opportunities because they cannot hold their own against male athletes" (Brake, 2010, p. 29).

The dialogues that shaped the regulations in the 1970s remained anchored in beliefs about male superiority and female inferiority even as the law was mandating that decisions based on those beliefs be eliminated. In calling for the rescission of the contact sport exemption on grounds that it violated the Equal Protection Clause, Katlynn Dee (2020) argued the following three claims:

> (1) the exception relies on generalized stereotypes about the physical abilities of women and does not account for their individualized qualifications;
> (2) the sex of the athlete does not inhibit his or her ability to play the sport because sex does not go to the essence of the contact sport; and
> (3) the asserted safety rationale is pretext for the legislature's intent to protect revenue-producing sports like men's football and basketball from female encroachment. (p. 1012)

In a hypermasculine enterprise like sport (Martin & McMillan, 2022; McGovern, 2021), such equivocation leaves room for avoidance, resistance, and manipulation to manifest in myriad ways (Brake, 2010; 2011). Strength, power, and control are all at stake in preserving what have traditionally been thought of as men's spaces in sport and limiting access to women's spaces. By insisting on an appearance of change with as little disturbance as possible to the underlying foundation of the enterprise, Title IX's mandate of equal treatment faces constant headwinds on the path to systemic change.

The terms under which strength is paired with femininity, and the legitimacy of who lays claim to it, emerge in the surveillance of transgender women athletes. The indictment of being "too strong for a woman" is revealed in full force when gender discrimination under Title IX is recognized as applying to those whose gender identity differs from their biological sex at birth. The issue of transgender women competing on women's teams has created divisions among Title IX and women's sport advocates, some of whom had been allies in the fight for equal rights for women for 50 years (Tugend, 2022). Citing concerns that transgender women will take over women's sports because of perceived biological advantages, especially for transgender women who have gone through male puberty, Olympian and founder of an organization called "Champion Women," Nancy Hogshead-Makar has argued that "equality requires separation" and allowing trans women to compete on women's teams predicts that "women will lose out" (Tugend, 2022, para. 23-25).

That logic, however, assumes a magnitude of trans women's presence in sport that is not reflected in their rate of participation and may (does) imply that even one trans woman is too many. According to *Outsports,* 32 trans athletes have competed openly at the college level in schools that are members of the NCAA, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and community college leagues and associations (Zeigler & Webb, 2022). While this account does not include trans athletes who were not publicly out or had not come out to their teammates, the number is very small, estimated to be less than one percent. Taking the NCAA as a case example for the academic year 2020-2021, member schools sponsored 10,733 teams with 219,177 women competing on those teams across approximately 42 championships (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021a). It is not a given that a team that has a trans woman athlete on it will compete in one of those championships or the events offered in sports like swimming, track and field, and gymnastics. In Utah, where the legislature overrode a veto of a bill in 2022 barring transgender girls from playing high school sports, there were only four transgender high school athletes in the state (one being a girl) out of 750,000 athletes in total (Tugend, 2022).

To illustrate this, University of Pennsylvania swimmer Lia Thomas made history by becoming the first openly transgender woman to win an NCAA Division I swimming national title in the 500-yard freestyle in 2022 (Blinder, 2022). To put Thomas's victory in perspective, she was not the first transgender woman to win an NCAA title: Cece Telfer won an NCAA Division II title in the hurdles in 2019 (Zeigler & Webb, 2022). Furthermore, at the 2022 NCAA Division I Women's Swimming and Diving Championship, national champions were named in 18 swimming and 3 diving events (Sutherland, 2022). Of the 322 athletes competing, one was an out transgender woman.

Thomas's performance and subsequent victory in the 500 freestyle galvanized an already churning conversation regarding transgender athletes. That conversation was fueled further by claims from competitors like Riley Gaines, who alleged that transgender women athletes like Thomas were robbing women of coveted opportunities to win events despite the fact that Gaines herself shared a 5th place finish with Thomas in the 200-yard freestyle at the NCAA Division I Women's Swimming and Diving Championships in 2022 (Swimming World, 2022). When considered relative to 500-yard freestyle performances in previous championships between 2013 and 2022, "Thomas's breakthrough performance is only just average…Over the last 10 years, she would mostly have come only in 2nd position with her time. Notably, in the 2016-17 season, she would have come 12th," (Goswami, 2022, paras. 3-6).

As the National Women's Law Center (2022) explains, despite recent efforts to ban transgender – and in some cases, intersex – athletes from competing in school sports in 15 states between 2020 and 2022, those athletes have still been competing for years. The rights of transgender athletes to compete on teams consistent with their gender identity are protected under Title IX as well as laws passed in 17 states and the District of Columbia (National Women's Law Center, 2022). President Joseph Biden affirmed the rights of transgender students in an Executive Order dated January 25, 2021, that "All persons should receive equal treatment under the law, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation" (Biden, 2021) and the U.S. Department of Education issued a clarification that discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity constituted a violation under Title IX (Office for Civil Rights, 2021). In April of 2023, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights issued a new proposed rule. The rule would

prevent schools from instituting outright bans on transgender athletes from competing on teams consistent with their gender identity (what many have called a "one size fits all" ban) but would allow for a consideration of grade level, level of competition, and reference to eligibility requirements already enacted by sport governing bodies like the NCAA. The onus would be on schools to explain how they balance the educational interests of transgender athletes while minimizing "harm to students who are limited or denied in their participation on a male or female team because of their gender identity" (Smith, 2023, para. 3).

In a letter issued on May 15, 2023, to U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Catherine Lhamon sent from the Transgender Legal Defense Fund, Harvard Law School LGBTQ+ Advocacy Clinic, and Athlete Ally, the proposed rule was described as an important step in protecting the rights of transgender, nonbinary, and intersex athletes under Title IX. However, it also noted that

> [T]he proposed rule fails to meaningfully engage with the racist history of gender-based policing in sports; does not sufficiently guard against the use of pernicious stereotypes about TNI [transgender, nonbinary, and intersex] people that have long been used to justify restricting the rights of marginalized groups; and lacks meaningful guidance on how the rule should be applied to nonbinary and intersex students. (p. 2, para. 1)

In some ways, it is no wonder that U.S. college sport systems have taken a leisurely path to compliance that has resulted in generally keeping women subordinated and sexual minorities either out of the arena entirely or regulated to the margins. The regulations themselves were designed to protect the gender binary, creating a more than 50-year investment in maintaining its boundaries. As a negotiated settlement, even as the number of women athletes and the number of women working in college and university athletic programs have expanded, they bargain over who gains access to sport opportunities, the magnitude of the benefit they realize from that access, and the compromises they have to make in order to remain in various sectors of college sport industry (i.e., college and university athletic departments; conferences; NCAA; media and marketing partners) continues.

Title IX, Race, and Intersectionality in College Sport

Over the course of 50 years, Title IX has become a cultural symbol synonymous with gender equity in athletic programs, a shorthand reference that stirs in people's sensibilities around fair treatment without a real understanding of what Title IX requires and what it does not require (Staurowsky & Weight, 2011). As important as Title IX as an education law has been in opening up opportunities for women in American society, it is what feminists and critical race theorists refer to as a "single axis" law (Staurowsky et al., 2022).

As such, a focus on Title IX compliance does not speak to how gender discrimination intersects with other forms of bias. The reason this is important is that "…women have not shared equally in many of the post-Title IX gains" that have been realized over the past five decades (Brake, 2010, p. 113). In a Women's Sports Foundation report on Title IX and race in intercollegiate athletics, the authors noted that "Race and gender inequalities are intertwined by their very natures…Thus, women athletes of color are in double jeopardy, facing the effects of

gender and race discrimination" (Butler & Lopiano, 2003, p. 7).

As legal scholars Mathewson (2012) and Flowers (2015) point out, Title IX provides a remedy for gender discrimination while simultaneously ignoring racial discrimination against African American women athletes. Furthermore, Mathewson (2012) directs our attention to a false assumption operating within the Title IX frame of equal opportunity that more opportunity for women means that all women reap the benefits in an equal way. Leading us through the flaw in that assumption, he points out that Title IX's mandate of equal access to athletic participation opportunities could be achieved by providing disproportionately more opportunities to White women athletes without consideration for women from other racial groups who get left behind.

In 2001, Dr. Doris Corbett, Professor Emerita and administrator at both Howard University and the University of Northern Iowa wrote, "Women of color experience a form of double jeopardy - racism and sexism. Because they are overlooked by society in general, their struggles in both sport and other aspects of life are compounded" (p. 307). Arguing for a more inclusive vision of college sport, one that recognized that women athletes of color were rendered invisible by the marginalizing forces of racism and sexism working in tandem, she observed:

> Working relationships that could operate for the good of the whole social institution of sport and society will continue to be hampered unless ethnic and racial stereotyping are unpacked and discarded. As women we already share a form of oppression that is universally understood. Why do we find it so difficult to extend the parameters? (p. 307).

According to Cooper and Newton (2021),

> Even after the passage of the Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, when athletic programs were expanding teams and scholarships for women, many of these opportunities were offered in sports where Black women were "herstorically" underrepresented due to various resources and gendered racist barriers (e.g., ice hockey, rowing, water polo, etc.). (p. 71)

A compounding factor that worked against Black women athletes in college sport was racialized stereotypical perspectives about which sports they could play (basketball and track versus swimming and volleyball). Even at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), women's athletic teams were not supported with equitable funding and faced differential treatment compared to men's teams. Fewer financial resources were devoted to Black women athletes at HBCUs in an array of operational areas including recruiting, travel, scholarships, team uniforms, media coverage, and coach salaries (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2015).

Efforts made by the NCAA to foster the growth of women's sports within college and university athletic programs through what they refer to as the Emerging Sports Program (a menu of sports specifically designated by the NCAA to encourage the growth of those sports for women) appear at times to have been developed with little consciousness of the racial dynamics at play in terms of the access that women athletes of color have to sport opportunities. As scholars Jacqueline McDowell and Akilah Carter-Francique (2017) pointed out, women athletes of color may be clustered in certain sports (basketball, track and field) because of societal expectations, family considerations, and economic factors. They also point out that "racial clustering and low

representation of women of color in nontraditional sports at the college level is also correlated to limited opportunities for girls of color to participate in these sports at the youth and high school levels" (p. 103). Notably, a sport like bowling, for example, has experienced greater growth among White women athletes over the past 20 years with a decline in Black women athletes.

In Table 1 below, the percent participation of women college athletes by sport and race reflects the emerging sports the NCAA has promoted over the years.

Table 1

NCAA Percent Participation in Emerging Sports by Race – 2021-2022

Sport	Black Female Athletes	White Female Athletes	Other Female Athletes
Beach volleyball	3%	73%	24%
Bowling	16%	66%	18%
Equestrian	1%	85%	12%
Rowing	2%	76%	22%
Rugby	12%	61%	28%
Triathlon	2%	71%	27%
Tumbling	9%	67%	24%
Water polo	1%	63%	36%
Wrestling	10%	51%	39%

Based on data from the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI, 2020), between 12-13% of the undergraduate populations at four-year public and private non-profit colleges and universities were Black. When considered in light of the representation of Black female athletes who participated in NCAA member schools, their access to athletic opportunities fell short of that mark (see Table 2).

Table 2

Percent of NCAA Athletes by Race, Ethnicity, & Gender from 2012-2022

	Male White		Male Black		Male Other		Female White		Female Black		Female Other		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
2022	172,076	33%	58,783	11%	62,246	12%	153,941	29	24,522	5%	50,597	10%	522,165
2021	164,176	33%	54,691	11%	56,308	11%	148,036	30	23,495	5%	46,591	9%	493,297
2020	167,545	33%	56,969	11%	57,185	11%	151,650	30	24,452	5%	46,910	9%	504,711
2019	168,059	34%	56,641	11%	54,544	11%	150,206	30	24,456	5%	44,834	9%	498,740
2018	167,723	34%	56,336	11%	52,077	10%	149,980	30	24,422	5%	42,373	9%	492,841
2017	168,345	35%	54,839	11%	49,497	10%	150,181	31	23,930	5%	40,106	8%	486,898
2016	170,040	35%	53,806	11%	46,784	10%	149,099	31	23,487	5%	37,759	8%	480,975
2015	170,361	36%	52,642	11%	44,610	9%	148,606	31	23,226	5%	36,151	8%	475,596
2014	171,160	37%	50,129	11%	41,368	9%	147,600	32	22,407	5%	33,633	7%	466,297
2013	167,731	37%	48,740	11%	39,144	9%	144,953	32	21,917	5%	31,642	7%	454,127
2012	168,491	38%	47,944	11%	34,802	8%	142,916	32	21,588	5%	28,468	6%	444,209

Looking solely at the number and percentage of women athletes competing on teams sponsored by NCAA member institutions between 2012 and 2021, the majority were White. There is, however, a shift occurring as seen in a seven-point drop in the percentage of White female athletes from a high of 74% in 2012 to 67% in 2022 (see Table 3). There is an impression based on the way that race and ethnicity data were reported that the "Other" female athlete category is growing in terms of representation, with an increase from 15% in 2012 to 22% in 2022; with the representation of Black women athletes remaining constant over an 11-year period at 11%.

Table 3

Breakdown of NCAA Female Athletes by Race, Ethnicity, & Non-Alien Status 2012- 2022

	Female White		Female Black		Female Other		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
2022	153,941	67%	24,522	11%	50,597	22%	229,060
2021	148,036	68%	23,495	11%	46,591	21%	218,122
2020	151,650	68%	24,452	11%	46,910	21%	223,012
2019	150,206	68%	24,456	11%	44,834	20%	219,496
2018	149,980	69%	24,422	11%	42,373	20%	216,775
2017	1590,181	70%	23,930	11%	40,106	19%	214,217
2016	149,099	70%	23,487	11%	37,759	18%	210,345
2015	148,606	71%	23,226	11%	36,151	18%	207,983
2014	147,600	72%	22,407	11%	33,633	17%	203,640
2013	144,963	73%	21,971	11%	31,642	16%	198,576
2012	142,916	74%	21,588	11%	28,468	15%	192,972

Although access to opportunity has increased, racial disparities continue to persist for women of color in college sports. As evidenced in the NCAA Gender and Racial Demographics data for 2021-2022, White women represent the largest population of women athletes in NCAA Division I, II, and III conferences combined at 67%. Black women represent 11%, followed by

Hispanic women at 6%, International women at 5%, women identifying with Two or More Races at 5%, and Asian women at 2% (NCAA, 2021). Often covered over or left out of anlayses is information regarding American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander women because, as shown in Table 4, their numbers are too small to register a full percent. When examining the data more carefully, they reveal that American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island racial/ethnic reporting categories account for 974 female athletes competing on teams under the umbrella of the NCAA (see Table 4.).

Table 4

NCAA Women Athletes by Race/Ethnicity in 2021-2022

	# Female Athletes	**% Female Athletes**
American Indian/Alaska Native	974	0%
Asian	5,650	2%
Black	24,516	11%
Hispanic/Latina	14,514	6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	687	0%
International	11,171	5%
Two or More Races	11,659	5%
Unknown	5,893	3%
White	153,789	67%
Total	228,853	100%

Note. The categories as outlined are those used by the NCAA in the collection of the data.

Of the 26 women's sports sponsored by NCAA member institutions across all divisions during the 2021-2022 academic year, the highest representation of women athletes of color (i.e., American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and individuals who identified with two or more races) were participating in these sports: women's indoor track and field (26%); women's outdoor track and field (27%); women's rugby (27%); women's basketball (37%); and women's fencing (38%). Only one of those sports, women's fencing, has fewer White female athletes (41%) than female athletes from other racial and ethnic groups and countries of origin other than the United States.

The six sports with the largest majorities of White female athletes and least racially diverse rosters included women's ice hockey (76%), rowing (76%), field hockey (82%), lacrosse (83%), rifle (84%), and equestrian (86%). In the sport of fencing, Asian women athletes comprised 26% of those competing in the sport. Hispanic/Latina athletes were represented more frequently in women's softball (10%), water polo (14%), and wrestling (21%).

The Limits of Title IX's Reach & Its Manipulation: The Case of NCAA Women's Basketball

By considering Title IX's existing regulatory structure through the lens of race and intersectionality, the question of who benefits from the protections against gender discrimination

comes into sharper focus. As Dr. Lori Martin points out, policies and procedures that appear to be race-neutral can have a profoundly different impact on people depending on their race and gender (Chavez, 2021). There is the additional juxtaposition of the role of Black men athletes so heavily represented in the money-making sports of college football and basketball contrasted with the seeming locked-in status of Black women athletes in the college sport system at a reported five percent across all sports. In one of the findings that emerged from the external review of gender equity in the running of NCAA championships, it was revealed that the television deal for the NCAA Division I women's basketball tournament, an event that showcases a sport where 44% of the athletes are Black, is entwined with that of 24 other NCAA championships (Kaplan et al., 2021).

A media and marketing expert hired by the law firm conducted an external review to evaluate the potential value of the NCAA Division I women's tournament if it were handled as its own separate property, as is done for the men's tournament. This expert, Ed Desser, concluded that the value of the women's tournament was markedly suppressed (Kaplan et al., 2021). Teasing out the existing value of the women's tournament within the existing contract to be in the neighborhood of $6 million, Desser estimated that the value should be in the range of $80 million to $120 million (Kaplan et al., 2021). From a value perspective, two issues stand out. First, just prior to the NCAA taking over women's championships in 1981, the Association for Women in Intercollegiate Athletics had a $1 million television rights deal for its basketball tournament (Bechtel, 2022). Second, over the span of 30 years of serving as the steward for the premier women's college basketball event in the world realized an increase to $6 million, the NCAA realized a growth rate of six times between 1982 and 2019 on its women's television contract (Caron & Novy-Williams, 2021).

In contrast, the NCAA's total gross revenue in August of 1981 when it was an all men's association (the year the NCAA voted to offer women's championships) was approximately $23 million, a growth rate of 23 times over ten years. The bulk of the revenue came from the revenue generated from the television rights to the men's tournament and the NCAA's historic agreement with ABC and CBS for rights to college football (White, 1981). By 1991, revenues continued to rise and doubled every 10 years thereafter. In 2021, the NCAA reported total revenue of $1.1 billion with over half a billion invested in marketable securities.

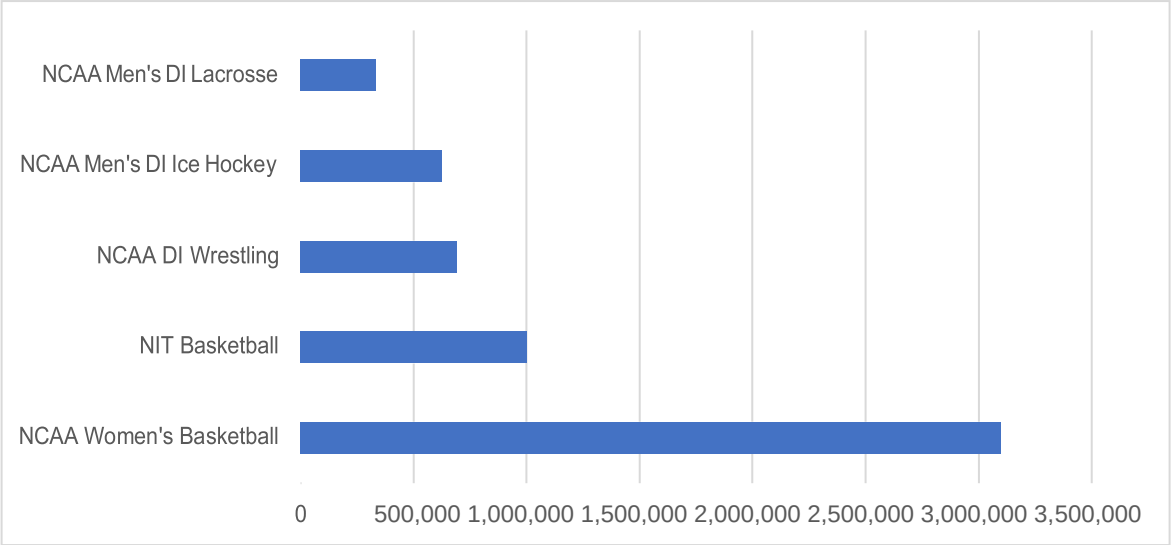
The NCAA women's tournament makes up just over 15.9% of the television rights deal the NCAA has with ESPN for sports other than Division I men's basketball:

> That's just $2 million (or about 50%) more than the NIT—the invitational for teams not good enough for the NCAA's 68-team March Madness field—despite the fact that the women's event in 2019 featured twice as many games and its final was viewed by nearly five times as many people. (Caron & Novy-Williams, 2021)

To illustrate this further, data from Nielsen showed the following (see Figure 1):

Figure 1

NCAA Championship Game Viewership on ESPN in 2021(Caron & Novy-Williams, 2021)



Responding to the institutional gender discrimination evidenced in the type of support women's basketball received during the 2021 NCAA Division I tournament, former commissioner of the America East Conference, Amy Hutchausen queried, "Clearly, the men's tournament is positioned to maximize revenue. Can we say the same about the women's?" She went on:

> [The ESPN deal] provides a measure of financial certainty, but it does not provide women's basketball (or any of the other sports, for that matter) an incentive to grow. This creates a spiral, reducing the incentive for the NCAA to increase its investment since there would be little to zero ROI [return on investmen]. (Hutchausen, 2021, para. 5)

When talking about what it would take for the NCAA to make substantive changes in recognizing women's basketball as a sport property, Stanford head women's basketball coach Tara VanDerVeer observed, "I think really the bottom line is it's a television package and it's a unit structure. When that happens, then we'll know it's serious." (Keeley, 2022, para. 12).

The unit structure is a reference to the performance-based incentives that have been built into the NCAA men's basketball tournament revenue distribution plan for decades where conferences with stronger men's basketball teams that play more games in the tournament are rewarded with higher revenue that are then redistributed to those teams. Additionally, University of South Carolina head women's basketball coach, Dawn Staley said,

> I would like for women's basketball to stand alone in securing a TV package. We're in high demand; we're heavily watched. Our sport is at a place where it's going to take off; it is taking off. We have missed opportunities to capitalize on revenue (Clarke, 2022, para. 10).

The NCAA's television contract is constructed in such a way as to render one of its more racially diverse women's events a mere footnote in relationship to the men's tournament.

The $6.1 million generated from the women's tournament barely creates a ripple compared to the revenue generated from the men's tournament, which in 2021 was estimated at more than $801 million. As Caron and Novy-Williams (2021) pointed out, the structure of the contract helped to create a circumstance where "The men's college basketball championship game is roughly six times more popular than the women's game, but the men's media rights deal earns the NCAA nearly 100 times the revenue" (para. 8).

If the NCAA knows how to do anything, it knows how to make money off of the sport of basketball and how to incentivize its growth among member schools. And yet for 30 years, the NCAA suppressed the value of women's basketball, a sport that under the AIAW had a foundation to grow. From Title IX's single-axis lens, an interpretation that the women's game could be manipulated in service to preserving a male hegemonic system makes sense. However, if this systemic effort to suppress the value of what should have been the most celebrated event for women in the NCAA's menu of offerings is viewed through an intersectional lens considering "differences across race, sport, and notions of sexuality", a showcase for women's athleticism and Black women's athleticism would not have "fit into the traditional idea of athleticism and femininity that are stereotypically associated with race and gender" (Brooks, 2018, para. 17). This kind of systemic sexism and racism is not as obvious as Don Imus's references to the strong Black women who played on Rutgers' basketball team but every bit as insidious (Lemieux, 2020).

This dynamic in terms of gender and race echoes in the sport of women's basketball. In a study examining digital WNBA coverage over the course of the summer of 2020, researchers Risa Isard and Nicole Melton (2022) found that White WNBA players received far more coverage than did Black WNBA players in a league that is 80% Black. More specifically, the findings included the following:

- The 2020 season's MVP and WNBA finalist, A'ja Wilson, received half as much coverage as that generated around White player Sabrina Ionescu
- In the 550 articles reviewed, White players received more than twice the mentions of Black players (118 v. 52)
- Black players dominated the awards but White players were most written about
- WNBA Commissioner, Cathy Englebert, who is White received more coverage and more media mentions than Black players, with the exception of A'ja Wilson
- Gender presentation mattered much more for Black athletes. "Black WNBA players who present as more masculine received an average of just 44 media mentions. Meanwhile, white athletes who present more masculine received more than five times that amount (an average of 212)." (Isard & Melton, 2021, para. 13).

In 2021, University of Connecticut women's basketball player Paige Bueckers was recognized with the Best Female College Athlete Award at ESPN's annual awards ceremony, the ESPYs. In her acceptance speech Bueckers commented, "Sports media holds the key to storylines. Sports media and sponsors tell us who was valuable, and you have told the world that I mattered today, and everyone who voted, thank you…But I think we should use this power together to also celebrate Black women" (Creef, 2021). She went on to say,

> So to Maria Taylor, Robin Roberts, Maya Moore, Odicci Alexander. To all the incredible Black women in my life and on my teams. To Breonna Taylor and all the lives lost, and to

> those names who are not yet learned, but I hope to share, I stand behind you and I continue to follow you, follow your lead and fight for you guys so I just want to say thank you for everything.

While her allyship came through, the structural barriers that suppress the value of women's basketball remain unaddressed. The television contract for the men's basketball tournament includes a provision that CBS controls the sponsors for the men's basketball tournament and all of the other tournaments offered by the NCAA. Thus, what appears to be a matter of media preference is the production of a negotiation between the NCAA and its media partners to preserve the resources that are invested in the men's basketball tournament. This investment has ensured that at the end of March Madness, men players have exclusive access to the real and mythic One Shining Moment, the figurative and literal elevation of the champions to iconic hero status, buoyed by their economic value to the NCAA's Corporate Partners, many of which are Fortune 500 companies (Staurowsky, 2023). Even though men's athletic performance is favored within this construction, the One Shining Moment is not as lustrous as portrayed when considered in light of the NCAA's exploitative labor practices that suppress player value, resist fair compensation, put players at risk in terms of their health and safety, and fail to deliver on the educational bargain (Staurowsky, 2022; 2023).

The NCAA's Pretense of Leadership Regarding Gender Equity and Failed Obligations to It

The NCAA has proven to be a center of confusion in terms of its obligations under Title IX and other federal laws barring gender discrimination. Its rhetoric includes references to gender equity, and the NCAA participates quite publicly in celebrations of Title IX's passage, such as the launch of a dedicated website to mark Title IX's 50th anniversary (Dent, 2022). However, the Association has relied on a U.S. Supreme Court decision in a case from 1999 written by then Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg that has created the impression that the NCAA is exempt from Title IX's reach. As a threshold matter, Title IX applies to institutions that receive federal funding.

In *National Collegiate Athletic Association v. Smith* (1999), a woman college athlete argued that the NCAA was bound by Title IX because they are an association whose members received federal funding and are thus an indirect recipient of those funds. The Court found that while the NCAA might be an indirect recipient, the question was more nuanced and required not only that an entity receive funds, but that it also benefit from those funds. Thus, it would be difficult to know if a member school drew upon those federal funds to pay for their membership in the NCAA, for example. Some have argued that the narrow ruling in *National Collegiate Athletic Association v. Smith* (1999) ought to be revisited in light of the NCAA's partnerships with government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Defense. Together, they formed the NCAA-DOD Care Consortium, part of a larger NCAA-DOD Grand Alliance, with an investment of $105 million to conduct research on concussion and repetitive head impact (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021b). A more complete analysis of how federal funding runs through the NCAA as an organization might yield a different conclusion.

Notably, even as the NCAA was messaging that they were celebrating 50 years of Title IX,

its executives, officers, and members were in the process of revising the Constitution that serves as the basis for its authority to act. In the course of revising the NCAA's Constitution in Title IX's anniversary year (McGuire, 2022), its Principle of Gender Equity was changed to remove references to an expectation that member institutions comply with state and federal laws pertaining to gender equity (which would include Title IX and Title VII) along with an expectation that the NCAA would not pass rules that would impede schools from complying with those laws while passing rules that promoted compliance. The newly revised Principle of Gender Equity states,

> Activities of the Association [NCAA], its divisions, conferences, and member institutions shall be conducted in a manner free of gender bias. Divisions, conferences and member institutions shall commit to preventing gender bias in athletics activities and events, hiring practices, professional and coaching relationships, leadership and advancement opportunities. (NCAA, 2022a, p. 2)

In the revision process, its Principle of Non-Discrimination was also removed. That principle reads as follows:

> The Association shall promote an atmosphere of respect for and sensitivity to the dignity of every person. It is the policy of the Association to refrain from discrimination with respect to its governance policies, educational programs, activities and employment policies, including on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, creed, or sexual orientation. It is the responsibility of each member institution to determine independently its own policy regarding nondiscrimination. (NCAA, 2020, p. 3)

Furthermore, members of the U.S. Congress took note that the NCAA was slow to respond to the blatant discrimination women basketball players had been subjected to during the 2021 tournament. In a six-page letter to the head of the NCAA (Mark Emmert), U.S. House Representatives Carolyn B. Maloney (D–N.Y.), Jackie Speier (D–Calif.), and Mikie Sherrill (D–N.J.) noted that the NCAA had not moved to change its leadership structure to ensure that those handling women's basketball within the organization had similar seniority to those representing men's basketball interests. They also sought answers to why "the NCAA has failed to create or commit to creating a chief business officer role to "oversee NCAA's media partner relationships with CBS/Turner and ESPN, the Corporate Partner Program, and branding and marketing for all championships" (Dellenger, 2022, para. 13).

Days before Title IX's 50th anniversary, U.S. Senator Roger Wicker (2022) wrote to NCAA president Mark Emmert asking for a detailed response to how the Association holds schools accountable for Title IX compliance and for monitoring whether schools are in compliance. Given the perception that the NCAA is exempt from complying with Title IX and its strategic move to distance itself from references to expectations that member schools comply with state and federal laws and a principle of non-discrimination, removing those references from the NCAA Constitution positioned the Association to claim that it need not hold itself accountable to comply with those laws or hold its member institutions accountable to them. Instead, under a veil of ratifying a revised constitution that empowered athletes and improved their prospects for better treatment, it retained vague language regarding gender bias, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Concluding Thoughts

In contemplating a 21st Century view of Title IX's application to college sport, the rationale for supporting separate-but-equal should be revisited and consideration should be given to eliminating the contact sport exemption, an exemption that was designed to protect and leave untouched a men's preserve within college sport. Although it is unlikely that the commitment to separate-but-equal will disappear, greater attention to and careful consideration of what it means to be treated equally in such a system needs more affirmative efforts. Such affirmative efforts call for the U.S. Congress to provide the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) – the office charged with oversight of Title IX – with the resources to hold schools accountable for not complying with the law. As a matter of policy, the Women's Sports Foundation, the National Women's Law Center, and others have called for the U.S. Congress to pass the Patsy T. Mink and Louise M. Slaughter Gender Equity in Education Act of 2021, which recognizes the need for more training and education of school administrators to support Title IX compliance (Staurowsky et al., 2022).

There also needs to be a recognition that the era out of which the Title IX regulations emerged that preference men's sports was markedly different than the one in which college sport operates today. In 1972, the NCAA was an all men's athletic association that was actively resistant and openly hostile to the expansion of women's sports. The college football powers breaking with the NCAA in 1984 – challenging the NCAA's control over the television broadcast rights of major college football in *NCAA v. Board of Regents* – led to the growth of 24/7 sports television and the emergence of college football and men's basketball as sport properties that are part of a multi-billion-dollar global sport entertainment industry (Staurowsky, 2023). The characterization of this industry as an extracurricular activity grossly underestimates the impact of systemic sexism that persists (Hoffman, 2020; Staurowsky, 2023). This is evidenced in the fact that women athletes in 2019-2020 missed out on $741,061,525 in athletic scholarship assistance because schools still are not providing athletic opportunities to them proportional to their enrollment. Schools dedicated on average 24% of their budgets to women's sports compared to 45% of their budgets to men's sports; and nearly 70% of athletic budgets were invested in scouting and recruiting athletic talent for men's teams compared to 30% of those dollars going to women's teams (Staurowsky et al., 2022).

The era in which Title IX was passed is important to consider because "…the statute was passed at a time when those faced with discrimination were finding the words to express the harms done and the barriers that needed to be overcome" (Staurowsky et al., 2022, p. 14). Just at the time when lively discussions were being conducted in the U.S. Congress, government agencies, and in American society about Title IX's application to education and athletics, feminist scholars like Rhoda Unger (1979) were conceptualizing the difference between the terms "sex' and "gender", with sex more narrowly referring to what she called "biological mechanisms" and gender acknowledging the sociocultural forces that contribute to it.

The social investment in separating men and women, and how it plays out in conversations about who has access to women's sport, has been the focus of controversy in terms of transgender athletes' rights under Title IX (Ghoryashi, 2022; Tugend, 2022). Notably, while those seeking to preserve women's sport for biological females only use the logic that women's sport should be for women, the door opens for suspicions about all women to surface. Such suspicions have circulated

as mechanisms of control in the lives of sporting women for well over 100 years. Strong, muscular, powerful, spectacular women who achieve in the athletic arena, as celebrated as they are at times, are never quite able to escape the indictment that their mannerisms, demeanor, tone of voice, physical presence and stature, determination, aggression, and success require surveillance to determine if they are somehow misplaced. That has been a central preoccupation with gender verification in women's sport, which yields the requirement that women have to be certified as women (Pieper, 2016).

A flickering glimpse of this penchant to regulate sporting women surfaces in its frequently veiled but truest form appeared in proposed legislation in the state of Ohio. Before being rushed to the House floor for a vote, and while another bill (H.B. 61 "Save Women's Sports Act") was pending and not on the schedule, a provision was added to H.B. 151 (the Ohio Teacher Residency Program) that banned transgender girls and women from high school and college teams. That bill also included a provision that any girl or woman athlete "accused" of being trans would be subjected to a genital inspection (Trau, 2022). According to the language of the bill, if an athlete's sex was challenged or disputed, a physician would need to verify her sex in "only" the following ways: "1. An examination of her internal and external reproductive anatomy; 2. Her normal 'endogenously produced levels of testosterone; 3. An analysis of her genetic makeup" (para. 5). Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman indicated that the provision would likely be removed before passage, and eventually it was (Migdon, 2022; Rees & Fahmy, 2022).

Such physical inspections harken back to exams women athletes endured in the 1930s and the "nude parades" and gynecological exams that "manly" women athletes were subjected to in the 1960s, followed by other forms of sex and gender testing that continue to the present day (Pieper, 2016). As Pieper (2016) explains "Sex is not a binary system established by a singular classification. Rather, most people in the medical profession recognize a collection of markers, including chromosomes, external genitalia, gonads, hormones, internal genitalia, and secondary sex characteristics" (p. 4).

From an intersectionality and racial perspective (Crenshaw, 1989; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017), examining the college sport system through the lenses of both gender and race reveals a White male hegemonic system that exploits Black male labor for profit while containing Black women on the margins. As Huma et al. (2020) reported,

> After accounting for the value of college athletes' athletic scholarships between 2017-2020, approximately $10 billion in generational wealth will have been transferred from college football and men's basketball players, the majority of whom are athletes of color, to coaches, athletics administrators, and college administrators who are predominantly White or to institutions and programs that serve majority White constituencies. (p. 3)

Finally, in NCAA Division I women's basketball where the largest majority of players are Black (44%), the NCAA has worked to consciously suppress the value of the tournament and the coverage of women's college basketball (Kaplan et al., 2021). The NCAA Division I women's basketball championship was aired on ABC and ESPN for the first time in 2023 (NCAA Staff, 2022). As Carter-Francique and Richardson (2016) explain, Black women have historically and contemporaneously been controlled by the media, resulting in Black sportswomen who "…have

faced the most (in)visible journey and are marred by their omission and/or image representation in media" (p. 7).

This dynamic was in full view during the 2023 NCAA Division I women's college basketball tournament. Historic in dimension, the NCAA Women's March Madness final between Louisiana State University (LSU) and the University of Iowa drew a record-breaking 9.9 million views on the ABC network with 12.6 million viewers across all Disney platforms that covered the game. The final set an all-time record for an audience watching a men's or women's college event on ESPN+ subscription stream service (Jones, 2023).

At the same time, the magnitude of the event was overshadowed by controversy sparked by the bold and confident behavior, what some might call "swagger," of two of the star players, Iowa's Caitlin Clark and LSU's Angel Reese. Los Angeles Times critic and columnist Mary McNamara (2023) wrote about the quarter-final and final games that were played during the Women's March Madness "Full of ferociously competitive and gorgeously orchestrated play, these edge-of-your-seat games put the lie to the notion that women's sports are just not as exciting as men's" (para. 5). Clark had taunted opponents from the University of South Carolina leading up to the final game. As it became evident that LSU would beat Iowa, Angel Reese flashed a hand gesture pointing to her ring finger, suggestive of wearing a championship ring, in Clark's direction. In the hours and days after the game, Reese was referred to as "classless." In interviews following the incident, Reese recounted the atmosphere in which she had played through the season where she felt her conduct was under scrutiny because she was "too hood" and "too ghetto" (Rosenblatt, 2023).

The issue of the racial lens through which players were viewed had been addressed just days before by the University of South Carolina head women's basketball coach, Dawn Staley, when she responded to the University of Iowa head coach, Lisa Bluder's, characterization of South Carolina's team as "street fighters." As Staley noted, "We're not bar fighters. We're not thugs. We're not monkeys. We're not street fighters. This team exemplifies how you need to approach basketball, on the court and off the court" (McNamara, 2023, para. 15).

Moving forward into the future, a consciousness about the possibilities as well as limitations of Title IX and the forces that marginalize all women, especially women of color and sexual minorities should be considered when developing strategies to achieve more inclusive environments where women can compete and work in college sport.

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Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Opportunities for Black College Athletes: Strategically Facilitating Academic Achievement and Successful Career Transitions

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Abstract: Omitted in discussions of college athletes' use of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) is a focus on equity, educational issues, and transition into post-college careers. We frequently hear National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) declarations stating that nearly all college athletes 'will go pro in something other than sports,' but little is said about the challenges faced by Black athletes as they deal with coursework and the transition into post-college careers. In this paper, we summarize how the changing contexts of collegiate sports and race relations in higher education have intensified those challenges for Black athletes. We discuss how NIL opportunities can be used by Black athletes to expand identities, create and nurture relationships with mentors from Black-owned businesses, and develop programs in Black communities and organizations that promote social justice and racial equity. We assert that NIL can be combined with Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) to develop skills for using unanticipated NIL-related opportunities in meeting challenges in courses and the transition into post-college lives. Lessons learned from support programs for Black athletes serve as a basis for recommending that universities fund the formation of a *NIL Alliance of Black Athletes* on campuses and provide career counselors to guide athletes as they meet people in connection with NIL deals that involve a combination of financial and personal development benefits relevant to education and future careers.

Keywords: NCAA, Black athletes, name, image, and likeness (NIL), happenstance, education

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NIL: Happenstance Opportunities for Black Athletes

Nearly all college athletes 'will go pro in something other than sports.'[1] This statement is often heard when watching televised National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) football and men's basketball games. However, it identifies a reality that is given little attention compared to financial considerations when DI decision-makers in the NCAA, conferences, and universities establish rules and policies. This oversight has become more serious as the economic stakes, cultural significance of sports, and importance of a college degree have increased dramatically over the past two generations. Although this oversight impacts all athletes, Black athletes face additional challenges due to the social and cultural significance of race and race relations in sports, universities, and American society (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Cooper, 2019; Simien et al., 2019; The Drake Group, 2022; Wilkerson, 2020).

These challenges were highlighted by the widespread backlash following the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020; the condemnation of Black spokespeople who called attention to systemic racism; state-level legislation that undermined diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and programs; and criticism of teachers and courses that focused on the history and current examples of racial discrimination that have perpetuated inequities and injustice. This backlash was amplified by the racist statements of Donald Trump during and following his presidency (2016-2020). The visibility of Black athletes who made statements and took actions protesting systemic inequities and injustice made them regular targets of racist comments and threats (Zirin, 2021). The negative media attention around these issues took a toll on the mental health and well-being of all People of Color, especially Black students making sense of history and current events (Peter, 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020).

The sting caused by public expressions of racism is long-lasting. This impacts Black students in historically white institutions (HWIs) as they consider their choices about participating in academic and social life on campus. It also creates anxiety about transitions into post-collegiate careers and relationships. Black athletes face challenges due to social isolation, how they are perceived in HWIs, and how sport participation limits the expansion of their experiences, relationships, and identities. [2]

The choices available to DI athletes, especially for those participating in revenue-producing sports, are further constrained by their lack of agency in athletic departments and team cultures in

[1] The discussion in this paper does not directly consider athletes at Historically Black Colleges and Universities because the sport and racial contexts there differ from those at historically white institutions (HWIs) in Division I of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

[2] There is a rich history of scholarship focused on Black college athletes. This population is not homogeneous in terms of backgrounds and experiences (Oseguera et al, 2018), nor is the culture of every HWI the same, but research over the past decade has found that Black college athletes, male and female, generally deal with similar challenges with varying degrees of success. The following is a partial list of informative sources on this complex issue: Bailey & Fuller (2019); Bernhard (2014); Bimper (2014; 2015; 2016; 2017); Bimper et al. (2013); Carter-Francique (2014); Carter-Francique & Hawkins (2011); Carter-Francique et al. (2017); Clark et al. 2015; Comeaux, 2019a; Comeaux & Fuentes (2015); Cooper (2019); Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Cooper et al. (2017); Fuller et al. (2017); Fuller et al. (2020); Gill et al. (2021); Griffin (2017); Griffith et al. (2019); Harper (2018); Hawkins et al. (2016); Hawkins et al., 2015; Lowe & Bernard (2019); Maples et al. (2019); Oseguera (2010); Peter (2020); Simien et al. (2019); Singer (2016); Singer & Carter-Francique (2013); Stone et al. (2012); Wilkerson et al. (2020); Zamudio-Suarez (2022).

which they face multiple demands on their time, have little discretion in how and when to meet those demands, and receive no material rewards enabling them to take more control over their everyday lives. The fairness of this situation is questionable when the labor of these athletes produces nearly all the revenue that supports athletic departments and the salaries of administrators, coaches, and other staff members.

In this article, we suggest that within the emerging NIL space, there will be happenstance or unanticipated opportunities for athletes to expand their identities, relationships, personal agency, and material resources. At the same time, these opportunities may be utilized by athletes to provide meaningful educational experiences and facilitate successful transitions into post-college careers. In making this case, we combine lessons learned from historical and contemporary research on Black athletes to recommend that Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) be used to maximize benefits in NIL and similar spaces. Although the context in which Black athletes navigate their years in college is constantly emerging, creative use of NIL opportunities can expand benefits associated with their personal, academic, and athletic experiences. Importantly, this also enables them to present themselves and be seen by others as more than physical assets in college athletic programs.

The Changing Context of College Sports

The changing economics of DI intercollegiate sports over the past generation have significantly impacted college athletes (Rumsey, 2023; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004). This is especially true for athletes in revenue-producing sports, primarily DI football and men's and women's basketball – sports with the highest numbers and percentages of Black athletes. As these sports have been increasingly organized to maximize revenues, the demands and pressures experienced by athletes and the stakes associated with individual participation and team success have escalated dramatically. During this process, big-time college sport became what sociologist Louis Coser called a *greedy institution* (Coser, 1974). Like other greedy institutions, it demands a total commitment of athletes' time, effort, and loyalty. This commitment is made in a formal hierarchical structure in which athletes lack agency and are subject to forms of control that grant them little discretion. Their scholarships and other benefits conferred by team membership depend on approval by coaches who possess formal as well as coercive power over them (Hatteberg, 2018).

To question or resist expectations under these conditions is to risk being labeled a 'problem athlete' unwilling to do what it takes to be part of a team. Efforts to avoid this label are intensified when coaches and teammates describe the team as a 'family' in which members have unquestioned responsibilities to support each other and obey coaches as quasi-parents. At the same time, greedy institutions regularly disregard normative limits that safeguard the autonomy and agency of those who participate in and reproduce them. In the case of high-stakes college sports, this means that athletes have fewer opportunities than other students to gain experiences, establish relationships, and develop identities in contexts apart from their sport participation. Within the institutionalized structure of those sports, coaches control their team membership and the benefits associated with it. Under these conditions, the time and energy that can be allocated to other activities, relationships, and identity formation unrelated to sport are severely limited (Howe, 2022).

Research by sociologists Peter and Patti Adler (1991) led them to conclude that athletes on big-time college teams experience *role engulfment* in connection with team membership. Regardless of academic goals or concerns for overall growth and development, the male athletes they observed and interviewed became so exclusively immersed in their athlete roles that there was little or no social space for them to engage in other roles, cultivate new identities apart from their sport, and create the social and cultural capital needed for meaningful transitions to post-college careers. This is partly due to the influence of others who use traditional stereotypes to define them in terms of physical attributes and skills. This provides persistent social reaffirmation that perpetuates the dual process of role engulfment and identity foreclosure. During the 30 years following the Adlers' study, this process continues to be difficult for Black college athletes to avoid (Hatteberg, 2018; Hawkins, 2010; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004).

The role engulfment process is reinforced by academic advisors, tutors, and coaches who regularly counsel athletes, especially Black athletes, to lower their educational aspirations so they remain academically eligible (Duru, 2022). Additionally, coaches often maintain tight control over Black athletes to ensure that they avoid trouble and remain eligible to provide cash-free labor while generating revenues for predominantly white NCAA institutions (Hatteberg, 2018). This has led noted sociology of sport scholar, Billy Hawkins, and others to describe those campuses and their athletic departments as *new plantations* (Fels, 2021;Hawkins, 2010; Kalman-Lamb et al., 2021a; Rhodes, 2006).

The greediness of big-time college sports and the process of role engulfment have intensified as university presidents, governing boards, foundation directors, and other campus administrators use athletic programs as the 'front porch' of higher education. As front porches, they recruit students, obtain financial donations from wealthy boosters, gain support from local and state legislators, and connect with alumni and team fans who promote and support university interests.

As football and basketball teams at top Division I universities have become major revenue and publicity generators, the status and salaries of the men who are head coaches for highly visible men's sport teams have increased to become the most recognizable and highest-paid public employees in nearly all states. For example, during the 2023-24 season, more than 50 football coaches at those universities had annual salaries topping four million dollars, and over a dozen coaches had annual salaries over eight million (Williams, 2024). Twenty-five of the men coaching men's basketball teams made over $3.4 million. About 60% of these teams' basketball rosters were Black men. One woman coach, Kim Mulkey at Louisiana State University, made over three million dollars; 10 of the 12 players on the 2023-24 LSU team were Black women.

Increases in the salaries of coaches lead to increased expectations for team success. As a result, coaches demanded more time, energy, and commitment from athletes. The result is year-round training, at least a 40-hour weekly workload for team members during most of the year, and additional hours spent recovering from exhausting practices, long road trips during the season, and injuries sustained during participation. As a result, both the greediness of sport and the role engulfment that accompanies it have increased to a point that challenges the mental health of athletes (Peter, 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020).

As universities embrace an entertainment-based commercial model of sport, the NCAA has used the 'student-athlete' label to give lip service to the academic benefits of intercollegiate sports and divert attention from the reality that athletic programs are isolated from the academic context of higher education (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2021b; Stone et al., 2012). Today it takes a student with strong academic experience, self-confidence, abilities, and social support to successfully combine athletic participation with coursework leading to a meaningful college degree. Given the power and influence of Division I coaches, the NCAA does little to enforce the '20-hour rule' as the maximum of sport-related activities time that coaches can demand from athletes each week. This lack of enforcement undermines the efforts of team members to take advantage of development opportunities associated with being a student and participating in relationships on and off campus. The powerlessness of faculty athletic representatives (FARs) and the lack of meaningful academic oversight by faculty committees allow coaches to manipulate the young people on their teams.

The economic context of college sports has changed dramatically over the past half-century. The stakes associated with success are so high that the time, energy, and commitment demanded of athletes, especially those in revenue-generating sports, undermine opportunities to fully benefit from academic courses and other learning and developmental experiences accessible to the general student body. Although the commercialization of sports impacts all athletes, research indicates that it impacts Black athletes in more targeted and profound ways due to racial attitudes and dynamics on campus, in the athletic department, and on teams (Harper, 2018; Southall et al., 2020). It is to that topic that we now turn.

These outcomes are further intensified as athletes negotiate their sport participation in a context characterized by ongoing chaos. Conference realignment motivated by a quest to maximize media rights income adds to pressures and time constraints for athletes. Other changes, often unpredictable, are shaped by factors such as: multiple lawsuits; a lack of regulation; confusion about the place and purpose of sports in higher education; coaches being fired and hired as universities desperately seek to be national leaders in multiple sports; a national governing body that fails to govern in conformity with antitrust laws; unsettled Title IX issues (Zimbalist, 2024); and athletes by the thousands transferring from one school to another and another as rules governing eligibility shift, lawsuits are settled or put on hold, and agents and booster collectives provide NIL inducements for athletes to transfer schools.

Overall, this context creates constant challenges for many athletes. For Black athletes, these challenges accompany additional ones related to the politically charged racial dynamics in higher education – our next topic.

Changing Racial Dynamics in Higher Education

Historically white institutions (HWIs) of higher education have not always fully supported Black students or responded effectively to their unique needs (Harper, 2018; Hawkins, 2010; Murty & Roebuck, 2015; The Drake Group. 2022). These inequities impact male and female athletes who have been treated differently than their white peers in sport, education, and social contexts. These differential experiences often affect Black athletes' emotional well-being, educational choices, self-confidence, and sense of belonging on their campuses. This is important because research shows that there is "a relationship between positive perceptions of campus

climate" and the academic success of athletes from racial and ethnic minority populations (Oseguera et al., 2018, p. 119).

Although a statistical case can be made that overt expressions of racism have decreased over the past half-century, the fact that they continue to exist, coupled with social media amplification and the persistence of racial microaggressions, means that Black students and other students of color are forced to endure their socioemotional impact to maintain their sense of security and mental health. Dealing with a few cases rather than dozens of them makes little difference for Black students as they strive to maintain personal, social, and academic self-confidence. When microaggressions and other forms of racism create self-doubt and social isolation, it undermines efforts to succeed in coursework and maintain optimism about the future (Lowe & Bernard, 2019). This is exacerbated for the Black athletes who are admitted to the university with insufficient prior academic preparation and personal backgrounds that differ from those of white students.

To make matters more challenging, campus and classroom discussions about race and racism are usually shaped by white administrators, faculty, and students who seldom ask about or discuss its impact on their Black and brown peers. Instead, they focus on the intent of those who talk or act in racist ways and what can be done to prevent such expressions. Adding to this narrow-minded approach, fears that such discussions of racism in U.S. history make white students uncomfortable led former President Donald Trump to declare in 2021 that "…teaching even one [student] these divisive messages would verge on psychological abuse." Trump added, "Indoctrinating generations of [students] with these extreme ideas is not just immoral – it is a program for national suicide" (Trump, 2021, para. 6). In his 'analysis,' Trump made no mention of the positive impact these programs may have on the identities and academic motivation of Black students and students of color generally.

Trump's comments resonated with millions of white Americans who echoed the idea that racism had to be ignored to abolish it and to protect white students from internalizing guilt related to racism. This logic led many state legislatures to limit or ban teaching about the centrality of racism and white supremacy in U.S. history and use critical race theory (CRT) to trace the ways they have been incorporated into dominant culture and contemporary forms of social organization.

Politically conservative legislators and influential media commentators have described such teaching about racism as a divisive form of liberal indoctrination that distorts the accuracy of U.S. history, undermines patriotism and national unity, and makes white students uncomfortable (Brown, 2022; Myskow, 2022). As noted by Mark Perry, a senior fellow at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, "[Critical race theory is] a thoroughly racist ideology, because it imputes evil to people solely based on the color of their skin" (Editorial, 2021, para. 16). As a result of this misinterpretation of CRT and the analytical tool of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), some teachers have been sanctioned or terminated for their discussion of issues that, according to vocal white legislators and parents, are contentious, offensive, and have no place in classrooms (Burnette, 2024; Krupnick, 2023). As this has occurred, no concerns were expressed about the negative impact these policies would have on the identities and academic motivation of Black students and all students of color from elementary school to higher education. Similarly, legislative actions to undermine or eliminate Black and Ethnic Studies programs in many colleges have likely exacerbated this negative impact, although systematic research on this topic is scarce.

After interviewing university faculty at major universities and assessing survey and interview data from 4,250 college instructors in a study done by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Krupnick and Monroe concluded that a growing number of instructors are engaging in self-censorship in their courses when dealing with contentious topics, including racism, discrimination, and racial inequities (summarized in Krupnick, 2023 and AAUP, 2023). As noted by a professor at Georgia Tech, "Faculty are afraid. And that's part of the point here, to make people afraid to teach" (Krupnick, 2023, para. 28). After collecting evidence on a number of campuses, Monroe explained that many faculty "are terrified" because faculty members don't know how their teaching and research will be defined when they deal with controversial topics.

Although no systematic study has been done, the anti-DEI/anti-CRT movement has likely influenced instructors as they make choices about curriculum design, learning materials, classroom discussions, testing, and grading. With the elimination of topics related directly to the lives of Black students and other students of color, these students' identification with course materials and motivation to immerse themselves in their educational experiences are likely undermined. Again, at this time (early 2024), there have not been systematic empirical studies of how these students are impacted by such changes.

The anti-DEI/anti-CRT movement and backlash to displays of the Black Lives Matter and social justice movements in education and other social spheres is based on a "perceived loss of power and status" by many white people (Bacon, 2022, para. 10). At this point in early 2024, it appears that organized efforts to eliminate and discourage DEI programs and CRT-related policies on college campuses will continue and lead to further legislation. These efforts have been inspired and supported by new laws and policies designed to repress voting by Black citizens, eliminate affirmative action, limit future protests calling for racial equality, and 'de-liberalize' education. Those who lobby for these actions feel legitimized as they discredit or demonize teachers and courses, along with academic programs that include content perceived as consistent with CRT and an emphasis on social justice for oppressed and marginalized segments of student and national populations (Burnette, 2024; Krupnick, 2023).

The tensions caused by this racial reckoning have not escaped the awareness of Black and brown students on campuses nationwide. They feel its sting as it intensifies their feelings of isolation on HWIs. For example, when Black athletes encounter racist words and actions, a lack of campus activities that reflect their interests, and a lack of Black faculty who could provide them with meaningful guidance and mentoring, it leads them to question if they are fully accepted and valued on campus. This form of alienation and self-doubt is insidious and often fosters the development of *imposter syndrome* – a discounting of one's skills and success to the point that a person experiences anxiety and questions their ability to succeed in college and society at large (Lowe & Bernard, 2019). Especially vulnerable to this syndrome are Black athletes recruited and admitted to universities for their sport skills alone. Further affirming this is that these athletes are routinely counseled and directed into courses and majors perceived as undemanding for the sake of maintaining athletic eligibility. As a result, Black athletes continue to have lower graduation rates than their white athlete peers (Lapchick, 2024; Southall et al., 2020). These dynamics reinforce our suggestion that Black male and female athletes deserve and would benefit from participating in an organized *NIL Alliance of Black Athletes*. Such an organization would also help them deal with the complex, confusing, chaotic, and rapidly changing environment that has

developed around athletes' commodity status and the selling and licensing of their names, images, and likenesses to organizations wanting to capitalize on their popularity and endorsements.

Developing such an alliance is a challenge. However, lessons can be learned from others who have already moved in this direction by creating programs that promote holistic development, maximize learning, and prepare Black athletes for transitions into careers other than 'professional athlete.' These programs are described below and used to inform our approach to how Black athletes may benefit from NIL opportunities.

Existing College Programs to Support Black Athletes

Two noteworthy programs focused on supporting Black athletes have been developed by Keith Harrison (2002; 2004) and Joseph Cooper (2016). Each is a former athlete with extensive knowledge of the challenges faced by Black athletes throughout history and across multiple sports. Harrison studied the biographies of Black athletes who participated in college sports prior to the Civil Rights Movement. He found that they were able to make time to take their student role seriously and combine it with learning experiences associated with happenstance events in their lives. In the process of developing identities unrelated to sports and physical skills, they flipped the narrative that identified them solely as athletes. In turn, this created a foundation on which they could develop successful post-college careers.

Over 20 years ago, Dr. Harrison developed the *Scholar Baller*® program designed to facilitate opportunities for athletes to develop multiple identities and achieve academic success. It was assumed that excelling in coursework and expanding experiences and relationships apart from playing sports would lead them to be socially identified in terms of multiple positive attributes and skills. Along with a team of educators, practitioners, researchers, professional athletes, and entertainers, Harrison has made a continuous effort to promote awareness of overall development among scholar-athletes (Harrison, 2002; 2004; Harrison & Boyd, 2007; Harrison et al., 2019).

Scholar Baller has connected with more than 50 NCAA institutions since 2004. This program has influenced athletes to make a special commitment to their educational development and make a successful transition into a career after graduation (Dexter et al., 2021). Additionally, Harrison developed *Scholar Baller* into a brand by establishing annual awards, providing logoed mementos and apparel to those who met *Scholar Baller* standards, and producing a curriculum and other strategies to sustain the motivation of athletes as they actively engaged in scholarship and participated in campus and community activities (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Joseph Cooper (2016) uses a slightly different strategy as he focuses on holistic development and empowerment among Black male athletes. His *Excellence Beyond Athletics* (EBA) approach consists of six holistic development principles (HDPs): (1) self-identity awareness, (2) positive social engagement, (3) active mentorship, (4) academic achievement, (5) career aspirations, and (6) balanced time management (2016).

Cooper emphasizes an asset-based, anti-deficit approach through which Black athletes develop an awareness of the structural inequities that enable the university to exploit them. This approach also promotes the belief among athletes that they have the power to confront and alter these

inequities as they focus on their holistic development, academic achievement, and strategies for successful career transitions (Comeaux, 2015a). Positive outcomes depend on identifying and eliminating barriers, developing relationships, and increasing expectations for success. Overall, the goal for Black athletes is to form a campus-based advocacy group of peers that regularly affirms and nurtures their identities as students, community members, citizens, role models, leaders, and family members (Comeaux, 2015b).

Success in the *Excellence Beyond Athletics* (EBA) program also depends on support from faculty mentors, advocates, and allies who understand that without "holistic consciousness, internalized empowerment, and engagement in counteractions," these men will continue to face an "oppressive system of athletic exploitation and academic neglect" (Cooper, 2016, p. 280).

As Cooper developed his EBA approach for Black male athletes, Akilah Carter-Francique and her colleagues (2017) developed a *Sista to Sista*™ leadership enhancement program for Black female athletes. Their approach is based on an Afrocentric paradigm and an ethic of care (Carter-Francique, 2014). It calls for the establishment of a 'safe cultural space' in which Black female athletes form relationships built around awareness of the power dynamics on campus and in the athletic department, and the power that comes with affirmations of self-definition and self-valuation grounded in the rich history of Black women's culture. From that vantage point, the athletes formulate strategies to express and politically represent their interests in contexts where their voices are traditionally undervalued or silenced (Kunda & Davis, 2022).

Carter-Francique and her colleagues knew that this was a risky strategy given that the structure and cultures of nearly all HWIs and Division I athletic departments were controlled by white men with little or no awareness of the experiences and concerns of Black female athletes on their campuses. The continuing underrepresentation of Black women in campus and athletic department leadership positions has long made it difficult for Black female athletes to find role models, mentors, and advocates who share an experience of marginalization due to stereotypes and beliefs that undermine knowledge about Black women living at various intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality (Bernhard, 2014; Carter-Francique, 2020; Carter & Hawkins, 2011; Cooper & Jackson, 2019; Long, 2022; Silbert et al., 2022).

In addition to Drs. Harrison, Cooper, and Carter-Francique, other scholars have invested time and effort into creating strategies to support academic success, holistic development, and positive career transitions among Black athletes (Comeaux, 2010; 2013; 2019a; 2019b; 2021; Comeaux & Grummert, 2020). However, doing this on all Division I campuses is practically impossible without an organizing body and institutional commitments by universities to establish, fund, and sustain such programs. This leads to our contention that such a program for Black athletes would be more likely to succeed over the long run if it were linked with NIL opportunities and the potentially positive developmental experiences associated with them.

Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL): Challenges and Opportunities for Athletes

As of July 2021, college athletes acquired the right "to control the commercial use of their name, image, and likeness" (Carter, 2023). However, many boosters, members of collectives, and athletes mistakenly assume that NIL focuses only on being paid for endorsements and promotional

activities when it involves the right to control *any* commercial use of their name, image, and likeness. Current NIL rules exist in over 30 states, but they are vague, inconsistent, and often contradictory. They vary by state and often conflict with the NCAA's temporary, vague, and restrictive NIL policy.[3]

Many NIL policies and rules contain loopholes. This creates enforcement challenges that enable collectives to use NIL deals to recruit and retain athletes or poach them from other universities. This is done by using the transfer portal that was established in 2018 and (temporarily) modified in 2021 to allow transfers to play immediately at their new school without sitting out of their sport for one year. To make it more confusing, the strategies used by booster collectives and agents from outside organizations have taken advantage of weak policy enforcement as they deal with recruits and current athletes in private and on their own terms.

Sports Illustrated reported in the spring of 2021 that there were approximately 150 NIL platforms created and managed by entrepreneurs claiming they were well-prepared to train, mentor, brand, and market athletes for lucrative financial deals (Dellenger, 2021).[4] They also claimed that there could be third-party advisors and enforcement agents serving as an NIL clearinghouse for universities and the NCAA. Some of these deal-seeking entrepreneurs have even alleged that they could simultaneously handle NIL deals on the one hand and enforce compliance with NIL policies on the other hand by forming two separate organizations. These agents operate on their own or work with 'collectives' formed by boosters who seek or create NIL deals for selected athletes at the universities they support. In both cases, their success depends on the fees they collect as they advise athletes.

Despite attractive mission statements and catchy slogans, NIL platform developers are primarily interested in athletes who can command deals that bring them sizable commissions and consulting fees. This leaves most athletes to seek NIL opportunities on their own, mostly as online influencers seeking enough followers to earn money by promoting products and services through social media. Despite a handful of athletes who have experienced notable financial success in this highly competitive realm, few of their athlete peers have the visibility and social media skills to make more than pocket-money as influencers.

Not surprisingly, the NIL space has been and remains crowded, competitive, and confusing. Furthermore, little is known about how participation in the NIL space impacts athletes' educational experiences and career transitions. Current NIL policies do nothing to transform the power structures of sport teams and athletic departments (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2021a). Only by threatening to enter the transfer portal can athletes generate leverage in their relationships with coaches and possibly gain more autonomy and control over their lives.

[3] NCAA spokespeople continue to explain they are waiting for the U.S. Congress to create a nationwide NIL policy and guidelines for college athletes. Given the divided priorities of Congress and its inability to pass meaningful legislation related to college sports, it is difficult to predict when this might occur and what the laws would allow and prohibit. In the meantime, elements of an "anything goes" culture have emerged as agents, representatives of collectives, and coaches do questionable things to recruit, retain, or compensate athletes (Christovich, 2024; McCann, 2024; Moody, 2023; Nakos, 2024; Wohlwend, 2024).

[4] An online search for "*Dellinger, articles on NIL*" provides dozens of articles that trace the challenges and opportunities that exist in the emerging NIL sphere https://www.google.com/search?q=Dellinger%2C+articles+on+NIL.

At the same time, the NIL-induced dream of financial benefits seduces athletes into allocating much of their time and energy to creating online personas and attracting followers. Consequently, they have less time for their coursework and involvement in other activities that contribute to their overall development, although research on this is lacking.

All college athletes need guidance to create and benefit from NIL opportunities. However, Black athletes generally have experiences, perspectives, interests, needs, identities, support systems, family resources, and forms of social awareness that differ from those of most white athletes (see Hextrum, 2021, for a detailed, empirically-based discussion of these differences). This is the case for both Black women and men. For them to express concerns related to these differences and inequities while interacting with white teammates and classmates is difficult due to their desire to avoid arguments, misunderstandings, and possible racial confrontations when their truth makes white peers uncomfortable. Similarly, Black athletes often feel that white NIL agents, boosters, and even their coaches would not understand their perspectives as they seek and assess NIL opportunities (Anderson, 2022).

Given the increasing economic stakes of big-time college sports and increased public expressions of racism on and off campus, there is a need for the NCAA to work with Division I conferences and institutions to sponsor a nationwide program that provides formal opportunities for Black athletes to consistently receive informed guidance. This is most likely to occur in contexts where they feel empowered to ask questions to advisors and mentors who understand their perspectives. These contexts would also provide the athletes with opportunities to support each other as they strive to fully embrace their student roles, seek recognition as more than athletes, maintain an authentic sense of self, and take advantage of chance events that enhance learning, graduation rates, and preparation for future careers.

The case for such programs is strengthened by a history of neglect; the labor provided by Black athletes in revenue-producing sports; the current social and political context of race relations; the pressures exerted on higher education to avoid curricula that acknowledge the significance of race in people's lives; and the desire among Black athletes to seek NIL opportunities that reflect their perspectives, interests, and sense of self.

In the following section, we focus on how happenstance learning theory and its associated methodologies can be used to enable Black athletes to identify, cultivate, and utilize the random, unplanned, and potentially positive events associated with NIL opportunities and experiences. The goal is to show how HLT, as well as lessons from the work of Harrison, Cooper, Carter-Francique, and other Black scholars, can be used in conceptualizing the organization of an NIL Alliance of Black Athletes.

Happenstance Theory and Methodology: Strategies to increase the agency of Black athletes in the NIL Sphere

In discussions of NIL policies, there have been no concerted attempts to systematically connect NIL with educational achievement or help athletes nurture non-athlete identities, gain experiences valued in careers, express social consciousness, or expand social and cultural capital. Failing to do this is the result of many factors, including unawareness of *happenstance learning theory* (HLT),

an explanatory framework increasingly used in career counseling worldwide. In this section, we point out that HLT can be used to reduce or eliminate experiences that undermine learning, development, and career transitions. At the same time, it helps athletes maximize experiences that foster positive learning and developmental outcomes.

HLT is organized around the idea that meaningful occupational careers are achieved through an action-based approach in which people learn to recognize, generate, and utilize unplanned events as contexts for learning and development, especially in connection with transitions into post-college careers (Armstrong & Agulnik, 2020; Krumboltz, 2009; 2011; Krumboltz et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 1999; Shurts & Schoffner, 2004). HLT recognizes that career choices and development are regularly influenced by unplanned and unpredicted events. This means that it is important to recognize these events as opportunities and effectively use them to produce positive outcomes. This process is not unfamiliar to athletes who routinely face and must effectively deal with unplanned and unpredicted events during sport competitions. Such events are inevitable, even when game plans and practice sessions are organized to minimize them.

HLT is also based on the realization that ever-changing social and cultural conditions today alter the patterns and processes of career development. This does not mean that 'career planning' is futile, but it does mean that opportunities and possibilities often occur in connection with happenstance events. Learning to recognize and utilize unanticipated opportunities maximizes a person's prospects for career development and making intentional career changes throughout the life course. Recognizing and seizing chance opportunities enable a person to effectively focus on learning and career development in the face of changing social, economic, and cultural conditions. In the process, they learn that careers are not endpoints of following a single path, but part of a long-term developmental process that occurs along multiple paths.

When people understand that *happenstance* events are normal occurrences in everyday life, learn how to recognize them, and use them strategically, they maximize opportunities for growth and exercise personal agency in pursuit of meaningful goals. It also makes them aware that such events often involve opportunities to expand networks and experiences in ways that support developmental possibilities independent of their habitus and positionality in the structure of society (Valickas et al., 2019).

The methodology associated with HLT for college athletes often begins by asking them to give examples of how chance events have altered competitive outcomes in their sports. This is followed by asking them to describe cases when unanticipated events in competitions led to a positive result for themselves and for their team. The goal is to help athletes understand that everyday life, like competitions in their sports, involves unpredictability, and that happenstance can be used to their advantage if they are ready for it (Mitchell et al., 1999). Just as success in competitions is linked with an ability to utilize happenstance events, successful growth and development depends, in part, on recognizing and knowing how to use them.

Research indicates that there are five primary skills required to effectively use happenstance. According to career counselors and psychologists (Mitchell et al., 1999, p. 118), they include the following:

1. Curiosity: exploring new learning opportunities
2. Persistence: exerting effort despite setbacks
3. Flexibility: changing attitudes and circumstances
4. Optimism: viewing new opportunities as possible and attainable
5. Risk Taking: acting assertively in the face of uncertain outcomes.

These skills, combined with the ability to critically self-reflect, are especially important for Black athletes because they face challenges that differ from those faced by white athletes during their college years and throughout post-college careers (Bernhard, 2014; Bimper, 2015; 2017; Carter-Francique, 2020; Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Griffith et al., 2019; Harper, 2018; Njororai, 2012; Simien et al., 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2020).

NIL as a Conduit for Happenstance Learning

While acknowledging that NIL is available to all student-athletes, Black college athletes who are over-represented in high revenue-generating sports like football, men's and women's basketball, etc., appear to be disproportionally gaining NIL opportunities at a higher rate in these sports. Three of the five top NIL earners in the 2022-23 academic year per *USA Today* – Bronny James (USC basketball), Sheduer Sanders (Jackson State/Colorado football), and Caleb Williams (USC football) – and six of the top 10 overall are Black student-athletes. The rate of pay for each of these three young men in television appearances, product representation, etc., was well over two million dollars.

As we have articulated, contrary to public perception, these high-dollar deals are not common among the total population of athletes, specifically Black athletes. According to the 2023 NCAA Demographics Database, 37,838 (20% of the total NCAA college athlete population) Black athletes participated in Division I sports (NCAA, 2023). According to a Sports Law and Business journal survey of NIL data, about 17% of all student-athletes reported NIL deals in 2022, with an average of $1300 per deal (Carter, 2023). While the volume and value of NIL deals continue to grow, it is safe to say that the vast majority of college athletes in general (and Black athletes as a subset) do not profit significantly from NIL deals. Furthermore, even for those who have no NIL deals, almost all contemplate and spend energy trying to participate and financially benefit from them (Wohlw end, 2024).

One female, non-revenue athlete at Arizona State University noted that many athletes are "distracted" and "have a lot of anxiety" surrounding NIL (personal communication, September 23, 2023). Related to the highly visible and widely followed sports of football and men's and women's basketball, we have also discussed the issues associated with role engulfment, identity foreclosure, and imposter syndrome for Black athletes. These realities reaffirm the need to activate the NIL space as one in which career-relevant skills can be developed, especially among Black athletes.

From the inception of the NCAA's permissive stance related to NIL rule enforcement in the summer of 2021, universities and their associated collectives were quick to develop programs to support athletes financially with little or no emphasis on linking support with learning and skill development opportunities. Universities created internal programs, even with assistance from

athletic department staff, and also nurtured alliances with third-party agent-like providers, such as Opendorse, SANIL, Altius, and dozens of others claiming to offer NIL guidance and deal-making programs. For example, the Altius group partnered with multiple institutions to provide General Managers for NIL (Smith, 2022). While these efforts are commendable, some of them are short-lived. One university's website link for its NIL platform, initially launched in 2021, no longer exists – an outcome that has been relatively common. Unlike the programs detailed on pp. 46-47 of this paper, these efforts, including those initiated by third parties, do not contemplate the nuance required to activate happenstance learning in the experiences of Black athletes.

In the meantime, the public and athletes across multiple sports are missing an important point here. Much like the overall college experience that may involve non-paid internships and developing social capital, there are significant opportunities for Black athletes to engage in meaningful discourse and network building that facilitate opportunities for happenstance learning. For example, with the formation of 'collectives' comprised of university-affiliated donors, alumni, and business owners, there are multiple opportunities for happenstance learning and establishing influential social networks. These collectives contract with athletes for quid pro quo compensation in exchange for 'work,' i.e., some form of marketing, public relations engagements, or 'development sessions' with young athletes or disadvantaged youth. The NIL Alliances of Black Athletes (NILABA) on campuses could ensure that these engagements could be undertaken strategically and with a sense of purpose. While the monetary gain is the focus in most discussions of NIL benefits, just as much emphasis should be placed on developing the athletes' networks with corporate and community leaders. As student-athletes are inevitably engaged with business owners and community leaders, these moments should be leveraged to include informational interviews, conversations about career development and success, and advice about the skills required to be a productive member of the community.

An example of this occurred recently when a Director of Player Development for football teams in Power 5 institutions held a community networking gathering for the athletes. The visiting group was comprised of clergy from a large Black church and Black community leaders across multiple business spheres. The goal was to surround the team members with supportive and influential leaders in the Black community. The conversation ultimately evolved into a discussion about success strategies, including NIL opportunities. These leaders emphasized that people in the region valued their 'brand' collectively and individually and that they utilize their value not only for NIL, but also for developing mentors who would provide guidance for personal and career development. Many of the athletes connected with and obtained contact information from the leaders in attendance and felt more confident about their post-graduation transitions. This is an example of planned happenstance learning inside of community engagement connected with NIL opportunities.

With the development of campus-based NIL Alliances of Black Athletes, there would also be an organizational foundation for a systematic and strategic curriculum implemented on a national scale. This would be part of a planned happenstance approach leading to a range of learning opportunities and the expansion of social networks that would be useful in the future. At a minimum, such a curriculum would create an awareness of happenstance learning opportunities that are a part of everyday life. Additionally, Black athletes in the alliance would come to understand that their experiences in college sports can make positive contributions to both personal

and brand development. Deepening this awareness would provide the athletes with leverage that could be used in making successful and meaningful transitions into their post-college lives. The mentors established in connection with alliance programs would be valuable as role models and sources of information to create pathways to self-empowerment and career-oriented opportunities. Peer expression of experiences in the NIL realm can be used as intel and building blocks to successful negotiation in a literal and figurative sense, both locally and nationally.

Recommendations and Conclusions

When compared with white peers, Black athletes are more likely to seek NIL opportunities that endorse or promote Black-owned businesses, non-profits dedicated to the development of predominantly Black communities, and organizations working for social justice and racial equity. In addition to financial benefits, they may see NIL opportunities in terms of social and political activism and develop networks of mentors and advocates who understand their experiences, perspectives, and concerns. This does not mean that financial benefits would be irrelevant, but it does mean that they may want to combine those benefits with developing relationships, experiences, and identities compatible with who they are and want to become as young Black men and women facing the eventual challenge of transitioning to post-collegiate occupational careers that are meaningful for them and related to their skills. It is through this asset-based approach and lessons learned from research that Black athletes have been effectively supported and empowered as students on the campuses of HWIs that we make the recommendation for a NIL Alliance of Black Athletes (NILABA) in universities nationwide.

The NILABA on each Division I campus would be funded by the university and athletic department. It would take the form of a working group in which participants support each other, receive guidance for making informed decisions about NIL opportunities, effectively utilize happenstance events to gain social and cultural capital, succeed in their courses, obtain a degree, and transition into a meaningful career that is consistent with their sense of self and how they want to impact the social worlds in which they live. With the guidance of mentors and advocates who are aware of their experiences and concerns, regular Alliance meetings would focus on linking NIL opportunities with learning and development. Such involvement, organized within the moving boundaries of emerging and confusing NIL policies and rules, would be connected with coursework as well as expanding knowledge of the occupational world and the dynamics of post-college career transitions. It would also involve identifying and nurturing opportunities for athletes who seek to connect with Black-owned businesses and other organizations working with/for Black communities where they can make contributions to economic development and political effectiveness. Meeting people and recognizing the potential of happenstance events during this process would add significantly to the benefits of participating in the NILABA.

Another function of the NILABA would be to sponsor webinars locally and nationally (online) in which respected Black leaders and their allies from different institutional spheres would discuss relationships between NIL opportunities, personal agency, career transitions, and informed citizenship. The NILABAs would not replace or compete with campus-wide NIL education programs. Instead, they would complement them by providing safe and supportive spaces for Black athletes to explore issues and opportunities related to their experiences, perspectives, interests, and goals. For example, when Black athletes have NIL-related opportunities, it is

important that they gain thoughtful strategies for how to use them to expand social and cultural capital and sustain a continuing process of knowledge acquisition, related in part, to their personal growth and development as well as their coursework, career possibilities, and financial well-being.

If such webinars were held, Black athletes could discuss experiences and engage in critical self-reflection about their NIL decision-making and actions. The support and guidance received during regular sessions would be provided by NILABA mentors and advocates aware of HLT and how it could be used to expand experiences, relationships, and opportunities. In this context, they would also affirm the value of personal experiences, perspectives, and relationships among Black athletes. It would provide a supportive environment in which efforts to conform with the expectations and perspectives of white peers would not interfere with discussing race-related issues associated with identifying and negotiating NIL deals that are meaningful to them. For example, this might be the case when nurturing relationships with Black business and community leaders, members of Black sororities, fraternities, community organizations, and churches, and with those who manage NGOs or non-profits dedicated to racial justice and equity. Securing NIL opportunities through which Black athletes benefit by associating their name, image, and likeness with services or products that reflect their racial, family, and community identities would contribute to their career preparation and overall development as citizens and human beings.

The lack of previous actions by universities and athletic departments to provide meaningful support for Black athletes indicates that campus-based NILABAs guided by knowledgeable mentors would be valuable for young Black men and women as they negotiate their way through HWIs and prepare for life after college. The lack of racial diversity among people with power and status in universities and athletic departments often creates never-ending loops of overlooked strategies that provide meaningful and effective support for Black athletes. White men and women in these positions of power seldom know much about the everyday challenges faced by 18-22-year-old Black athletes and what they must do to maintain a positive sense of self as they strive for success in their courses leading to graduation and successful career transitions. The establishment of campus-based workgroups in the form of NILABA would be a step in the direction of fairness and racial equity. Without such groups, it would be difficult to critically assess NIL opportunities that might involve Black athletes in deals that unintentionally reproduce a racial status quo that disadvantages them in the long run.

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Exploring the Influence of Black Liberatory Theory on Collegiate Sport Reform Initiatives

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Abstract: As the oppressions of United States collegiate sport persist, recent collegiate sport reform efforts have emerged to address the racial injustices and inequalities that remain in contemporary collegiate sport. Because racial justice reform efforts in college sport are intricately linked to broader visions and pursuits of Black liberation, it is necessary for these efforts to acknowledge the diversity of Black political perspectives and explicitly consider precisely which theoretical model underpins their pursuit of racial justice in college sport. This paper aims to outline how racial justice initiatives within collegiate sport have been theoretically and strategically connected to broader Black social movements and the liberatory visions that accompany them. Specifically, I examine how some of the most common theories of Black liberation – Black Liberal Integrationism, Black nationalism, Black Marxism, and Black feminism – have shaped the tactical and utopian directions of key movements in the history of collegiate sport activism. Such events include the boycott efforts led by Dr. Harry Edwards in the late 1960s, the push for Historically Black Colleges and Universities athletics throughout the late 1900s, and the University of Missouri football strike in 2015. In effect, I argue that exploring the implicit intra-Black political divergences and tensions of past Black social movements can reveal instructive insights for contemporary collegiate sport reformers that can aid in achieving a more collective, structurally focused, and intersectional vision for transforming collegiate sport.

Keywords: Black politics, racial justice reform, collegiate sport activism, social movements, liberatory theory

The Multiplicity of Black Politics

Scholars and activists have long advocated for the need for racial justice within collegiate sport in the United States (Cooper, 2019; Edwards, 2018; Hawkins et al., 2016; Singer, 2019). The intertwined oppressions stemming from the racism, exploitation, and neoliberal governance of collegiate sport have spurred calls for a more equitable and perhaps liberatory form of collegiate sport (King-White, 2018; Runstedtler, 2018). These oppressions – as well as the calls for action to eliminate them – have been especially prescient within the revenue-generating sports of men's basketball and football, which Black athletes constitute at a rate highly disproportionate to the percentage of Black people in the broader United States (U.S.) population (Ingraham, 2020; Van Rheenan, 2013). Historical and contemporary racial justice efforts in U.S. collegiate sport have been explicitly and implicitly connected to broader social movements for racial justice, such as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-60s and the Black Lives Matter movement of the 2010s and beyond. Thus, the efforts have been influenced by the underlying theories and ideology of Black liberation inherent to those movements. It is a result of both timely research/advocacy by scholars

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and the continued blatant exploitation by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) that the necessity of race-based collegiate sport reform has become generally favorable within mainstream U.S. political opinion (Allison et al., 2022; Kleen, 2021). The next step, I contend, is unpacking the differences in theory, ideology, and tactics *within* racial justice movements in collegiate sport.

Scholars such as Keeanga-Yamhatta Taylor (2021), Charisse Burden-Stelly and Jodi Dean (2022), and Olúfẹmi O Táíwò (2022) have argued that while the perspectives held by Black people have recently gained more currency and credibility within mainstream White institutions, the "Black perspective" is too often treated as a monolith. The epistemological assumption that Black people – by way of simply being ascribed the social label of *Black* – all harbor roughly the same political and ideological perspectives. This assumption ignores the vast diversity of political orientations, liberatory visions, and strategic preferences for attaining racial justice that exist within the Black community that determine the direction and effectiveness of racial justice efforts. Furthermore, the well-intentioned mantra to "listen to Black voices" has perhaps gotten more Black people a seat at decision-making tables, but it has also elevated some Black voices over others. Specifically, the above scholars argue that the Black perspectives that are more compatible with moderate, liberal, reformist social viewpoints tend to be privileged over more radical and revolutionary Black perspectives (James, 1999; Táíwò, 2022). Assuredly, mainstream institutions (academia included) have somewhat begun to counter the monolithization of Black people by accounting for the intersectionality of the Black experience (Collins & Bilge, 2018) regarding how the Black lived experience is intricately intertwined with gender, class, sexuality, and ability. However, diversity of *ideology* remains an overlooked factor in Black inclusion efforts, specifically in conversations about attaining racial justice in institutions such as collegiate sport.

As a Black scholar personally and professionally interested in the racial politics of collegiate sport and efforts to reform it, I aim to offer a theoretical contribution to racial justice initiatives in collegiate sport. I contend that these initiatives influence, and are influenced by, broader ideologies of racial justice and Black liberation. As alluded to above, what precisely constitutes racial justice and/or Black liberation is not uncontested, even in (especially in) the Black community. Rather than containing a universal definition, Black liberation has been a polysemic and contested concept in each of its historical contexts. These subtle yet largely unexplored differences that exist in theories of Black liberation reflect and reproduce a politics that enables some liberatory visions and restrict others in ways that function to hinder the realization of a collective, grassroots, intersectional, and diasporic Black liberatory project (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Collins, 2000; Hall, 1990; Zamalin, 2019). Because of the way Black liberation terminology has been invoked – as well as co-opted or appropriated – by various late capitalist economic and political forces (Andrews, 2018; Gilroy, 2000), I argue that racial justice initiatives within collegiate sport would benefit from explicit and reflective examination of the Black liberatory theories that underpin their praxis, and upon which their goals, methods, effectiveness, and impact rely. While doing so may spark generative disagreements, this reflection will ultimately ensure that reformers are operating with aligned assumptions and visions of racial justice.

In what follows, I briefly explicate the aforementioned differences in Black political ideology in order to critically explore how the ideological diversity within broader Black politics

has influenced collegiate sport racial justice initiatives. I trace this history organized by theory rather than chronology because, generally, each theory has been relevant within each historical period. Drawing empirically from numerous historical collegiate sport racial reform efforts, I argue that the successes and failures of each of these historical movements in collegiate sport reflect more broadly the politics inherent to their corollary theories of Black liberation. Overall, I conclude that Black liberatory movements have always been marked by hybridity and contestation on the grounds of ideology; and that current efforts aiming to reimagine the racial politics of collegiate sport must be cognizant of this history to avoid the obstacles that have limited past race-based collegiate sport reform efforts.

Liberation as Equality: Liberal Integrationism

The most common and fundamental strand of Black liberatory thought has been the pursuit of equality. Though equality has been the underlying principle in almost all liberatory ideologies, the definition, form, and function have differed significantly (Dawson, 2001). In most historical cases, animating Black liberatory ideology was what Frederickson (1995) termed a *universal liberal integrationist response*, wherein Blacks aimed for equal status and full integration with Whites within common society as it functioned, though a society devoid of an entrenched racial hierarchy. The majority of Blacks have accepted the classic liberal view of equality as the *equality of opportunity*, which posits not that all people be granted or end up with the resources to survive (let alone thrive), but merely that all people needed to have equal protection under the law so that they could compete and interact with other equal actors in the pursuit of private wealth and property (Mills, 2017). The pursuit of the equality of opportunity was dominant from the post-Emancipation era and into the early 20th Century, which saw the denial of basic civil rights for Blacks – the effective right to vote, the denial of education, the denial of employment, the destruction of Black business – after Reconstruction and through the next century of Jim Crow segregation and discrimination (DuBois, 1935; Foner, 2019). Because Blacks are both a social and numerical minority in the U.S. context, equal protection under the law was seen as the bare minimum civil right, even if it did not spur complete integration.

In terms of function, the liberal integrationist pursuit did not seek liberation as the elimination of race as a social factor (unsurprisingly, since the essentialist view of race was dominant at the time). Instead, it merely sought the ability for Blacks to act within their interest as a collective race and as racialized people without being politically or violently punished for doing so (Frederickson, 1995). Equality of opportunity as an endpoint for liberation was especially appealing to the burgeoning Black elite and middle classes, for whom race was the only inhibitor of attaining equal status and legitimacy within White institutions (Andrews, 2018). For these intellectuals, e.g., Martin Delany, T. Thomas Fortune, Booker T. Washington, and even Frederick Douglass, a truly integrated nonracial society was still on the horizon of possibility, as racism was viewed as a temporary remnant of slavery that would soon wither away with time (Frederickson, 1995). Perhaps more importantly, the post-Emancipation Black elite was overwhelming capitalist and, as such, accepted and endorsed the ostensibly American values of meritocracy, hard work, and self-help (Frazier, 1965). Therefore, in their eyes, the system Whites had constructed was preferable; the central issue was that Blacks were denied the fruits of that system's riches. This view was accompanied by antagonistic, intra-Black class politics that would occupy the backdrop of subsequent liberatory struggles to this day (Marable, 2015; Spence, 2015). Rather than merely

expressing a latent Black collective consciousness, this post-Emancipation Black elite often viewed themselves as worthy of equality but viewed the poorer Black masses as requiring civilization into modernity and the development of a persevering determination to help themselves – without sacrificing their dignity by accepting hand-outs – before becoming equal with Whites (Frederickson, 1995). This belief explains the framing of post-Emancipation Black liberation as obtaining opportunity and gradual reformism rather than compensation, justice, or other demands that would arise as Black resistance progressed.

Within collegiate sport, liberal integrationism was obviously the dominant theoretical influence in the push for integration of collegiate sports (as discussed later). I argue that it is still the most common theoretical underpinning of racial justice reform movements in collegiate sport since, by definition, any reform effort aims to stabilize the system and thus tacitly functions to maintain the system. For instance, one could argue that the legalization of NIL functions as a salve that allows some college athletes to capitalize in small part on the value they create while discouraging critical interrogation of the broader system in which they are still exploited and robbed of the value their labor creates for universities. A cynic might say NIL policies thus make a fundamentally exploitative system slightly more tolerable. Despite my tone and previous lamentation of the neglect of more radical perspectives, I do not view reformist strategies as worthless or automatically inferior to more radical perspectives. As I argue later, my point is that reform occupies a hegemony in racial justice theory and strategy when alternatives to reformism exist and should be taken seriously.

Empirically, The Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), organized by Dr. Harry Edwards, contained elements useful for examining liberal integrationism in action as a framework for collegiate sporting activism. In response to racism and economic injustice faced by Black athletes in sport and Black people in society more broadly in the late 1960s, the OPHR attempted to organize a boycott by Black athletes of the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. The OPHR had six demands of the International Olympic Committee (IOC): (a) restore Muhammad Ali's boxing title that was stripped for his refusal to fight in the Vietnam War into which he was conscripted; (b) remove "anti-Semitic and anti-Black personality" Avery Brundage; (c) exclude the participation of apartheid nations South Africa and Rhodesia; (d) add at least two Black coaches to the Olympic men's track and field coaching staff; (e) appoint at least two Black people to policy-making positions at the U.S. Olympic Committee; and (f) desegregate the New York Athletic Club (Edwards, 2018; p. 53). Although the boycott ultimately fell apart, its spirit came to fruition when sprinters John Carlos and Tommie Smith famously raised their fists in a Black power salute during the men's 100m medal ceremony, drawing attention to racial injustice through sport (Hartmann, 2003).

In his writings, Harry Edwards has forcefully articulated the OPHR within a broader history of revolt for Black liberation (Edwards, 2018). Accordingly, the trajectory of the OPHR reflects some of the strengths and weaknesses of a liberal accommodationist approach. While the movement was vocal about the racism inherent to American sporting institutions, it ultimately prioritized an approach aimed at more Black inclusion into those same institutions. The OPHR succeeded in bringing wider attention to the political nature and racial oppression in sport, as well as catalyzing some key reforms to amateur athletics (Hartmann, 2003). It also provided a memorable moment that inspires Black revolutionary activity (within and outside sport) today. Yet

a potential critique is that the movement resulted in mostly symbolic achievements that, in effect, gave off the appearance of revolution without fundamental changes to the roots of the issues afflicting Black athletes. The concrete action sparked by the revolt – slow-moving reform, a hallmark of liberal integrationism – may have kept intact (and perhaps preserved) an exploitative and racially oppressive amateur athletic system that persists today. As discussed later, even if the boycott were successful, it is doubtful that the movement's success would have translated to positive gains for anyone other than elite Black male athletes, an issue common to all pursuits of racial justice underpinned by liberal integrationism.

Liberation as Escape: Black Nationalism

Black nationalism is another influential theory of Black liberation that reached its political and intellectual heights in the early 1900s but has cultural remnants that persist today. While it has various strands and manifestations, the underlying postulation for Black nationalists is the belief that Blacks have been wronged not only as individuals but as a collective people and nation (Andrews, 2018). The signature departure for Black nationalism from the pursuit of equality is the belief that the remedy for Blacks' historical wrongs is not reform and gradual integration into the White-constructed system but rather a full-scale escape from the colonizing nation (in our case, the U.S.). Most Black nationalists also advocated for and even planned in detail the establishment of a separate and independent Black nation, either within or outside the colonizing nation (Kelley, 2003). In the Black nationalist view, liberation could only be realized with the autonomy allotted by a sovereign nation *of* Blacks and *for* Blacks. Less important are the political and economic structures in place than the Black faces that would purportedly be in control of them.

Black nationalism was born in several important contexts. First, the conscription of White workers for the demand necessitated by World War I sparked the transition of many Blacks into the industry, merging their everyday lives with the rhythms of the working class (Frederickson, 1995). This shift exacerbated a second important context: the growing notion/recognition that W.E.B. DuBois's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other Black bourgeoisie organizations were elitist, beholden to White liberal dollars and political alliances, and spoke *to* the Black masses (in a patronizing manner) rather than *for* the Black masses as they professed (Andrews, 2018). The NAACP's lack of an economic and labor program to address the class-based concerns of the emerging Black working class confirmed the view that Black leaders favored Black elite interests over Black rural and working-class interests (Shawki, 2006). Third, the intensity of the Jim Crow era and its concomitant lynchings, violence, and discrimination that only seemed to be spreading deeper and wider inspired pessimism that integrationist equality was ever feasible or even desirable.

As such, Black nationalism arose as a form of Black populism that tapped into an increasingly radicalizing and anti-elitist fervor that sought to oppose rather than adapt to White Western social formations (Frederickson, 1995). It was especially tantalizing to the Black poor and working class by way of its capacity to – at least in rhetoric and appearances – represent everyday Black people. Importantly, its appeal also derived from the way Black nationalists instilled pride in Blacks. Black nationalists often gladly accepted essentialist views of race, as well as the popular turn-of-the-century notion that each "race" had a unique gift to offer humanity. Black nationalists reversed the White view that Blacks were cursed with passivity and inferiority;

they argued instead that Blacks possessed power, spirit, and other gifts that would make whatever nation they established a mighty empire (Frederickson, 1995). This belief also was wielded to buttress a conservative Booker T. Washington-esque belief that self-help and respectability were key to unlocking the Black genius, and that economic empowerment was the key to setting it in motion. Whereas the pursuit of equality inspired strides in the political terrain, Black nationalism based its liberatory appeal on the cultural and psychological terrain.

Black nationalism – along with the closely related movement of Pan-Africanism that valorized a physical or metaphorical return to Africa for Blacks – also became associated with reformulations of cultural identity for many Blacks. As it became increasingly clear in the early to mid-1900s that Blacks around the globe were not going to return to Africa permanently, there emerged a tendency to attempt to summon a sense of long-lost Blackness through culture. In this cultural nationalist logic, if Blacks could not unlock the prophesied royalty and power of African identity in Africa, they could instead invoke the proverbial power of Africa in their everyday contexts and keep Africa alive in their actions (Andrews, 2018). Cultural nationalism was closely linked to the Black Power movement, which sought to rearticulate Blackness as a source of pride and solidarity rather than inferiority (Ture & Hamilton, 1992). Their primary issue was not the racism embedded in material structures and institutions; they claimed that many Blacks were still stuck in mental slavery – and would fail to reach self-determination until they liberated their minds and unlearned the racism that Blacks had been inundated with for centuries (Kelley, 2003; Kendi, 2017). Methods of liberating the Black mind were manifold: from the creation of revolutionary and utopian art by the surrealists, to the "re-assertion of manhood" from many of the Black men who claimed leadership of liberation movements, to the adornment of traditionally African clothes and hairstyles, to the play of sports with a distinct Black/African style (Isaac, 2008; Powell, 2003; Rhoden, 2006). Cultural nationalists thus sought liberation through the confidence and self-esteem granted by the assertion of a mighty and triumphant ancient African identity that was stripped in the Middle Passage and destroyed by the West's oppression.

While the Black nationalist movement sparked a new form of consciousness for Blacks, it also suffered from logical flaws. The Black nationalist longing for a sovereign Black nation was not only hindered by pragmatic and logistical barriers that prevented its realization; the idea itself underestimated how the increasing interconnectivity engendered by globalization (in its 19th Century or 20th Century form) very likely prohibits the possibility of a Black nation that could exist without ties to – or dependence upon – White nations (Andrews, 2018). This is especially the case since many Black nationalists aimed to simply replicate the foundational logics of Western modernity, eliminating racial hierarchies but maintaining hierarchies of class, gender, and sexuality (Zamalin, 2019). Both Black nationalism and its corollary, cultural nationalism, also operate under an essentialist view of race that implies there is an authenticity to Blackness, or a fixed Black core within people racialized as Black that is yearning to be unlocked, often via a performance of Africanness (Hall, 1990). This often results from – and simultaneously reproduces – a romanticization of Africa as a Black utopia that only exists through myth and imagination and does not resemble history or reality (Kelley, 2003). Even if one pretends there was a mighty Africa in the premodern past, the cultural nationalist actions of thinking, talking, and acting "Black" to summon it is more performative than liberatory, and does nothing to change structural conditions for Blacks in their contexts (Andrews, 2018). A cultural revolution to influence confidence and self-perception has a role to play in Black liberation, but because racial oppression is far more

material and institutional than psychological, the constellation of an Afrocentric mindset cannot alone serve as an endpoint for racial justice.

Black nationalism as a liberatory approach has influenced numerous sporting activist endeavors. The emergence of the Fab Five reflected the appeal of cultural nationalism. The Fab Five was the nickname for the 1991 University of Michigan's all-Black starting men's basketball lineup, consisting of players Chris Webber, Jalen Rose, Juwan Howard, Jimmy King, and Ray Jackson (Vogan, 2011). Apart from their basketball success, they became popular due to their street aesthetic, i.e., black socks and baggy shorts, and swagger attitude that, to many, was reminiscent of an *authentic* Black culture that posed an affront to the overarching Whiteness of college basketball (Wallace, 2022). While likely functioning to help normalize the presence of Blackness in mainstream popular culture, the Fab Five's cultural style did not result in any material change to the position of Black athletes, or the Black community for that matter. The appeal that they represented Black culture also relied on the problematic notion that a predetermined authentic Blackness can be excavated. Historically, this assumption of the authenticity of the Black experience has reproduced notions that Black people are monolithic while most often privileging Black hetero-masculinity as the *default* Black performance (Hall, 1990; Zamalin, 2019).

As for the more material strain of Black nationalism, even the OPHR had Black nationalist ideas – such as an alternate 1968 Olympics for Black athletes held in Africa and a Federation of Black Amateur Athletes for Black collegiate athletes – that never came to fruition. Another sporting example reflective of Black nationalist approaches is the historical push to strengthen Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) athletics. Recognizing the alienating and dehumanizing experiences of many Black athletes at predominantly White universities, Black athletes were encouraged to attend HBCUs rather than White colleges. The rationale was that talented players attending HBCUs would make the gameplay more competitive and enticing, which would generate wider and possibly mainstream interest, which would then translate to increased revenue and development of an economic sporting infrastructure whose fruits would be controlled by, enjoyed by, and hopefully mobilized for the wider benefit of Blacks.

Rhoden (2006) argued that the focus on integration halted the progress of building up Black professional institutions, e.g., the Negro Leagues, as well as Black collegiate institutions, e.g., HBCU athletics. But even this point perhaps romanticizes the benefits of Black-owned institutions. HBCU athletics became a point of pride and identification for Black communities through the mid-1900s, played a vital role in employing Black workers, and empowered Black culture. Some Black HBCU coaches recognized the benefits of segregated sport for their team's success and personal coaching careers and aimed to prolong segregation to benefit from the increased likelihood of recruiting and attaining Black talent (Rhoden, 2006). Similar to Black cultural nationalism, its benefits were always more psychological and cultural than material (which is not to downplay the importance of the psychological and cultural realms). However, the liberatory potential of parallel Black sporting institutions was likely always restricted. Even if there could eventually be truly parallel sporting institutions owned and controlled by Black faces, it would not automatically confer material benefits to Black athletes or the Black community. While HBCU athletics would enrich a select handful of Black people instead of White people, it would still rely on amateurist exploitation. Furthermore, similar to the push for independent Black nations, the hypothetical Black parallel sporting institutions would still operate within the context of a White-majority

nation and, therefore, would be directly or indirectly reliant upon White society, i.e., in the form of consumption, investment, governance/regulation, media, and other corollary institutions, in a manner that renders full autonomy unrealistic.

Liberation as Anti-capitalist Revolution: Black Marxism

One of the more radical visions of Black liberation is that of Black Marxists, who link their anti-racist struggle to socialist, communist, or anti-capitalist struggles. The *radicalism* of Black Marxism entails rejecting the fundamental principles that govern Western capitalist democracies (Andrews, 2018). For Black Marxists, true Black liberation means targeting and transforming the material and systemic structures responsible for oppression (of both race and class) rather than attempting to ingratiate oneself or merely assuage its subsidiary symptoms (Robinson, 1984). Following Marx's conception that the economic base (of capitalism in our case) determines the societal superstructure (of culture, politics, religion, society, etc.), Black Marxists found it contradictory to pine for equality in a capitalist system that was inherently unequal and fundamentally reliant upon exploitation. Because the majority of Blacks were poor and working class, i.e., proletariat rather than petit bourgeoisie, they were critical of earlier conceptions of Black liberation that ignored the immediate ramifications of class and labor exploitation, or worse, they sought to develop Black capitalism that merely swapped a White bourgeoisie with a Black bourgeoisie (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Frazier, 1965). In addition, Black Marxism was largely Pan-Africanist. Perhaps more than any other theory of liberation, Black Marxists sympathized and connected with an international proletariat often marked in their local context by class *and* race (Gilroy, 1993). Whether or not they believed it could solve the issue of race, Black Marxists favored and aimed to establish communism. The logic was that the largely White and European (at the time) Communist movement ironically could be of more benefit to Blacks and all people of color around the world, who were more concentrated into the poor and working class (Kelley, 2015; Marable, 2015).

While Marxism had been a growing political-economic-social theory mainly in Europe since the mid-1800s, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 that established the Soviet Union triggered the ascendence of communism into a tangible political project that quickly spread around the globe (Frederickson, 1995). After World War I, communism gained a significant following and formed associations with the popular Progressive-era labor movement in the U.S. (McLellan, 1979). The radical fervor of communism became attractive to Blacks for a few reasons. First, as stated earlier, it addressed the immediate question of class and exploitation that its contemporary movements of NAACP-led liberal integrationism, Black nationalism, and Black Christianity largely ignored (Kelley, 2015). Second, despite the uneasiness of many Blacks to associate with a communist intellectual heritage that appeared to only speak about and to White Europeans, Blacks recognized the fact that the overwhelmingly White U.S. communist organizations by the 1920s were at the forefront of anti-racist protests, legal battles, and other forms of racial resistance (Frederickson, 1995). This was mostly due to the directives supplied by Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin. In his famous analysis of capitalist imperialism, Lenin (2015) rejected Marx's theory that liberatory revolution would require an organized working class within a nation, instead arguing that the rise of imperialism meant that the third world and underdeveloped nations – including the most oppressed status groups within those nations – were the laborers upon which global capitalism depended. As such, it was the third world, mostly non-White nations and peoples, that were the

key revolutionary agents whose liberation would bring about the fall of capitalism. Lenin officially recognized Blacks as an oppressed nation deserving of self-determination, which dictated international Soviet-allied communist policy. Lenin had special sympathies for Black Americans due to the emergence of the U.S. as an economic superpower and viewed them as the vanguard of the international Black race (Frederickson, 1995). The actions and the messages of Lenin-affiliated communism thus gained credibility with many Blacks across the economic stratum, especially as the White capitalists and moderates who vehemently denounced communism simultaneously tolerated Jim Crow discrimination. As opposed to Black nationalism, Black Marxists were willing to work with White progressives and the White working class to eliminate class and racial oppression.

The burgeoning linkage between Blacks and communists did yield several issues and tensions, however. Lenin – and even his successor Stalin – were more resolute in their anti-racism than the satellite communist movement in the U.S. that was constituted largely by homegrown White Americans, who were often socialized into harboring anti-Black proclivities (Heideman, 2018). The Labor Movement was no better, as Blacks were too often denied union entry because of their race – or seen as the enemy of unions because they were willing/forced to accept lower wages and fewer benefits from employers than White workers (Foner, 2017; Zinn, 2003). There was also the more abstract issue of the relationship between race and class in Marxist theory. Many Marxist theorists viewed race as simply a matter of *false consciousness*, or an ideological misconception that was the product of intentional bourgeoisie manipulations of proletariat unity. They viewed race as a particularity of capitalism that would be eliminated with its abolition and racism as the misdirected expression of grievances that inveterately arose from class exploitation. Therefore, in this thinking, race was secondary to class (the ultimate basis of solidarity) because solving the class question would solve the race question (Robinson, 1984; Roediger, 2017). Communists were eager to organize with any Black workers in a common pursuit of revolution. However, these arguments sparked hesitancy to take any race-exclusive issues seriously that did not have a clear class angle. While the class-first argument was convincing to some, many Blacks perceptively understood that class did not solely explain race and that racism took on its own distinct character separate from the relations of capitalist production (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1980; Kelley, 2015; Robinson, 1984). Black Marxists in the academy would later demonstrate how racism and capitalism are certainly intertwined, yet have their unique histories and operations, which confirmed the long-held intuition among Blacks that the end of capitalism would not solve racism (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Johnson & Lubin, 2017).

While Blacks were enticed by communism for the reasons listed above, the association was usually more intellectual than political. Blacks did not join communist political organizations in droves (Frederickson, 1995). The anti-communist milieu of the post-World War I and later post-World War II McCarthyist era resulted in significant repression of communist ideas (Zinn, 2003). This made formal affiliation with communism dangerous for Blacks, especially Black community leaders whose flirtations with communism would be weaponized to destroy their credibility with liberal Whites and integrationist/reformist Blacks. DuBois, for example, evolved into a Marxist intellectually but was aware of how communist affiliation was weaponized to destroy Paul Robeson (Bryant, 2018). Other Black communists, most notably Richard Wright, would grow disillusioned with American communism's inconsistency with the race question and became pessimistic that Whites could ever truly unify with Blacks in service of revolution (Gilroy, 1993).

Yet Marxism would remain a factor in subsequent Black liberation struggles. Malcolm X would forcefully advocate for an international, anti-capitalist, quasi-socialist revolution, and King would shift his focus to labor relations, poverty, and socialism later in his life (Shawki, 2006). The Black Panther Party headlined by Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Fred Hampton, declared themselves explicitly Marxist-Leninist (Kelley, 2003). They would not only preach, organize, and raise consciousness for an international socialist revolution (in alliance with oppressed Whites) but would also provide a taste of Black liberation by implementing community programs that prefigured the society they sought to establish (Newton, 2019). Marxism would be even more influential in anti-imperialist liberatory movements across the diaspora – especially in South Africa and other African nations, as well as in the Caribbean – as there was not a strong competing integrationist theory of liberation that would pacify the revolutionary energy of Black majorities (Frederickson, 1995; McLellan, 1979).

There are fewer examples of Black Marxism within sport than there are examples of previous theories, unsurprisingly due to sport's moderate, if not conservative, structure and culture. Still, activism based on the tenets of Marxism has been present in sporting history. Examples include the development of workers' sport leagues in the early 1900s to develop working-class solidarity (Harvey et al., 2014; Wheeler, 1978); the attempts in multiple sports to create player-run leagues (Ross, 2016); and the famous labor dispute cases such as Curt Flood's challenge of the Major League Baseball's Reserve Clause in 1969 (Briley, 2014). More recently, this perspective implicitly underpinned the attempts by the Northwestern University football team to unionize (Strauss, 2015). The goal was to classify *student-athletes* as employees, enticing them to labor rights, e.g., the right to unionize. Unfortunately, it fell apart after the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) declared that it lacked jurisdiction over the NCAA to declare them employees. This case had the potential to revolutionize collegiate athletics by granting players collective bargaining power that could be used as leverage for a list of economic and racial demands. However, its failure in the legal system demonstrates how more revolutionary strategies based on a Black Marxist approach will likely fail when forced to navigate institutions that fundamentally aim for the status quo's persistence and strengthening, such as the U.S. legal system.

A useful example for examining the strengths and weaknesses of a Black Marxist approach in college sport can be found in the University of Missouri football protests of 2015. In response to the culture of racism at the university and the lack of an adequate response by the university administration, the Missouri football team announced that they would not play football until the university president was removed from office (Nadkarni & Nieves, 2015; Yan et al., 2018). A few days later, the president resigned. The Missouri football strike reflects the potential of a Marxist approach to Black liberation. First, it demonstrated how the economic engine that is collegiate football can be leveraged to confront and address racism. This is similar to what the OPHR attempted but ultimately did not succeed in. Recognizing the value of athletic labor – and the catastrophic consequences of its refusal – created pressure for effective change in White power structures in ways that other liberatory projects had not. Second, it is important to note that the Missouri football team was united among Black and non-Black players. Cross-racial solidarity is often difficult to envision and sustain in a myriad of contexts, but the Missouri strike may suggest that sport contains a unique opportunity for the formation of the solidarity necessary to affect change. These results are difficult to replicate on a grand scale. Though the exploitative nature of

the NCAA may create a ripe atmosphere for athletic labor solidarity, the precarity of student-athlete life means that willingness to unite for a cause may be tenuous. Nonetheless, the Missouri example demonstrates the power of collective change aimed at structural roots, even when the odds are stacked against it.

Liberation as Eliminating All Oppressions: Black Feminism and Intersectionality

Unlike previous theories, the last theory is one that I argue has not had *enough* influence on racial justice movements both within and beyond collegiate sport. Black women have been central to developing many of the aforementioned theories of liberation and have overwhelmingly coordinated the political activity to actualize them. Yet, their work has often gone unrecognized, and their perspectives and epistemologies have gone unheralded by the men who assumed the front lines of intellectual and political leadership (Ling & Monteith, 2004; Weheliye, 2014). As a result, many Black male leaders who have theorized about the roots of oppression of the Black race have tended to overlook how patriarchy and heteronormativity contribute to the racial oppression of Black women and Black queer people (Kelley, 2003). Neither structure of oppression received much mainstream critical thought until about the 1970s, which tainted and limited the effectiveness of previous liberatory movements. Black nationalist leaders, e.g., Garvey, Carmichael, and Eldridge Cleaver, harbored deeply misogynistic and anti-LGBT ideas, and even more integrationist Civil Rights leaders tended to view the role of women as supporting and organizing in the background for revolutionary men (Andrews, 2018). This was indicative of the broader assumption of female domesticity that relegated the majority of women to the private sphere of the home while men occupied the public sphere of politics, business, and academics. Indeed, many Black male leaders viewed the sin of racism not as oppressing the Black community as a whole, but as stripping the Black man of his ostensibly proper manhood, thus linking Black liberation to the full realization of a toxic and domineering masculinity (Matlon, 2022).

Black feminist scholars and activists since the Civil Rights movement – notably Angela Davis, Ella Baker, and the Combahee River Collective – identified the ways in which capitalism, racism, and patriarchy were linked (James, 1999). They offered a theory of liberation that extended from the public to the private realm, which is constituted by women who themselves required unique forms of liberation and harbored an entirely untapped reserve of revolutionary thought and insight (Kelley, 2003). Black feminists thus argued that Black liberation must heed and center the most vulnerable *within* the Black community – women, queer people, and people with disabilities – to achieve a truly collective and revolutionary Black liberation (Combahee-River-Collective, 1995; Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 1971). For instance, one of the reasons for the failure of the OPHR is the failure to meaningfully include Black female athletes and Black women in the operations (Smith, 2009).

These critiques sowed the seeds for Black feminists in the 1990s to develop the concept of intersectionality, which argued that the Black experience is shaped not by a single source of oppression, e.g., race, class, or gender, but by various sources that intertwine and become enmeshed (see Collins & Bilge, 2018; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015). There are theoretical and tactical differences even within Black feminist thought. As outlined by James (1999), activists such as Ella Baker identified how “the political contradictions of liberalism among black elites advocating civil rights distinguished between attempts to become ‘a part of the American scene’

and 'the more radical struggle' to transform society" (p. 74). As such, prior to the Civil Rights movement, Black women who were amongst the few to be trained as potential leaders within the Black community were those whose political ideologies were more closely aligned with liberal integrationism than any form of structurally oriented radicalism (James, 1999). Since the late 1990s, however, most strands of contemporary Black feminist theory rejects a liberal universalist pursuit of equality within existing structures in favor of a politics that mobilizes the racialized-gendered-sexualized subject positions of Black women to envision and enact new forms and visions of being human (Wehelyie, 2014; Wynter, 2001); not just to eliminate racism and sexism but all -isms that stem from oppression (Wynter, 1982). Intersectionality animates liberatory thought to this day, urging a recognition that true liberation will require careful consideration of these multiple matrices of oppression and a new imagination of what humanity may look like without them.

An intersectional approach is still necessary for contemporary collegiate sport reform because barriers of race and gender inhibit progress. For example, the head women's basketball coach at Howard University, Sanya Tyler, sued the university in the 1990s, claiming that the men's basketball team had more resources, facilities, and vastly higher pay for coaches (Cooper, 2021). She was successful in court. The disparity between men's and women's collegiate sports remains 50 years after Title IX, so her claims may come as unsurprising. However, Howard is an HBCU. The lingering disparity demonstrates how, as mentioned above, ostensible Black control of institutions does not automatically solve gender-based inequalities. More broadly, it still leaves room for inequalities based on other oppressions.

Conclusion: BLM and Racial Justice in the Neoliberal Moment

With recourse to a number of moments that had implications for racial justice in collegiate sporting history, my first objective in this piece was to advocate for considering racial justice initiatives in connection to broader Black social movements and the liberatory theories, visions, and strategies that accompanied them. Certainly, there is far more to be said about each listed theory and additional influential theories that space and scope have limited me from examining. The implication of tracing these theoretical influences is to demonstrate how we can and should apply this same contextual thinking to contemporary racial justice efforts within the Black Lives Matter moment. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) social movement represents a resurgence of Black liberatory activity in the U.S. after a relative retreat of collective and confrontational Black politics in the post-Civil Rights era (Taylor, 2021). Analyzing in detail the theory and politics that characterize the BLM movement is slightly more difficult than previous movements because it is ongoing, decentralized, and elastic, and much of its foundational rhetoric has become increasingly co-opted and wielded for a wide range of objectives and political projects (many of which diametrically oppose what seem to be the central tenets of BLM). Despite these difficulties, in broad terms, it is agreed that BLM as a slogan rose to prominence in the aftermath of the frequent Black deaths and brutalities at the hands of police in the mid-2010s (Lebron, 2017). While police brutality was and remains the rallying cause, BL has expanded to address and critique the residual presence of structural and colorblind racism in the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), often packaged with an anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal, and intersectional orientation.

Yet, the movement has its unique challenges. BLM coincides with the emergence of contemporary theories of Black liberation that, while they may have some merit, I argue are polluted by the internalization of neoliberal individualist prescriptions for social change. For example, one common recent theory described by Spence (2015) is that liberation can be attained using a *hustler's mentality*, which touts the idea that Blacks can succeed by pursuing constant entrepreneurship, prioritizing investments and financial initiatives, working extra hard in their endeavors, and/or if all else fails, finding creative ways to exploit or trick another party out of their money. This theory is rampant in contemporary Black popular culture – especially rap music – but is essentially just a recent iteration of a long tradition of Black conservatism that preaches self-responsibility, respectability, economic empowerment, and individualism, submerged with the contemporary gig economy, informalization of work, and emphasis on materialism and consumption. The commodification and commercialization of collegiate sport have produced unprecedented opportunities for athletes to accumulate personal wealth (or fame that can translate to wealth). With the institution of the new Name and Image Likeness (NIL) rules for NCAA athletes, it remains to be seen if collegiate athletes will mobilize the individualized fortune for collective and liberatory ends or retain individualized pursuits reminiscent of the neoliberal "hustler's mentality." A separate (but related) challenge for overcoming this dynamic is the recent bans on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and corollary critical perspectives occurring in some U.S. states and institutions (Schuessler, 2021; Wendling, 2021). Beyond simply attempting to deny the objective facts about historical and contemporary racism in the U.S., these legislative efforts function to further discourage collective identification and organization around racial identity throughout all levels of the education system. This has stakes for Black collegiate athletes who – already in a precarious situation and at the mercy of the largely conservative institutions who employ them – may face further scrutiny when using the leverage attained by collegiate sport to promote action toward Black liberation.

Second, I have attempted to promote a materialist understanding of racial justice reform efforts that center on the importance of structures, particularly class and its intersections with race and gender. Third, and relatedly, I have advocated for increased focus on and attention to the *intra*–Black political tensions within race-based social movements and, thus, within collegiate sport reform movements. I have argued that Black political visions have always been marked by hybridity not only of class, gender, and sexuality but also of ideology, objectives, tactics, and strategy. My promotion of radical perspectives throughout should not be read as my automatic endorsement of them or that I view them as superior to more moderate and reformist approaches to transforming college sport. I emphasize the revolutionary perspectives because they are too often forgotten about and are left out of negotiations altogether. However, I believe that more radical strategies, e.g., withholding labor or withdrawing certain value-producing entities from the system, must be combined with more reformist pressures for either approach to be effective in achieving any sort of racial justice. Before strategy is even discussed, however, I argue that any forms of racial sporting activism should reflect in clear and explicit terms the ideological assumptions guiding their praxis. Doing so would clarify how these ideological visions determine the sustainment and effectiveness of their efforts, as well as the vision of sport and society that activist movements are aiming to build.

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Antiblackness and Carcerality: Implications for the Study of College Athletics

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Abstract: We frequently frame criticisms of college athletics in terms of labor exploitation and/or legacies of racism. Though these remain necessary and foundational analytical frames, there are other important frameworks through which we must analyze college athletics to fully understand how and why inequity and racism are both rationalized and compounded. Antiblackness and carcerality—and their deep interconnection—are two such perspectives that both complement and complicate other approaches to the study of college athletics. This paper discusses these two essential theoretical frameworks and demonstrates the nuance that using them in college athletics research provides through several exemplars.

Keywords: Antiblackness, carcerality, college athletics, racism

Theorizing the Function of College Athletics

For decades, critical sport scholars have documented the tension between the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and college athletes who continue to fight for their rights to healthcare, free speech, bodily autonomy, education, and fair compensation (Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). Those who have organized against the current structure and fought for player rights have experienced massive resistance from administrators and state officials who fight to preserve the system—an arrangement that has been critiqued for mirroring a plantation (Branch, 2011; Hawkins, 2010), and relying on the disposability of primarily Black men (Comeaux, 2018; Rhoden, 2006). Scholars have analyzed other functions of college athletics, such as propagating white supremacist delusions of the ultimate heterosexual white subject (Hextrum, 2021a; Smith, 1990), serving as another privileging access point to college for white youth (Hextrum, 2018, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Jayakumar & Page, 2021), and accumulating wealth for primarily white administrators and corporate entities (Gayles et al., 2018).

Recent analyses of sport in relation to state violence (Haslerig et al., 2020) and statehood (Hextrum, 2021a) lead us to consider other, often more expansive, views of the root of inequity and harm in sport. Hextrum (2021a) explicated the relationship between college sport, the NCAA, and state power:

> Like other arms of the state (e.g., military or taxes), the NCAA is not a singular thing but a collection of member institutions and individuals. Through its diffuse organizational membership (discussed in forthcoming chapters), the NCAA's reach and the state's power expand. (pp. 5-6)

As such, college sport can be seen as enmeshed in and complementing other antiblack state projects and carceral expansion such as segregation, organized abandonment, the war on drugs, nonprofit

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sporting organizations (Hartmann, 2012), the proliferation of tropes about Black athleticism and invincibility (Azzarito & Harrison, 2008; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Haslerig et al., 2020), as well as narratives that sport via the "state-sponsored sports pathway to college" as an avenue for social mobility (Edwards, 1979; Hextrum, 2021a, p. 3; Kalman-Lamb, 2020).

What remains undertheorized is how higher education's administering of college athletics rests within the carceral continuum of these antiblack state projects and structural conditions of antiblackness in general. Put another way, how is the system and foundational logics that structure college athletics tethered to the dehumanization of Black players specifically, and the reproduction and normalization of the abjection of Black people generally? In what ways does higher education use antiblack logics and carceral formations to administer college athletics? What forms of control and ideologies are used to indoctrinate and rationalize this system to participants, as well as gain public consent?

To reflect on the significance and explanatory power that carcerality and antiblackness offer toward these questions, I present a portion of data from a study that qualitatively examined how athletic department policies and practices shaped former (18) and current (two) college player experiences (see Appendix A for participant demographic information). Interviews with 10 Black and 10 nonblack[1] participants from 13 different Division I institutions were collected and analyzed. Data analysis demonstrated the power these theories had in situating participant experiences within a larger continuum of state violence – particularly as it relates to an undergirding antiblack logic.

Literature Review

There is a large archive, both academic and activist, that details college athletes' inequitable and exploitative conditions within higher education. Most research critical of the system has investigated the structure of college sport and player experiences through lenses of capitalism, neoliberalism, racism, and white supremacy. Research has examined these structuring logics and how fulfilling them, e.g., organizing and administering athletics according to them, is tied to structural racism (Gayles, 2018; Hawkins, 2010), white supremacy and whiteness (Hextrum, 2018; 2020d; 2021a; 2021b), capitalism and neoliberalism (Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018; Giroux & Giroux, 2012), and antiblackness (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Dancy et al., 2018). Most research references the structure of wealth accumulation for white administrators and the disproportionate percentage of Black players in revenue-generating sports compared to other sports and the rest of the study body as a signifier of racist exploitation (Gayles et al., 2018; Giroux & Giroux, 2012). Dancy et al. (2018) and Hawkins (2010) paralleled the current structure of college athletics to slavery and a plantation system, respectively. Dancy et al. (2018) asserted that Blackness being equated with property has never been eradicated from the white imagination, structures, and society. Several authors have noted that universities have shifted from relying on enslaved Black labor to build and maintain institutions to relying on Black players to generate revenue and promote the university under the guise of amateurism (Dancy et al., 2018; Hawkins, 2010; Nocera & Strauss, 2016).

[1] The term "nonblack" encompasses white people and nonblack people of color. Theorists of antiblackness have been clear in their departure from a People of Color vs white people analytic, finding that a Black/nonblack distinction is more accurate in defining the analytical scope and explanatory power antiblackness offers (Vargas, 2018). [2]See Hartman, 1997, p. 21 for her analysis of fungibility and fungibilities relationship to libidinal economy.

Furthermore, research has analyzed player experiences across sport and gender to delineate common coercive practices such as surveillance, threat of punishment, and precarity (Hatteberg, 2018; Hatton, 2020). Other research has analyzed how the structure placates white comfort and fragility and serves as a privilege access point for white youth to gain preferential treatment in admissions (Hextrum, 2018; 2021a; 2021b). Hextrum (2018; 2020a) directly implicated the ideal of amateurism as a form of symbolic violence and privileging mechanism for white prospective athletes, whereby they are able to convert their various forms of capital into athletic scholarships and thus protect white property interests through sport (Harris, 1993; Hextrum, 2018; 2021a). Furthermore, many analogies have been used to analyze and describe the structuring logics used by universities and the NCAA such as the plantation (Hawkins, 2010), indentured servitude (Nocera & Strauss, 2016), migrant labor (Hawkins, 1999), exploited worker (Hatton, 2020; McCormick & McCormick, 2006), brothel (Southall et al., 2011), cartel (Kahn, 2007; Koch, 1973), and company town (Southall & Weiler, 2014).

Within the body of research that analogizes the structure of college athletics to slavery, authors tend to foreground an analysis of the exploitation of Black men in football and basketball and thus prioritize a focus on *labor exploitation,* which may unintentionally obscure an analysis of the ways in which college athletics is imbued with antiblack logics that exceed the labor relation. Scholars of gendered antiblackness have emphasized an analysis of ontology, fungibility, and gratuitous violence as elements constitutive to antiblackness that are not rooted in a labor conflict, but rather the structure of humanity and sociability for which Black people have been excluded (Hartman, 1997; Vargas, 2018; Vargas & Jung, 2021; Wilderson, 2010). The focus on antiblackness is not meant to negate the ways in which white supremacy and racial-colonial violence affect all People of Color; rather, an interrogation of antiblackness provides a sharper analytic of the root of Black abjection and violence – one that is separate and distinct from white supremacy. As stated by Vargas and Jung (2021), it is a "difference in *kind* that is continually misrecognized as a difference in *degree*" (p. 8). As such, this paper suspends an analysis focused on labor exploitation and racism to highlight constitutive conditions of antiblackness and carcerality that often remain unexamined and/or obscured in analyses of college athletics.

Theoretical Frameworks: Antiblackness and Carcerality

Theorists of antiblackness analyze the enduring social and structural formations that continue to render the dehumanization of Black people, i.e., as nonhuman or antihuman, as essential toward the construction of humanity (Hartman, 1997; Vargas, 2018; Wilderson, 2010; 2021). I draw upon theories of antiblackness informed by Saidiya Hartman, Patrice Douglass, João Costa Vargas, Joy James, Frank Wilderson III, Jared Sexton, Orlando Patterson (1982), Sylvia Wynter, and Frantz Fanon (1952), alongside other critical theorists who have outlined specific distinctions within Black experiences and traced them to a fundamental antiblack antagonism. As explained by Vargas and Jung (2021), an analysis of antiblackness is distinct from racism:

> …while the world of racism is structured according to a White/nonwhite continuum of which Black people are a part (and thus, as nonwhite peoples, possessing fractions of humanity and social belonging), the world of antiblackness is structured according to a Black/nonblack continuum from which Black people are

> categorically excluded (and thus, unlike nonblack nonwhite peoples, possessing no fraction of humanity or social belonging) (p. 2).

This paradigmatic shift draws our attention to the distinct forms of violence and abjection that are unique to antiblackness. For example, Hartman's work (1996; 1997; 2007) demonstrated how the convergence of natal alienation, dishonor, gratuitous violence, and fungibility[2] are constitutive to the "social relations of slavery" (1996, p. 542). Following Hartman, Vargas posed that we analyze the "blueprint" or "underlying algorithm" of slavery as "a socially enforced theory of human relations" that cements antiblackness as a structuring logic of human sociability (Vargas, 2018, p. 35; Vargas & Jung, 2021) that has fungibility at the core of its antiblack schema (Hartman, 1997; Vargas, 2018; Wilderson III, 2010; 2021). Vargas (2018) argued:

> Following Hartman's reasoning, fungibility provides a more precise measure of contemporary Black experiences rooted in transhistorically imposed abjection through terror: Black subjugation is not explainable as solely a product of capitalist pragmatic logic; Black subjugation is as much about a libidinal economy—a regime of desires and abjections—shaping the ways in which the enslaved were at once dehumanized, transformed into discardable and interchangeable machines, and made into a medium for the expression of the subjectivity of the nonblack. (p. 12)

As Vargas emphasized, Hartman's analysis of fungibility exposes the affective dimensions of slavery – or the economy of enjoyment created through chattel slavery. In situating slavery as a *theory of social relations*, Hartman also posed whether the concept of the "human" (and subsequent notions of freedom, rights, and liberty) have been accurately transmuted to Black people. She stated, "As well, it leads us to question whether the rights of man and citizen are realizable or whether the appellation 'human' can be borne equally by all" (1997, p. 6). Other theorists of antiblackness have extended this analysis further. For example, Afropessimism, as "a lens of interpretation" and "outgrowth" of the work of Hartman and Spillers in particular (Wilderson III, 2021; Wilderson III & King, 2020, p. 61), centers ontology to interrogate the nature of being and critiques humanity as a parasitic formation that established a Black bodily foil for which nonblack – and most grotesquely white – humanity gained its coherence (Vargas & Jung, 2021; Wilderson III, 2010; 2021).

Wilderson III (re)outlined the analytical project of Afropessimism and clarified its theoretical similarities and departures from other radical theories, which are helpful for beginning to grasp the theoretical depth, explanatory power, and paradigm shift they offer. He explained that several theories share an understanding that violence forms unethical paradigms; however, when looking at the antagonist/ism each theory analyzes, one can see the departure and the alternative paradigm Afropessimism interrogates:

> If revolutionary feminism is an immanent critique of the family or the paradigm of kinship, if Marxism is an immanent critique of capitalism or the paradigm or political economy as a structure, then Afropessimism is an immanent critique of the Human or the paradigm of Humanity. (2021, p. 39)

[2]See Hartman, 1997, p. 21 for her analysis of fungibility and fungibilities relationship to libidinal economy.

The aforementioned theorists of antiblackness provide analyses that call into question the very notion of the *human* as an unethical formation (Hartman, 1997; Hartman & Wilderson III, 2003; Vargas, 2018; Vargas & Jung, 2021; Wilderson III, 2010; 2021).

Carcerality and the Carceral Regime

As Hartman and others have asserted, the social and structural dynamics of slavery have been and continue to be rigorously and thoroughly conserved through our structures and social relations, despite legislation and (neo)liberal notions of racial progress. Scholars have documented how captivity under slavery transitioned over time to other forms of surveillance, punishment, containment, and terror. To name a few iterations, the 13th amendment, the convict prison lease system, Black codes, Jim Crow laws, and residential segregation represent an antiblack carceral continuum – an evolving set of state strategies to contain, surveille, and terrorize Black communities (Browne, 2015; James, 1996; Richie, 1996; Rodríguez, 2021). Carceral regimes, and the antiblack logics they are founded on and proliferate, are prime vehicles through which this operates (Rodríguez, 2021; Vargas, 2018).

Dylan Rodríguez's conceptualization of the *prison regime* (2006) or *carceral regime* (2021) is central to understanding carcerality as an elaboration of antiblackness. His definition of the carceral regime and its conceptual reach magnifies the "meso-range" of practices and logics that mediate, inform, and deploy carceral logics and formations beyond the site of the prison itself (p. 41):

> Structures of human captivity and bodily punishment, though perhaps most spectacularly actualized at the locality of the jail or prison, necessarily elaborate into other, at times counterintuitive, sites of targeting: the school, the workplace, and the targeted neighborhood or community. (Rodríguez, 2006, p. 58)

As several theorists have emphasized, the logics of containment, control, and racialized punishment of the carceral regime is underwritten by an antiblack code, or what Vargas (2013) characterized as an *antiblack death drive*. Thus, antiblackness inflects the formation and management of other institutions such as schools, higher education, and medical systems according to the same logic that targets, dispossesses, criminalizes, and/or kills Black people (James, 1996; Roberts, 1999; Rodríguez, 2006; 2021; Sojoyner, 2016; Vargas, 2018). The prevailing logics of the sociality of slavery are preserved, institutionalized, re-narrated, and disguised as reform. As explained by Rodríguez (2021),

> The antiblack chattel relation forms as it facilitates the condition of modernity as well as modern (state) institutionality. This formation of power—as paradigm, method, and infrastructural template—structures the very coherence and preconceptual premises of modern institutions and bureaucratic structures—including notions of order, administrative/labor hierarchy, disciplinarity/compliance, stability, and normative white civil subjectivity. (2021, p. 194)

Furthermore, Joy James' (1996) analysis of state violence illustrates how the state codified the concept of the *criminal* in Black people. James asserted that "Rather than the erasure of bodily

torture for a carceral of self-policing citizens, as Foucault (1975) maintains, punitive torture in the United States became inscribed on the black body," while bodies that conform to whiteness are granted autonomy to self-police, or at most be policed without force (p. 26). Thus, even though carcerality cannot be reduced to antiblackness, antiblackness is a foundational logic and precondition of carcerality (Vargas, 2018).

For the purposes of this paper, I present a broad overview of findings related to 20 participants' experiences with various spheres of healthcare in their athletic departments to illustrate the undergirding antiblack logic that dictated who received care, whose pain was legitimized versus neglected, and whose bodies were routinely deemed fungible (see Appendix A for demographic information). To read the participants' full narratives and the study's findings, please reference Grummert (2021).

Health Experiences

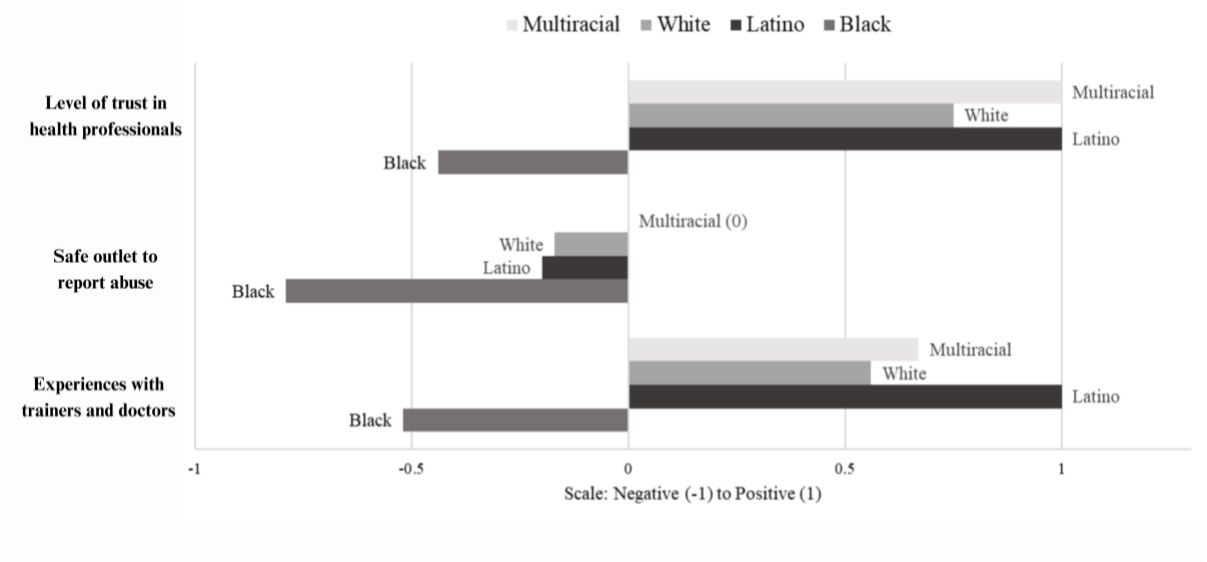
Experiences with Athletic Trainers

Participants described how they endured a range of mental and physical health problems while playing college sport. I asked participants about their experiences with coaches, athletic trainers, and team doctors regarding their mental and physical health. Former players shared problems stemming from abusive coaches, under-trained and/or negligent trainers and doctors, and a general environment that discouraged tending to mental and physical health. However, there was a clear distinction between Black and nonblack players regarding the severity and nature of abuse and injuries.

All but two participants (90%) suffered an injury while competing, but the extent to which their pain and injury were handled with attention and care varied by race. When I asked each participant to describe their experiences with athletic trainers, nonblack participants were overwhelmingly positive, citing how they felt cared for. Figure 1 illustrates the overall sentiment from participants revolving around three topical areas: the level of trust they had in their team doctors, whether or not they felt there was a safe outlet to report abuse related to health and wellbeing, and their overall experiences with team trainers. Black participants consistently reported the lowest levels of trust in team doctors, the most negative experiences with team trainers, as well as the lowest level of confidence there was a safe outlet to report abuse.

Figure 1

Average Quality of Health-Related Experiences by Race



Note: Participants self-identified their race; two participants identified as multiracial (Toby and Iliza) and are therefore reflected as such in Figure 1.

The narratives from participants highlighted this dichotomy further. When I asked each participant if they trusted team doctors, the responses from Black participants were in stark contrast to nonblack participants. Black participants overwhelming responded with a negative such as "no," "hell no," "not at all," "no, clearly no," and "I can't trust nobody," whereas nonblack participants overwhelmingly answered with an affirmative "yes," "absolutely," "definitely," "yeah, for sure," and "wholeheartedly." Some nonblack participants even expanded, unprompted, about how much they felt cared for and in trusted hands with medical staff.

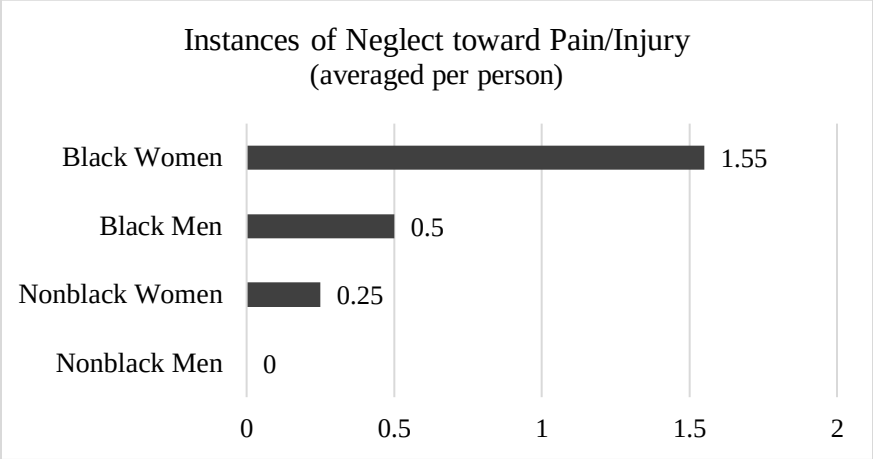
For example, Diego, a Latino soccer player, said he remembered having a reflective moment where he realized "All right, he [the athletic trainer] really cares about me." Other nonblack participants shared similar sentiments such as Thiago who stated "They treated me with respect, they cared about me, they were always there for me taking care of me;" Wayne, who reported he "had really good trainers, like at both schools;" and Jennie, who "trusted my [her] ATs wholeheartedly." Two participants – Iliza, a Latina and White track and field athlete and Whitney, a White swimmer – explicitly stated how they felt respected as humans and had bodily autonomy: Whitney felt treated like a "holistic human being," and Iliza felt her body was more respected during her time *in* college sport versus after. In nonblack participants' narratives of being injured or in pain, there was a general theme of trainers being cautious and ensuring players – particularly nonblack men – were healthy and cared for.

Nonblack participants' positive experiences were juxtaposed with Black participants' overwhelmingly negative experiences, the majority of whom described how they were often not treated at all and/or mistreated. There were three exceptions in Chiney, Toby, and Tori's experiences. Tori stated that she had a world-renowned Olympic trainer and thus received exceptional care; Toby did not suffer any significant injuries; and Chiney felt she could trust her athletic trainer, but acknowledged that trusting trainers as a Black woman was a rare occurrence. Black women, in particular, described the negligence they routinely faced from coaches and trainers (See Figure 2). Five out of nine Black women offered numerous stories of neglect from

athletic trainers, how coaches attempted to convince them that they were not hurt, and in some cases how they suffered worse health problems due to ongoing neglect. This was a shared experience among several Black women participants; within Jessica, Janelle, and Ari's accounts of trying to get care, the women explicitly stated that trainers did not believe they were in pain – a pattern of dismissal that Jessica and Janelle said they had faced since high school. Notably, nonblack men reported zero instances of neglect from athletic trainers and doctors.

Figure 2

Average Instances of Neglect by Race and Gender



Lastly, there were no options for recourse to address the individual and structural harm participants were subjected to. I asked each participant if they felt there was a safe option for reporting such abuses, whether micro or macro, and most participants said no. Importantly, the depth and assuredness of answers varied by race and gender, as they did with the amount of trust participants had in medical doctors. Most Black women answered with a definitive "no," and the answer often came after they had already detailed experiences of being harmed and attempted to ameliorate the harm or find redress to no avail. Of the few women who did not answer with a definitive "no," they said they could think of somewhere or someone to report to, but doubted anything would be addressed. For instance, Chiney provided an example of the volleyball team reporting their coach to administration but that "it wasn't taken seriously" and she felt that "it was kind of shut down."

Women, and Black women in particular, had a more intimate awareness of their vulnerability to harm and the limited options for recourse. The culmination of neglect was felt in and on players' bodies. Negligence toward Black participants' bodies and health was demonstrated by coaches overworking them, not providing sufficient income or resources for nutritious food, trainers and doctors denying their pain, and coaches using increased physical activity as punishment for advocating for better wellness practices. Furthermore, coaches' power to revoke one's scholarship at will further incentivized and coerced players into playing while injured, which had lasting ramifications on their health and exemplified Black players' fungibility.

Discussion

The sport-state partnership of college athletics functions in three overarching, related ways that have been previously documented: (a) maintaining racial and class reproduction and stratification by privileging white access to higher education through athletics (Hextrum, 2018; 2021a; 2021b); (b) reinforcing white supremacist, eugenicist notions of white superiority and Black inferiority and fungibility (Haslerig et al., 2020; Hextrum, 2021a); and (c) creating a network of parasitic economies that profit off players' labor, images, and likeness through racism and capitalism (Gayles et al., 2018; Hawkins, 2010; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Staurowsky, 2007). The research presented here underscores how antiblackness and carcerality are logics that are enmeshed, and perhaps driving forces, in the previously documented functions.

Every participant was subjected to carceral conditions across Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), and Division I (no football) institutions including participants who competed in track and field, cross country, men's and women's basketball, men's soccer, football, softball, and volleyball. By centering antiblackness, findings demonstrated how college athletics preserves the sociality of slavery, as seen through an analysis of health outcomes in relation to fungibility. The specificity of antiblackness was evidenced by Black participants' unique experiences of: (a) athletic trainers' and doctors' negligence toward their bodies and emotional wellbeing; (b) being treated as fungible and discardable; and (c) having their pain dismissed and/or denied. Antiblackness was also evidenced in the larger collection of findings from this study that described participant experiences of the denial of their bodily autonomy and rights and all-encompassing surveillance, as well as the policing of political thought, working under threat of punishment, and mandating that athletes be deferential to authority (Grummert, 2021).

The logic of antiblackness, specifically fungibility, was perhaps most glaring when Black participants shared their experiences with athletic trainers, coaches, and doctors. As evidenced by participant stories, the antiblack structuring logic of college athletics enabled and produced harm and abuse toward Black players as their injuries and pain were consistently neglected or denied. Importantly, Black women were uniquely vulnerable to state violence as administered through college athletics – psychologically, emotionally, and physically. More than half of the Black women participants in this study referenced their pain and injuries being treated as an afterthought or not treated at all. These findings complement other studies on antiblackness in college athletics broadly (Comeaux et al., 2022; Comeaux & Grummert, 2020), the ways that media promote Black players' dehumanization and perceived imperviousness to pain through the production of college football broadcasts (Haslerig et al., 2019; 2020), as well as studies that document how Black women's pain is uniquely denied (Roberts, 1999; Sacks, 2019). Perhaps not surprisingly, trainers' and doctors' refusal to recognize Black players' pain is reflective of the larger medical community's denial of Black pain and humanity in the U.S. more broadly (Hoffman et al., 2016), and other literature that details antiblackness as a planetary phenomenon (Douglass, 2018; James, 1999; 2021; Vargas, 2018; 2021; Wun, 2016).

Implications and Conclusion

As we can glean from research at the nexus of prison and schooling (Sojoyner, 2013; 2016; Wun, 2016; 2017; 2018a; 2018b), there may be more explanatory power when situating college athletics in relation to state-sanctioned attempts to enclose and police Black communities and control dissent rather than analyses of racist labor exploitation alone. This requires a more thorough analysis of the carceral processes that structure contemporary college athletics and how those processes are informed by and extend antiblackness as a logic of social and institutional life. Additionally, reform efforts should be met with skepticism. Scholars of the prison regime have continued to document how carceral systems thrive on reform (Gilmore, 2007; Rodríguez, 2017; 2021). Reforms often present a narrow set of solutions that operate within the current paradigm, such as diversifying athletic departments or allowing college players more access to economic opportunities, i.e., more rights to their name, image, and likeness. As Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) bills increasingly garner support from state legislators and backlash from university presidents, we see an orchestrated dance between higher education and the state that preserves the current structure. Reform efforts need to question if proposed changes will alter the material conditions of students, and the antiblack sociality of college sport more generally.

Furthermore, this study analyzed how economic exploitation is insufficient for describing participant experiences as they were shaped by university policies and practices. Such a focus serves to obscure Black women's experiences in particular. There must be increased attention and research that attends to how gendered antiblackness is shaping college athletics as well as reform efforts. Experiences of antiblackness are deployed and mediated in gendered ways, but the fundamental organizing logic behind them remains (Vargas, 2018). Participants were not being strategically funneled into sport, isolated and contained, surveilled, and rendered fungible because they played football or basketball, but rather because they were Black. The experiences of players in sports outside of men's basketball and football, and experiences of Black women in particular, may be glossed over in part due to the inclination to focus purely on economic exploitation. These findings suggest that it would be more appropriate to center Black women's experiences in discussions and advocacy related to health and wellbeing. Doing so may prevent the exclusive focus on men, and therefore *revenue-generating* sports, as well as reductive narratives that come to the fore when women's players receive attention, which are often white-washed and solely focused on resource discrepancies compared to men's sports.

Lastly, these experiences of neglect were neither exclusive to DI FBS institutions nor football or basketball players. Rather, it was a shared, relational experience that proliferated the very foundation of the system and thus was reflected in Black players' narratives across sports and gender. As such, this research should push researchers and organizers to contend with how antiblackness and carcerality are structuring logics that are being expanded and preserved through sport as well as various reform efforts aimed at college athletics. In the macro sense, we can see how the NCAA, as a nonprofit organization inextricably tied to the state (Hextrum, 2021a), is used to manage and control dissent and complement other state projects of enclosure. Sport, when operationalized this way, takes on the state's carceral logic, necessarily making the organization of these leagues follow an antiblack blueprint of containment, control, surveillance, bodily harm, and punishment.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym and Demographics

Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Sport	Division	Athlete-Status
Aaliyah	Black	Woman	Track	FBS	Current
Aneesa	Black	Woman	Soccer	NF	Former
Ari	Black	Woman	Basketball	NF	Former
Chiney	Black	Woman	Volleyball & Track	NF	Former
Diego	Latino	Man	Soccer	NF	Former
Dom*	Latino	Man	Soccer	NF	Former
Elena*	white	Woman	Basketball	NF	Former
Iliza*	Multiracial (Latina, white)	Woman	Track	FBS & NF	Former
Janelle	Black/West Indian	Woman	Cross country	NF	Former (quit sport)
Jenny	white	Woman	Softball	FCS	Former
Jessica	Black	Woman	Basketball	NF	Former
Kyle*	white	Man	Football	FBS	Former
Nate*	Black	Man	Football	FBS & FCS	Former
Skylar	Black	Woman	Track and Field	FBS	Former (quit sport)
Sydney*	Black	Woman	Soccer	NF & FCS	Former
Thiago	Latino	Man	Soccer	NF	Former (quit sport)
Toby	Multiracial (Hispanic, African American)	Man	Basketball	NF	Current
Tori	Black	Woman	Soccer	NF	Former
Wayne*	Latino	Man	Soccer	NF	Former
Whitney	white	Woman	Swimming	FCS	Former

* Participant transferred to a different university

FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision); FCS (Football Championship Subdivision); NF (Division I no football)

An Examination of the Assimilative and Anti-Immigrant Policies, Practices, and Cultures that Harm International College Athletes in the United States

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Abstract: International college athletes (ICAs) are distinct from other international students because of the demands of elite intercollegiate athletic participation. Institutional practices inaccurately position ICAs as a homogenous group with similar needs and frequently utilize assimilation methods when providing support. We engage with integration and assimilation as theoretical frameworks to reveal how these approaches disrupt ICA's college experiences. In reviewing existing literature, we consider how contemporary National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) policies, higher education institution (HEI) practices, and athletic department cultures impose assimilation on ICAs while extracting their athletic talents. We found that assimilation is normalized in the NCAA's amateur rules, in HEIs and their academic policies and practices, and in athletic departments. Throughout the article, we discuss how assimilation harms ICA's athletic and academic achievement. We conclude with suggestions for the NCAA and its member institutions to adopt integrative policies and practices.

Keywords: International college athletes (ICAs), integration, assimilation, whiteness, school/sport conflicts

An Examination of the Assimilative and Anti-Immigrant Policies, Practices, and Cultures that Harm International College Athletes

International college athletes (ICAs)[1] are a unique student population in United States (U.S.) higher education institutions (HEIs). Along with attending school full-time, ICAs compete in varsity sports programs (Hong, 2018). Oftentimes, ICAs cannot simultaneously play elite sports and attend college in their home countries (Bale, 1991; Popp et al., 2009). ICAs are also attracted to U.S. HEIs' top-notch athletic facilities, coaching standards, sports medicine, and scholarship opportunities (Bale, 1987; Hong, 2018). NCAA sports lure ICAs to leave their families, cultures, and home countries to pursue a holistic collegiate experience in the U.S. (Pierce et al., 2012).

From 1980 to 2017, international students at HEIs in the U.S. have tripled – growing from 305,000 to over a million (Bound et al., 2021). International student enrollment has remained

[1] Following Sack and Staurowsky (1998), we use the term "college athlete" rather than "student-athlete" because the NCAA invented and enforces the usage of the latter term to limit athlete compensation.

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above one million and is predicted to increase – even amid the global COVID-19 pandemic (Bound et al., 2021). ICA enrollment has outpaced international student enrollment. In 1999, only 3,515 ICAs competed for NCAA Division I institutions, i.e., the most competitive college sport division. By 2016, there were 19,500 ICAs across DI institutions (NCAA, 2021a). Today, over 25,000 ICAs make up 13% of the entire college athlete population and compete at NCAA member institutions (NCAA, 2021a). Despite growing ICA enrollment, few researchers study ICAs. The few existing studies explore ICAs' academic and athletic challenges and unique mental health issues arising from culture shock, language barriers, and homesickness (Lee & Opio, 2011; Pericak et al., 2023; Popp et al., 2009; Sato & Hodge, 2009; Sato et al., 2018; Sethi et al., 2022; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Research indicates that ICAs face distinct institutional challenges compared to domestic college athletes and non-athlete international students.

Researchers and practitioners often present ICAs as a monolithic group – assuming *all* ICAs experience the *same* struggles within U.S. HEIs. As a result, studies rarely examine the diversity *within* ICAs[2]. By erasing in-group differences, researchers misrecognize the range of identities, cultures, and origin countries within ICAs. Researchers also evade the institutional assimilative and discriminatory practices ICAs face when navigating campus life. Assimilation is unidimensional and compels underrepresented groups to forgo their identity to adapt to the host culture (Kramer, 2009; Tierney, 1992). Institutional assimilative processes and expectations include requiring ICAs to speak English, eat American food, and adapt to American teaching styles – all of which may conflict with and erase ICAs' cultural and social identities (Lee & Rice, 2007). Researchers have yet to study how the linguistically, racially, ethnically, culturally, and nationally diverse ICA population experiences these assimilative practices.

This conceptual piece explores existing studies on domestic college athletes, international students, and ICAs to discuss the multifaceted and diverse challenges ICAs face when encountering assimilation. We employ assimilation and integration frameworks (Gordon, 1964; Klarenbeek, 2021; Tierney, 1992; Yao, 2015) to discuss ICAs' transitional and on-campus experiences. We also incorporate unique data from the NCAA's Office of Research to examine the ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity among ICAs.[3] In doing so, we identify how athletic departments expect unidimensional behavioral changes and force ICAs to conform to U.S. culture. Lastly, we suggest how U.S. HEIs can adopt integrative policies and practices to enhance ICA's mental health, sense of belonging, and connection to their home countries.

Frameworks: Assimilation and Integration

Assimilation stems from the Latin word *simulare* or "to make similar." It assumes one person or group must change in response to another's expectations (Kramer, 2009). Assimilation reflects power relationships as the incoming group must accept the existing group's culture (Gordon, 1964). During assimilation, the incoming group – often underrepresented in national demographics – relinquishes their cultural and linguistic practices and submerges into the host nation's norms (Tierney, 1992; Yao, 2015). Assimilation requires no change or accommodation

[2] Jenny Lee's research (e.g., Lee, 2007; Lee & Opio, 2011), discussed in forthcoming sections, offers a notable exception to this trend.

[3] The NCAA does not collect data on ICAs by race. We use country of origin to discuss potential racial, cultural, and ethnic differences among ICAs.

by the dominant group and "imposes ethnocentric and patronizing demands on minority peoples struggling to retain their cultural and ethnic integrity" (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 827). Through assimilation, underrepresented groups can lose their identity, language, and cultural affiliation (Alba & Nee, 1997). The goal of assimilation is to blend "formerly distinguishable ethnocultural groups…into one indistinguishable group" (Rumbaut, 2015, p. 82).

Furthermore, assimilation is ideological or reflects an ideal and norm that is often out of reach for underrepresented groups. American assimilation functions as an ideal and justification for "state-imposed policies aimed at the eradication of minority cultures" (Rumbaut, 2015, p. 82). Dominant groups uphold arbitrary standards of when and how someone can assimilate, often blaming immigrants for their inability to reach these ever-shifting standards (Tierney, 1992). Oftentimes, minority groups can achieve benchmarks of assimilation and yet remain subordinated and "othered" or "regarded as in some sense a stranger, a representative of an alien race" (Rumbaut, 2015, p. 83). Such perceived failures to assimilate say more about the host country, the privileged group, and the HEI than about the minority groups (Tierney, 1992).

As discussed throughout this article, U.S. anti-immigrant rhetoric, discrimination, and policies espouse assimilation to a white, Western norm that most immigrants can never reach due to their ethnic, racial, cultural, and national affiliations. Higher education extends anti-immigrant discrimination in school-specific contexts by recruiting international students to improve their institutional reputations yet withholds these students the proper support to receive an adequate education (Lee, 2017). Similarly, the NCAA and HEIs recruit ICAs for their athletic capital, economic gain, and global reputation (Bale, 1991). Many ICAs can never assimilate (nor desire to) and, as a result, are targeted for their language, ethnic, cultural, or national differences (Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007).

In contrast, integration is a mutual adjustment between the incoming group and the host nation (Klarenbeek, 2021). Integration asks both the immigrant and the host to mutually adapt (Klarenbeek, 2021). While these terms are often used interchangeably and with "great imprecision" (Hutnik, 1986, p. 151), assimilation requires no change by the dominant group, whereas integration expects the dominant group to learn from and accommodate the minority group (Hutnik, 1986). Integration models strive for cultural synergy to ensure the minority group feels comfortable in an unfamiliar environment (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Olmedo, 1979). Therefore, integrative policies are considered "a dynamic process that retains the connotation of individuality" and promote cultural harmony and diversity among communities (Lalami, 2017, para 2).

While the integration of immigrants should be a mutual effort, in practice, integration is asymmetrical due to greater levels of adjustments required by those arriving in a new country (Rumbaut, 2015). Such asymmetries should lead host nations to take on greater responsibility to support immigrants, including proactive policies that "promote equality between the immigrants and the existing population" (Rumbaut, 2015, p. 29) and "promote the naturalization of immigrants and thus their full legal integration" (Carens, 2005, p. 40). Yet the U.S. extends asymmetries across immigrant and native groups by upholding restrictive and exclusionary immigration policies and withholding proper support systems to integrate. Integrative practices begin with the receiving society's "respect[ing] the cultural identities and commitments that immigrants want to maintain"

(Carens, 2005, p. 46). This requires "abolish[ing] even the symbolic opposition to dual citizenship" (Carens, 2005, p. 40). Next, host nations must adopt policies that appreciate the differences and similarities between individuals and nations and enhance the experience of immigrants like ICAs to improve educational, athletic, and civic outcomes in the U.S.

U.S. Nationalism, Assimilation, and Sport

U.S. nation-building policies and nationalistic ideologies historically and presently embrace assimilation (Gardner, 2009; King, 2000; Skiba, 2012). Nation-building grants each state the power to define a nation's origin story, citizenship criteria, and features that unite one nation against others (Gems, 2000). While the U.S.'s national origin story often (falsely) positions itself as a pluralistic, meritocratic, and diverse nation, the country was founded upon removing property and personhood rights from indigenous and African peoples, women, and non-property-owning white men (King, 2000; Mills, 2003). The late 19th century saw increasing immigration from Asia and Eastern and Southern Europe to the U.S. (King, 2000). Such changes evoked a nativist and eugenicist movement, culminating in the first race-based immigration restrictions (Gardner, 2009; Skiba, 2012). These policies favored immigrants from English-speaking, northern European countries, drastically reshaping the eventual U.S. demographics (King, 2000).

Sport emerged in the late 19th century as a potent vehicle for nationalism and assimilation (Gems, 2000). The Playground Movement – a group of educational reformers advocating for the incorporation of physical education and interscholastic sports into schools – argued that athletics were more effective than academic curricula in unifying a fractured American populous into white, Protestant, and capitalist values (Crawford, 2008; Gems, 2000; Miracle & Rees, 1994). Values like individualism, victory, success, and upward mobility were cultivated as inherent to sport and whiteness/Protestantism/capitalism (Crawford, 2008; Miracle & Rees, 1994). Colleges soon became the domain of spectacle sports, transmitting assimilationist and nationalistic ideologies on a larger scale (Gems, 2000; Miracle & Rees, 1994). Spectacle sports like football drew large crowds and promised to bring success and prestige to the school and community (Bale, 1991). Such events opened sport up to non-college-going Americans, offering them a chance to participate in collegiate life (Oriard, 2005).

College football's 20th century rise solidified U.S. nationalism and enabled global expansion. The "symbols, rituals, and meanings inherent in the game resulted in a clear definition of the U.S. as an aggressive commercial, patriarchal culture ready to promote its ideals on the world stage" (Gems, 2000, p. 7). During the Cold War, college sports were vital to producing and disseminating an *American way of life* domestically and abroad to combat communism (Crawford, 2008). Sporting events united and displayed an amalgam of cultural ideas, such as freedom, capitalism, and individualism, that were amplified through university marketing efforts, government propaganda, and consumerism (Crawford, 2008).

College sports remain potent engines for nationalism in the 21st century. College sporting events ritualized the national anthem and embraced military symbolism after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001 (Ternes, 2016). Such rituals foster community and help groups recover and unite during times of strife (Butterworth, 2008). But they also cultivate attitudes of American exceptionalism (Allison, 2000) and imbue pro-American values in the rituals associated with sporting events

(Knoester & Davis, 2021). For instance, Ternes (2016) found the rise of military symbols in college sports post-9/11 "reinvigorated the primacy of white masculinity as the truest form of patriotism and cast all those outside of the traditional hegemony as potential threats to American life" (p. 279). Importantly, not all athletes who perform the rituals of nationalism neatly align with the hegemonic definition of American identity, i.e., white, cis-male, heterosexual. Yet their athletic performance is often packaged and consumed in ways that attempt to minimize these contradictions and amplify nationalistic sentiment (Knoester & Davis, 2021; Ternes, 2016).

Colleges have long recruited ICAs to boost their programs and telegraph nationalism (Bale, 1991). Oftentimes, colleges resolve the tension of ICAs as "foreign" athletes promoting American universities by enforcing assimilation. ICAs' presence in American universities emerged on a large scale following World War II (Bale, 1991). The mid-20th century saw a rise in globalism which expanded sport markets and talent pipelines (Maguire, 2004; Thibault, 2009). Simultaneously, the NCAA loosened its amateurism and eligibility policies permitting recruitment and athletic scholarships (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Combined, these changes permitted colleges to look beyond their local communities for top talent. Low-ranked universities recruited internationally to boost their programs, especially in sports like golf, tennis, and track & field (Bale, 1991). Such practices increased in the 21st century and expanded into revenue-generating sports like football and basketball (Associated Press, 2020; Auerbach, 2014). Bale (1991) deemed this phenomenon a *brawn drain* in which developed nations (like the U.S.) steal talent from lesser-developed nations, exacerbating global inequalities. Bale (1991) also noted that the brawn drain utilizes assimilationist practices by requiring ICAs to adopt American education, social, and cultural norms, and by favoring athletes from predominately white nations.

In reviewing existing literature, we found little evidence of HEIs embracing integrationist policies and practices when recruiting and supporting ICAs. In the remainder of the article, we consider how contemporary NCAA policies, HEI practices, and athletic department cultures impose assimilation on ICAs while extracting their athletic talents. We found that assimilation is normalized in NCAA's amateur rules, in HEIs and their academic policies and practices, and in athletic departments. We discuss how assimilation harms ICA's athletic and academic achievement. We conclude with suggestions for the NCAA and its member institutions to adopt integrative policies and practices.

Minorities in U.S. Higher Education: ICAs in College Sports

Tracing the existence of assimilative policies and practices requires first, establishing the dominant group and its corresponding cultures, norms, and values. Next, researchers identify the group subjected to assimilation. As previously discussed, the U.S. and its HEIs corresponding sporting organizations institute whiteness, masculinity, and capitalism as their normed subject positions that value competition, hierarchy, and winning. By virtue of their population size and international status, ICAs are a small proportion of students in HEIs. ICAs make up 13% of the total college athletes at DI and DII schools (NCAA, 2021a).[4] Yet numerical underrepresentation alone does not subject a group to assimilation. Instead, ICA's ethnic, national, racial, and linguistic diversity position them as "foreigners" occupying a lesser status and subject to discriminatory

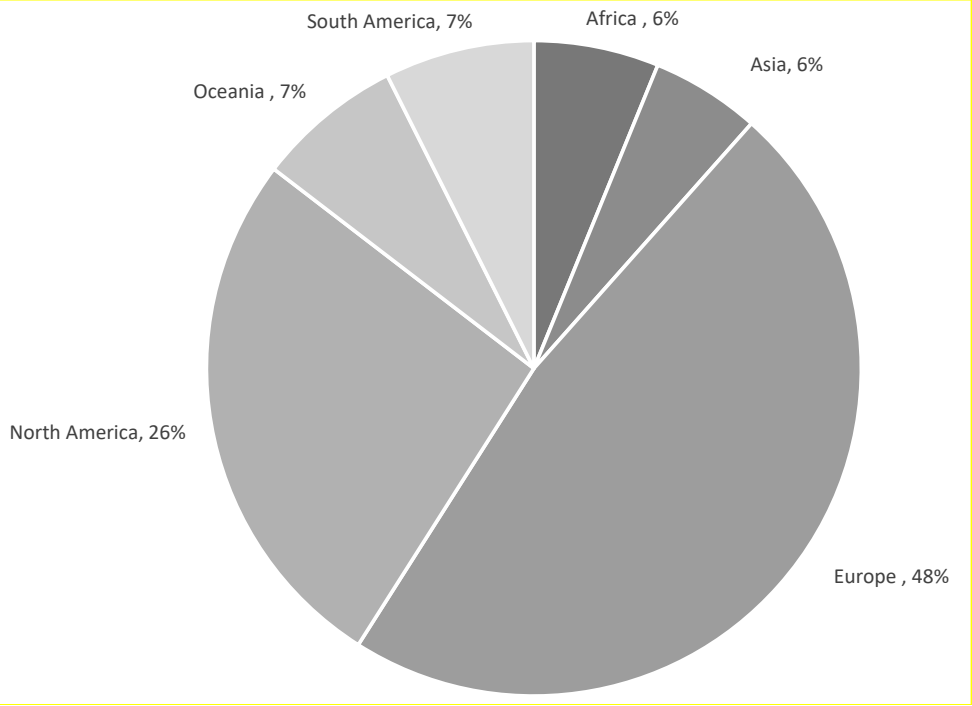
[4] The NCAA does not collect data on DIII ICAs since their applications do not go through the NCAA eligibility center.

treatment (Lee & Rice, 2007). The lack of public data and data collection methods obscures the composition of the ICA population. The NCAA labels all ICAs as "non-resident aliens" and does not disaggregate by race and/or national origin. This data collection strategy communicates that ICAs are a monolithic group and that their race and ethnicity are irrelevant. As a result, researchers extrapolate racial identity through country demographics – an imperfect strategy. Here, we review available NCAA (2021a) data on ICAs to determine trends in country of origin.

Nearly 75% of ICAs are from North America or Europe (see Figure 1). Although representing 85% of the world's population (Worldometer, 2021), ICAs from Asian, South American, Oceanic, and African countries comprise only 26% of ICAs (see Figure 1). Within continents, certain countries are overrepresented. Only 10 countries represent 56% of all ICAs, with the majority, i.e., one in five, from Canada (see Figure 2).

Figure 1

Percentage of ICAs based on continent of origin



ICAs from English-speaking countries consist of 40% of the entire ICA population but continue to be overrepresented. However, those from regions where English is not commonly spoken (Asia, South America, and Africa) are vastly underrepresented even though they make up 60% of the ICA population present at NCAA member institutions (see Figure 3). ICAs from underrepresented countries likely face unique challenges that need support and accommodation.

Figure 2

Top 10 countries' college athlete representation at NCAA member institutions

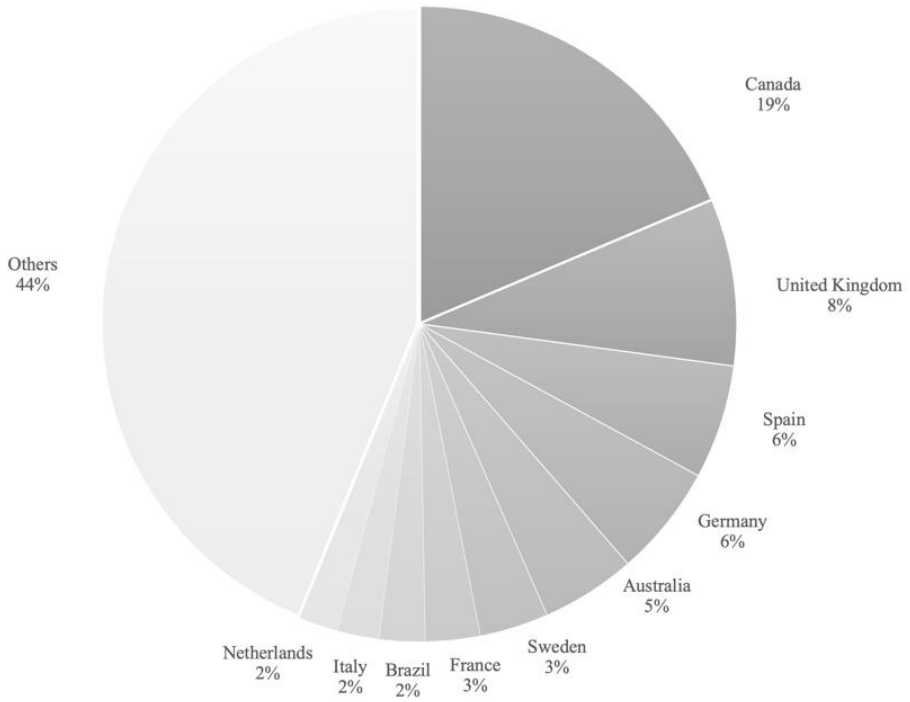
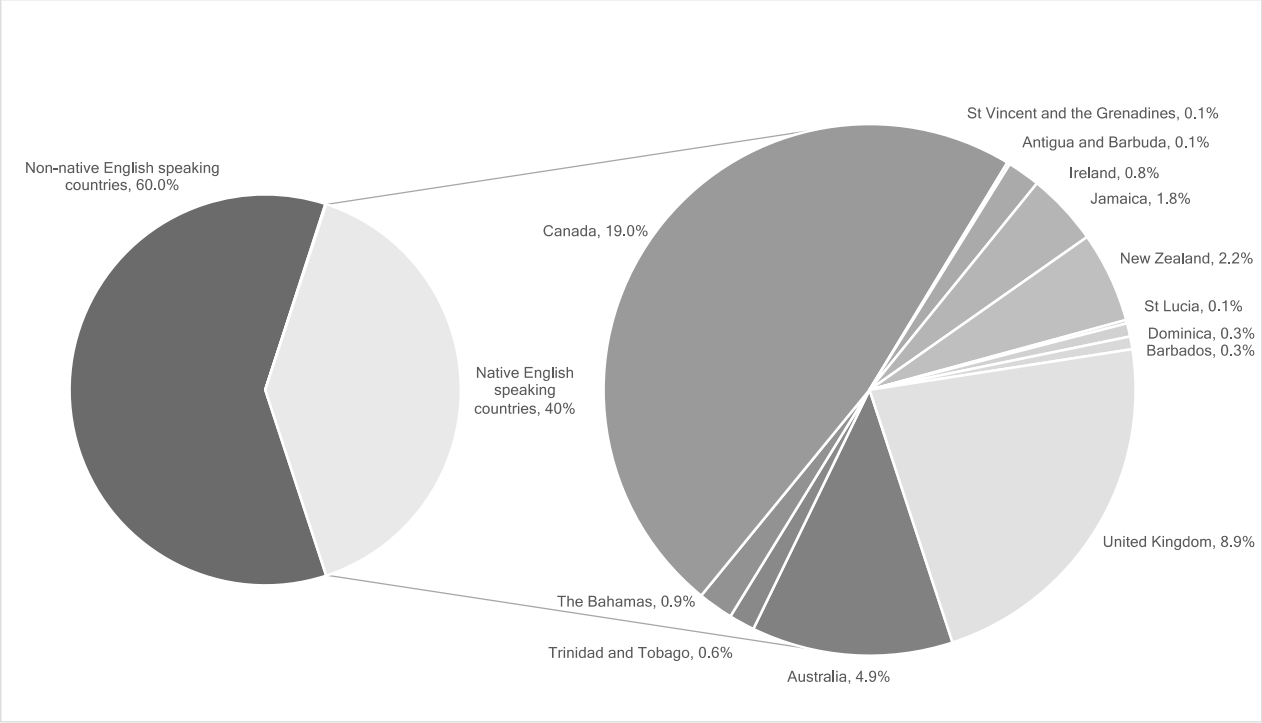


Figure 3

Percentage of native English-speaking countries and breakdown of countries

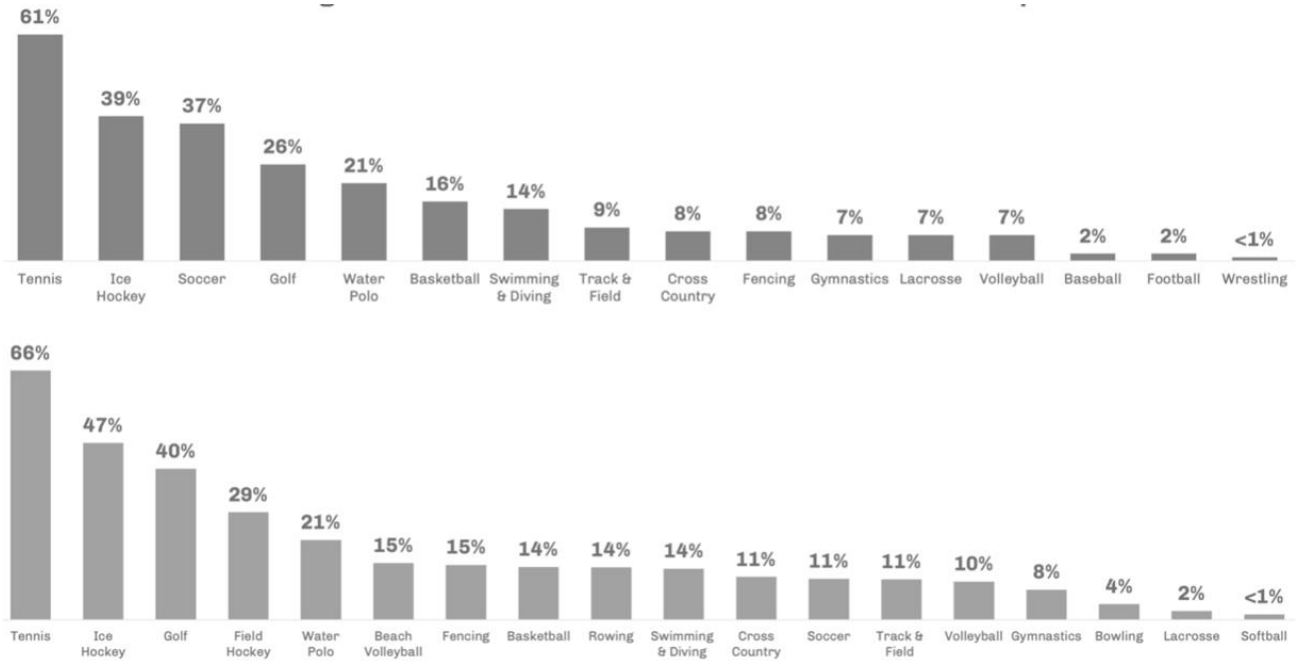


While ICAs represent only 13% of the entire college athlete population within the NCAA, global sports like tennis, soccer, and skiing have large ICA enrollments (see Figure 4). For example, over

60% of DI men's and women's tennis players are ICAs. This shows how a relatively small population of ICAs compromises the majority of participants in certain sports.

Figure 4

NCAA DI men (top) and women (bottom) sports with the highest percent of ICA population



The overrepresentation of European and Canadian athletes suggests that most ICAs are white. It also suggests that athletic recruitment practices may reflect and amplify long-standing U.S. immigration practices that favor *assimilable* immigrants, or those from white-dominant, English-speaking nations. As we discuss later in the paper, white ICAs experience assimilation differently than those identifying – or who upon their arrival are positioned in the U.S. racial context – as Athletes of Color. ICAs must quickly adapt to a U.S. sports culture that centers on white, masculine norms, requiring People of Color and/or women to assimilate into white supremacist and patriarchal cultures (Hextrum, 2020a; 2021a; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). As a result, not all U.S. citizens share equal benefits and privileges while competing in intercollegiate athletics (Hextrum & Sethi, 2021). Domestic Black athletes are stereotyped as athletically superior and academically inferior to their white peers (Fountain & Finley, 2009; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004). They also face racial exploitation and discrimination (Beamon, 2014; Coakley, 2015; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Researchers find that academic support units hold lower academic and career expectations for Black college athletes, and, as a result, more often cluster them into easier classes and majors (Beamon, 2014; Fountain & Finley, 2009).

Domestic women athletes also face unique challenges as they are assimilated into a male model of athletics (Hextrum & Sethi, 2021). Women athletes are more often subjected to beauty and appearance standards that align with whiteness and femininity while playing sport (Hanson, 2012). Women and their fans are also assimilated into believing that women are athletically inferior to men (Hanson, 2012). Women of Color are underrepresented and under-studied in

intercollegiate athletics. The limited research has found Women of Color experience sexism and racism within and outside of athletic settings that cause emotional and psychological stresses not experienced by their white peers (Hall, 2001). The dearth of role models for Women of Color Athletes further decreases their chances of aspiring toward professional roles in sport (Hall, 2001; Person et al., 2001). Many ICAs of Color, those who identify as women, and those who do not conform to the gender binary may be unaware of the specificities of American racism and sexism. How ICAs experience and adjust to U.S. power structures remains under-researched. Understanding how the intersections of racism, sexism, and nationalism impact ICAs is a needed first step to providing proper support for this student group.

Amateurism as Assimilation

NCAA Regulations

The unique U.S. intercollegiate athletics model attracts athletes from all over the world whose higher education systems do not host elite sports programs (Kaburakis, 2007). To be eligible to compete for U.S. HEIs, elite athletes forgo any professional affiliations or opportunities to reach NCAA amateurism standards (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Amateurism itself reflects assimilation as a unidirectional form of adjustment in which incoming athletes must abide by all NCAA regulations with no room for negotiation or adaption by the host institution. While the NCAA has begun to modify amateur regulations – permitting *most* college athletes to receive some compensation for their name, images, and likeness (NIL) – the original amateur ideal, a white gentleman who plays sport for pleasure, not for profit, remains institutionalized (Hextrum, 2021a).

The NCAA requires complete adoption and obedience to this norm, permitting athletes little freedom to negotiate or digress from the regulations (Hextrum, 2021a; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). For instance, amateur regulations limit how much money college athletes can receive to pay for travel between their homes and campus (NCAA, 2021c). If athletes receive money beyond these limits, they face NCAA sanctions and punishments, including losing their athletic eligibility. This rule assumes athletes have the time and money to travel home during holidays and off-seasons, thus harming lower-income athletes and ICAs who live far from campus.

The NCAA also promotes assimilation more tacitly, as all their regulations and guidelines are published and disseminated in English. To certify their eligibility, ICAs must read, review, and sign materials that may not be in their native language. Upon arriving at athletic departments, ICAs must also complete all the required compliance and admissions paperwork, which is also in English only. ICAs are rarely provided with a translator or translation service to help them understand the documents they must sign. ICAs also have *additional* paperwork – immigration and visa documentation – not required of domestic athletes that is English-only. Monolingualism is assimilationist, requiring those from non-English speaking countries to adapt to America's English-centric norms.

The NCAA amateurism policy also separates ICAs from other international students. Two agencies, Designated School Officials (DSOs) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), monitor international students' compliance with visa laws. These agencies monitor over a million international students in the U.S. and cannot scrutinize all actions (Sethi et al., 2022). In

contrast, ICAs are surveilled by another bureaucracy – the NCAA – which requires athletes to document any forms of employment or earnings and monitor their engagement with fans, donors, and stakeholders (NCAA, 2021c).

Furthermore, ICAs are excluded from recent changes to NIL (Newell & Sethi, 2023; Sethi et al., 2022). ICAs receive F1 student visas, a status that prohibits F1 visa holders from earning any form of active income while studying in the U.S. (Sethi et al., 2022). F1 visa holders can work on campus for up to 20 hours a week during the academic year but cannot work off campus or engage in additional employment opportunities that provide financial compensation (USCIS, 2020). In contrast, domestic athletes are free to work in the U.S. and face no federal employment restrictions. Any restrictions on domestic athlete employment have traditionally come through the NCAA (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). New NIL rules restrict *pay for play*, which prevents athletes from earning money directly for their athletic talents (NCAA, 2021b). As the NCAA has lightened restrictions on athlete compensation, domestic athletes can now build their brands and earning potential through advertisement, public appearance, contractual endorsement, autograph signing, social media promotions, or any other action that could lead to potential sources of income (Sethi et al., 2022). Yet, the combination of NCAA prohibitions of athlete employment and federal restrictions on international student employment effectively lock ICAs out of NIL. If ICAs monetize their NIL on U.S. land, they risk violating immigration policies and could face deportation (Sethi et al., 2022).

The NCAA and its member institutions have offered scarce guidance for ICAs to navigate conflicts between NIL and immigration laws. Instead, ICAs have been directed to consult immigration attorneys (Sethi et al., 2022). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and ICE have remained largely silent, creating further uncertainty for ICAs. With this uncertainty, ICAs are forgoing NIL opportunities (Sethi et al., 2022). As a result, ICAs cannot profit off their athletic talents in ways domestic athletes now can – a policy change meant to reconcile long-standing economic and racial inequities in intercollegiate athletics.

ICA Athletic Recruitment

Many ICAs learn about NCAA amateurism for the first time during their recruitment (Kaburakis, 2007). During recruitment, some learn they have unwittingly violated amateurism, as their home countries have different athletic and academic standards (Kaburakis, 2007). NCAA amateur regulations conflict with international pipelines of youth sport access, where it is common for youth athletes to receive subsidies and prize monies when competing (Kaburakis & Solomon, 2005). These conflicting standards can exclude many ICAs from competing on U.S. amateur athletic teams (Kaburakis & Solomon, 2005). Prospective ICAs receive little support when navigating the differing and conflicting NCAA eligibility standards (Kaburakis & Solomon, 2005).

If a prospective ICA overcomes the myriad barriers listed above, their recruitment process unfolds differently than domestic athletes. ICAs rarely visit college campuses prior to signing national letters of intent, accepting scholarships, or enrolling in the university (Hextrum, 2017; Kaburakis, 2007). In contrast, domestic athletes often take multiple campus visits, meet with coaches and future teammates in person, and sometimes even attend week-long camps to acclimate to the athletic program (Hextrum, 2021a). Such differences in recruitment exacerbate the

transitional challenges for ICAs and openly display how college admissions and college athlete recruitment is not a meritocracy (Hextrum, 2017; 2021a).

Coaches may also interact differently with international recruits by setting unrealistic academic expectations. In persuading ICAs to leave their home countries, coaches emphasize that the U.S. is the only country that combines elite athletics and academics (Bale, 1991; Kaburakis, 2007). Yet coaches rarely discuss how U.S. HEIs might not provide the skills, training, or credentials that translate into an ICA's home country's employment market (Newell, 2015). ICAs might have to complete additional education – in some cases, repeat college – to enter their chosen profession in their home country. These expectations are not explicitly communicated during recruitment but become clear to ICAs once they arrive on campus (Newell, 2015). Such practices reflect assimilation; coaches remain unaware of degree pathways outside the U.S. and assume American HEIs provide the best educational pathways.

Sethi et al. (2022) found that assimilation is "so engrained in the NCAA, members often frame it as a positive" during recruitment (p. 87). As one example, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), a national association of college academic advisors, administrations, counselors, faculty, and students, published recommendations for avoiding amateur violations when recruiting ICAs. Sethi et al. (2022) examined NACADA's guidebook and found the organization encouraged U.S. coaches to recruit from international schools with U.S. curricula and English instruction, arguing that such athletes would be a better *fit* for U.S. college teams.

NCAA policies and practices, especially amateurism, require ICAs to assimilate to a U.S. athletic model. This athletic model (re)produces a global athletic extraction system that funnels toward U.S. institutions. ICAs are seen as institution builders who can improve an HEI's revenue and reputation. ICAs do not receive proper guidance or support as to the true cost of signing with a U.S. DI school.

Game Time: Assimilation within U.S. Intercollegiate Athletics

Anti-Immigrant Discrimination in College Sports

Jenny Lee's research is the most comprehensive to date, exploring how various forms of racism that are endemic to higher education impact international students (Lee & Opio 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007). Utilizing the framework of *neo-racism*, she argued that international Students of Color face compounding forms of discrimination based on their skin color, cultural practices, national origin, language, speech patterns, and religion (Lee & Rice, 2007). Throughout her research, Lee discusses how anti-immigrant discrimination proliferates throughout higher education (e.g., Lee, 2007; Lee et al., 2017; Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007). Neo-racism identifies a form of racism based upon "cultural differences" and maintains a white "way of life" rather than discriminating strictly on perceived (and inaccurate) biological differences (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 389). As Lee and Rice (2007) explained, "neo-racism does *not* replace biological racism but rather masks it by encouraging exclusion based on the cultural attributes or national origin of the oppressed" (p. 389). This further perpetuates harm as ICAs continue to be viewed and treated as a monolith.

Today's global, cultural, and national hierarchies are rooted in whiteness – positioning white-dominant nations like the U.S., Canada, and Northern Europe as superior (Lee et al., 2017). Neo-racism flattens and hierarchically organizes entire nations, ethnic groups, and/or religions into greater or less than cultural categories (Lee, 2007). For example, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the U.S. used isolated terrorist events like the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and the 9/11 attacks to institute new tracking, documenting, and exclusionary practices targeting predominately Muslim nations (Ruiz, 2014). In 2017, former President Donald Trump perfected this strategy through his *Muslim Ban* or Executive Order 13769, which temporarily prohibited foreign nationals – regardless of their religion – among seven predominately-Muslim countries from entering the United States (ACLU, 2020). Support for these policies was garnered by nationalistic rhetoric to protect U.S. (white) culture and lifestyles, seemingly threatened by the presence of Muslim immigrants (Lee, 2007). In this sense, neo-racism intertwines nationalism, patriotism, and racism by justifying and expanding exclusionary and anti-immigrant policies based on one's culture and national origin if said culture or nation is a perceived threat to white dominance (Lee et al., 2017; Lee & Rice, 2007). Additionally, neo-racism utilizes assimilative rhetoric, espousing which cultures, ethnicities, and nations can and cannot assimilate into a U.S. *white way of life* as further rationale for bolstering anti-immigrant policies (Lee & Rice, 2007). Furthermore, neo-racism is not applied to national origin alone. Racist structures are reproduced as Immigrants of Color continue to face distinctly different exclusionary rhetoric than white immigrants, e.g., targeted as perpetual foreigners, unassimilable, and inherently violent (Lee, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007).

Lee's research identified neo-racist practices in higher education that impact ICAs (Lee, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007). Anti-immigrant discriminatory practices based on one's national origin included:

> …less-than-objective academic evaluations; loss of employment or an inability to obtain a job; difficulty in forming interpersonal relationships with instructors, advisors, and peers; negative stereotypes and inaccurate portrayals of one's culture; negative comments about foreign accents; and so on (p. 28).

For instance, ICAs who are not fluent in English can have lower levels of academic preparedness and fewer interactions with professors (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). These outcomes do not reflect academic competency or ability, as some ICAs may be proficient if the material was taught in their native language. But without the proper English-language support services, institutional practices may target them for remedial classes and/or funnel them into a major misaligned with their expertise. ICAs also face discrimination from students, faculty, or staff for their accents or language proficiency while on campus (Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), which can lead to higher rates of stress and depression (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Assimilative Athletic Department Cultures

Athletic departments cultivate assimilative and anti-immigrant cultures. Upon arrival in the U.S., ICAs encounter competitive, elite, hierarchical sporting organizations (Coakley, 2015). DI institutions are known for their entertainment business model that disrupts college athletes' abilities to fully access the educational and career development opportunities promised through intercollegiate athletic participation (Fountain & Finley, 2009; Sack & Straurowsky, 1998). The competitive pressures within college sports create hierarchical structures that encourage and impose authoritativeness, conformity, and dependence (Martens & Lee, 1998; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). These attributes align with assimilation as coaches require athletes to comply with the team norms and values of the host nation (Bale, 1991; Hextrum, 2021b; McGregor, 2022). Rarely do coaches utilize integrationist approaches or embrace a culture of mutual adjustment and interdependence. Instead, college coaches create highly structured and disciplined environments for athletes compared to their non-athlete peers (Martens & Lee, 1998). Authoritative, hierarchical, and assimilationist athletic cultures harm the holistic growth of college athletes, as they are less likely to engage in explanatory behaviors and learn a sense of independence (Martens & Lee, 1998; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

Studies continuously document how elite, win-at-all-cost college athletic cultures generate academic conflicts and compromises for athletes (e.g., Bale, 1991; Hextrum, 2020b; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Tatos & Singer, 2021). Bale (1991) found that these conflicts are heightened for ICAs, even in non-revenue-generating sports. He argued that athletic departments exploit ICAs by luring them to the U.S. under false pretenses, using ICAs for their own aims, and not adequately providing for their social, emotional, physical, and educational needs. Due to ICA's precarious visa status – a status often linked to their standing on an athletic team and/or athletic scholarship – they may feel greater pressure to conform to athletic cultures and succumb to school/sport conflicts than their domestic peers (Bale, 1991; Sethi et al., 2022).

Practices within athletic departments that increase school/sport conflicts make it more likely for college athletes to overdevelop and commit to their identities as athletes (Beamon, 2014; Coakley, 2015). One way college athletes cope with time demands is to select majors that accommodate their athletic commitments (Fountain & Finley, 2009). Oftentimes these decisions lead athletes to pursue less rigorous degree programs disconnected from their future goals (Fountain & Finley, 2009; Navarro & Malvaso, 2016). ICAs are more likely to enroll in majors to fit their team's schedules and minimize athletic conflicts (Jara, 2015). ICAs have the added challenge of pursuing majors that may be irrelevant in their home countries (Bale, 1991; Newell, 2015). In part, these academic decisions are motivated by the pressure placed on them by coaches to improve a team's athletic performance (Bale, 1991; Weston, 2006).

ICAs of Color may also endure American racism for the first time, unaware that their skin color marks them as an *other*. Racism, discrimination, and stereotyping of ICAs of Color extend to their living and dining spaces in ways not often experienced by their white domestic and white ICA peers (Lee & Rice, 2007). For example, Lee and Opio (2011) found that athletic departments held different academic expectations for white versus Black college athletes from the African continent. Black Africans were treated paternalistically with greater surveillance and lowered expectations for academic achievement compared to white South Africans. Arab and African ICAs

also experienced higher levels of racism and discrimination like verbal insults, cultural intolerance, and name-calling on college campuses and within team settings, whereas white-European ICAs endured no such harm (Lee & Opio, 2011).

Hextrum's research on non-revenue college athletes' (rowing and track & field) experiences with whiteness found striking differences across race and national identity (Hextrum, 2020a; 2021b). ICAs from Westernized, majority white countries, including Germany, Canada, Britain, and Australia, quickly acclimated to their teams, academic environment, and peer cultures. They also perpetuated harmful white cultures, misrecognizing their own racial supremacist identities and roles in marginalizing domestic Athletes of Color. In many cases, white ICAs could culturally assimilate, and in turn, receive maximum athletic and academic benefits in ways unavailable to Black domestic track & field athletes (Hextrum, 2020a; 2021b). Rather than encourage and reward white international students for perpetuating whiteness, Hextrum (2020a) recommended that athletic departments incorporate anti-racist and social justice-oriented work to begin to eradicate how all white people – regardless of their nation of origin – are centered and uplifted in sports.

Neo-racism imposes whiteness, classness, and Americanness in ways that inherently marginalize international students and disrupt their educational, social, and career experiences. Neo-racism magnifies cultural intolerance against international students and interferes with their well-being, their ability to develop friendships, and how they learn about the host nation (Lee & Rice, 2007). Interviews with ICAs revealed that many do not report their experiences with racism for fear they will be deported (Lee & Rice, 2007). The anti-immigrant discrimination pervading the U.S. broadly and higher education specifically has led international students to "believe they must accept discrimination as the cost of earning an American degree" (Lee, 2007, p. 29). The costs are even higher for ICAs whose athletic talents are expected to improve a team's performance and raise the institutional profiles (Bale, 1991; Lee & Opio, 2011; Weston, 2006). Research finds that campuses rarely counteract neo-racism despite their own inclusive mission, goals, and objectives (Yao, 2015). Without consequences for those who perpetuate anti-immigrant discrimination against ICAs, neo-racism will continue to proliferate throughout higher education (Lee, 2007).

Assimilation and Life After Sport

Ending one's athletic career poses social, psychological, physical, and career readiness challenges (Newell, 2015). College athletes who transition from sport can experience depression, stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, decreased self-worth, mood changes, disordered eating, nutritional challenges, body image issues, and lack of support following the end of their athletic careers (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Papathomas et al., 2018). Adjusting to physical changes, such as new nutritional needs, body image concerns, and weight fluctuations, causes physical and emotional fatigue (Papathomas et al., 2018). These struggles are exacerbated by the loss of community after leaving sport, as athletes no longer have the support of teammates and staff (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Stoltenburg et al., 2011). While emotional and psychological fatigue is common for all athletes, ICAs enter the U.S. with stigmas about mental health and therapy due to the perceptions and opinions of people in their home country. Therefore, they are less likely to use psychological resources during their time at HEIs (Mori, 2000). For those who do seek mental health services,

lack of diversity and cultural insensitivity among counseling staff has often led to negative experiences (Mori, 2000).

Domestic college athletes often have little knowledge or clarity about career readiness compared to their non-athlete peers (Newell, 2015; Pierce et al., 2012). ICAs face similar struggles as domestic college athletes yet have added immigration and career opportunity difficulties (Sethi et al., 2022). ICAs must decide whether to stay in the U.S. or return home – a decision rife with financial, cultural, emotional, and social concerns (Newell, 2015; Pierce et al., 2012). Upon arriving home, ICAs may have to complete additional career, technical, or educational training to join their workforce (Newell, 2015). They may also find they no longer fit in with their home country, as they have spent years assimilating to U.S. norms, cultures, and values. If international students want to stay in the U.S., they must find employers willing to sponsor a work visa.

Academic advisors can play an integral role in helping ICAs navigate their career paths. Encouraging ICAs to look beyond their athletic identity and explore diverse career opportunities post-graduation can improve career outcomes (Navarro & Malvaso, 2016; Newell, 2015). Individualized advising for international college students, such as discussing whether they intend to stay in the U.S., can also improve outcomes (Newell, 2015). Yet, *if* career services are offered by athletic departments, they cater to domestic college athletes (Newell, 2015). ICAs require advising that discusses which companies and industries hire international employees and sponsor work visas (Popp et al., 2009). Ideally, academic support service administrators would develop programs that prepare ICAs for myriad post-athletic careers, including inside and outside the U.S. This integrationist approach would help ICAs flourish in their professional careers in the workforce within their home country or the U.S.

Conclusion and Recommendations

ICAs are drawn to U.S. college sports by the promise of exceptional athletic infrastructure, a world-class education, a holistic college experience, and an opportunity to interact. Inadequate support and innumerable constraints set by coaches and administrators who prioritize athletic performance hurt the overall experience of ICAs while benefitting the institution. Anti-immigrant discrimination and exclusionary practices combined with inadequate support compromise ICA's educational and athletic experiences. Institutions are increasing the number of ICAs enrolled each year. However, their awareness and level of support towards this population remains limited. Thus, is it ethical for HEIs to lure ICAs to their campuses with such hostile climates and inadequate support systems? How can HEIs be held accountable for learning about the diversity within ICAs and offer the support needed to improve their experience? How can HEIs eliminate their assimilative cultures? Will ICAs ever become truly integrated into HEIs if they remain "perpetual foreigners" due to their visa status? After reviewing the literature, these were a few questions we could not resolve and invite future researchers and practitioners to consider.

Research on international college student experiences identifies that HEIs use assimilative and exclusionary tactics, harming the learning outcomes of domestic and international students alike. Fostering a welcoming campus environment and support services to assist international students will improve retention and academic and social outcomes (Weston, 2006). However, doing so is not easy at the athletic department or institutional levels. Racist and anti-immigrant

federal laws combined with discriminatory policies and practices within higher education require systemic reform and long-term solutions. Immigration is a global process requiring actions to eradicate discourses, ideologies, and policies that elevate U.S. culture and whiteness at the exclusion and expense of all those who do not align with these ideals. Achieving such change requires a "certain kind of public culture, one that recognizes the immigrants as legitimate members of society and treats them with respect" (Caren, 2015, p. 44). Thus, federal offices and immigration policies should consider the "desires that most immigrants have for economic and social opportunities similar to those enjoyed by the existing population so that the receiving society is not placing obstacles in the way of immigrants who seek to pursue these opportunities" (Caren, 2015, p. 46). Working toward global and national levels of cultural, economic, and immigration reform will likely take multiple generations. The extensive change required to foster a more humanizing global movement of people does not relieve HEIs from taking modest steps that could lessen the harm they currently commit against international students and ICAs. Here, we discuss a few policies and practices to create a more holistic and inclusive environment for ICAs.

First, HEIs could prohibit anti-immigrant discrimination on their campuses. As discussed throughout, international students and ICAs face rampant and often normalized discrimination based on their linguistic patterns, cultural practices, national origin, and/or race. Yet Lee and Rice (2007) found that few institutions have explicit prohibitions against such actions, leaving international students with little recourse or support. Oftentimes, international students are unaware of their rights to receive an education free from discrimination under federal law (Lee & Rice, 2007). Therefore, we echo Lee and Rice's (2007) recommendation that campuses adopt explicit policies prohibiting anti-immigrant discrimination and educate students, staff, and faculty about said policies. Concurrently, HEIs should create programming to educate all international students about their rights and protections under existing federal anti-discrimination laws.

Second, HEIs must go beyond punitive and carceral actions toward discrimination and foster campus climates that embrace the diverse experiences, knowledge, and culture that international students bring to U.S. HEIs. As part of their mission, most universities espouse that they teach students how to "operate in a multicultural world" (Tierney, 1992, p. 615). International students are vital to this mission. HEIs must educate domestic students to become culturally aware and sensitive (Tierney, 1992). HEIs should also communicate the value international students bring through diverse perspectives, languages, and cultural richness, all of which should be embraced by U.S. college campuses (Wu et al., 2015). For example, DEI offices could host workshops to raise awareness and educate faculty, staff, administrators, and students about the cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, religions etc. within the ICA population. These trainings could help institutional members rid assimilative practices from their units and assist ICAs to retain their unique identities.

Third, HEIs must institutionalize more comprehensive and individually tailored support services for international students and ICAs. This includes redressing campus cultures, norms, and timelines regarding English proficiency while increasing support for English language learning (Wu et al., 2015). Instead of expecting ICAs to learn English on their own, campus departments could assist international students by providing language-specific tutors, language learning workshops, and other online and supplementary resources. Campuses should also teach ICAs

about existing resources like writing centers and tutors. This would increase ICAs' confidence in speaking English in public settings.

Fourth, institutions could combat the siloing of student services and encourage cross-campus collaboration among international student services, student affairs, and athletic departments to better support ICAs. Examples include hosting cultural evenings, country-specific game days, and celebrating different college athletes and their heritage, holidays, and nationality through social media platforms. Cross-collaboration could also focus on specialized career programming that encourages a life-after-sport approach (Meyer, 2017), introduces students to the complexities of the visa and employment process for immigrants and enhances their sense of belonging (Pericak et al., 2023). Researchers find that when campuses offer programming, ICAs can rarely attend due to their demanding athletic schedules (Meyer, 2017). Athletic department staff should ensure ICAs have the chance to attend these workshops and not penalize participants for missing practice or competition to do so. Units should collaboratively host an ICA first-year student orientation to learn about campus, classrooms, cafeterias, and other resources. This can expedite integration as ICAs begin to feel welcomed into unfamiliar spaces. Athletic department staff can support ICAs on their campus by collaborating with the international student services office and student affairs professionals to develop leadership and mentorship programs/workshops. Such collaborations will expand ICAs' professional networks and prepare them to enter the workforce.

Our research also identified areas for specific reforms within athletic departments. To enhance ICAs' academic, athletic, and career experiences, we recommend athletic departments adopt integrative policies and practices throughout their unit. Research has shown that ICA's transition to campus improves when coaches and administrators work collaboratively to support their needs. (Person et al., 2001; Pierce et al., 2012). Integrative practices within athletic departments could minimize school/sport conflicts, support ICA's holistic development, and enrich the experience of their domestic peers. Yet again, reforming athletic departments away from assimilation requires changes throughout the college athletic system. However, interim steps could be implemented to improve ICA's career and athletic trajectories. For instance, athletic departments could develop workshops and listening sessions where they could learn about ICAs' unique cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic contributions (Hong, 2018). They could also educate domestic college athletes about the diversity in the department through seminars, ICA week of celebrations, and other social/cultural events. This model of mutual reciprocity and willingness to understand each other's needs would make athletic departments more inclusive.

In addition to athletic support services like academic advising and career readiness, athletic recruitment also requires reform. During recruitment, coaches should discuss how amateurism and NCAA regulations may differ from athletic rules in ICA's home countries. Coaches should advise ICAs about the challenges of transferring U.S. academic degrees to career fields in other countries. Academic advisors could offer guidance and resources for ICAs to learn about the advantages and limitations of earning a U.S. college degree (Newell, 2015).

Another integrative policy would be to hire and designate an individual or unit to assist ICAs. This unit could connect the athletic department with various student offices to support ICAs in areas like career preparation, monitoring visa statuses, tax documents, travel signatures, and

work authorization approvals. Pairing ICAs with other international students to foster cross-campus and cross-sport interaction can be an enriching experience (Pierce et al., 2012). Encouraging and providing time and resources for ICAs to engage in campus activities, get to know other student organizations, participate in academic and professional workshops, and attend orientations and international student events would allow them to develop a sense of community and build professional networks (Hong, 2018). Lastly, athletic departments may consider forming a safe space for ICAs to discuss their unique needs with one another, which could enhance their sense of community. This can be a first step towards providing underrepresented communities an opportunity to work towards diminishing assimilative tactics, which can often harm their learning outcomes and overall experience at U.S. HEIs.

Finally, our review of research identified how scholars and practitioners treat ICAs differently from domestic students by instituting assimilative practices, treating ICAs as a monolith, and ignoring important in-group differences. The NCAA contributes to this phenomenon by collecting and publishing incomplete data about ICAs. A needed step is for the NCAA to allow ICAs to name their regional, national, linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and racial differences so researchers and practitioners can provide individually tailored support accordingly.

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Interventions in Support of Anti-Racist Praxis in Athletics

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Abstract: Since the 1990s, college athletic departments have developed parallel and redundant student services that are specific to athletics, ostensibly to broaden the accessibility of these resources for athletes. However, this insularity can create echo chambers and totalizing institutional norms. Previous research has documented that many athletics practitioners, even those in student-facing roles, are neither trained as educators nor student affairs professionals (Navarro et al., 2015). Additionally, athletics practitioners are often untrained and unprepared to address racial equity topics and have little prior experience working with racially diverse students and coworkers. This article discusses two efforts to better prepare anti-racist athletics practitioners: one at the graduate level with students working as athletics graduate assistants and pre-professional graduate students and a second with current athletics staff and administrators. Through the lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), we discuss the need, development, and theory of change undergirding these two interventions implemented at the University of Oklahoma and offer suggestions of how other universities and athletic departments could approach and/or implement similar programming.

Keywords: Critical Whiteness Studies, anti-racist praxis, professional development, graduate degree curriculum, intercollegiate athletics administration

Symbolism and Intervention through College Athletics

College athletics occupy a unique and contradictory position within higher education in the United States (U.S.). Although athletic departments are separate and increasingly isolated from the rest of campus life (Comeaux, 2018; Hatteberg, 2018; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Smith, 2011), athletics are also one of the most prominent representatives or exemplars of higher education in general, and of any given institution (Hoffman, 2020). Higher education has built organizational cultures that position athletics as exceptional and outside of their governing structure, thereby permitting siloed and deviant actions within sports programs, all the while absolving academic leaders of culpability (Grummert & Rall, 2020; Hoffman, 2020). The paradox of athletics' *exceptionalism* and framing as an *institutional exemplar* parallels the contradictions implicit in athletics' relationship to racial justice movements. Despite sports – and college athletics, in particular – being hailed as sites for ameliorating racial discord and/or inequality (Hextrum, 2021a, 2018; Hirko, 2009), racial and gender issues remain endemic to intercollegiate athletics as racist and sexist ideologies and practices are promoted to external audiences through sport (Haslerig et al., 2019; 2020; Hextrum, 2020a; 2020b; Hextrum & Sethi, 2022).

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Furthermore, scholars have critiqued the racist and inequitable economic structure(s) of college athletics, from the governing principle of college sports, i.e., amateurism, that denies legal labor rights and protections (Ferguson & Davis, 2019; Grenardo, 2016; Staurowsky, 2014), to reliance on unpaid labor to generate revenue (Gayles et al., 2018; Hawkins, 2013). The overrepresentation of Black men in the most visible portions of athletic departments, i.e., revenue-generating sports, can obscure the fact that 80-90% of athletes, coaches, staff, and administrators are white (Lapchick, 2020). The methods through which the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tracks racial demographics, e.g., creating averages across teams or departments, obscures how certain portions of athletic departments, such as upper administration, head coaches, and athletes on non-revenue generating teams, are virtually all-white (Hextrum, 2021a; 2021b). According to an internal department poll in 2020, 81% of athletics staff identified as white at the University of Oklahoma (OU).

Although there is robust research examining the negative and inequitable experiences of Black men in college football and basketball (e.g., Beamon, 2014; Bimper, 2015; Hawkins, 2013; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016), the often singular focus on their experiences can reinforce deficit narratives. It can also obscure the roles white athletes and athletic staff play in (re)creating and benefiting from institutionalized racism (Hextrum, 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2021b). In contrast, Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) centers systems of power and their beneficiaries. Racism exists as a dialectic in that one group reaps the benefits of another's harm (Fields, 2001; Leonardo, 2009). Thus, to truly improve the educational and athletic experiences for Athletes of Color, we must also interrogate how white people (re)enact and benefit from systemic racism in athletic departments.

Sport is often a site and symbol for broader fights for racial justice (Cooper et al., 2019; Ferguson & Davis, 2019; Hoffman, 2020; Jolly et al., 2021). However, when athletes use their platforms to draw attention to these national movements, a fallacious narrative often emerges that racial injustices are primarily *external* to sport. In some cases, sport is framed as a solution to the racial strife outside of sport, thus obfuscating racial conflicts and inequities internal to athletics. In contrast, the two interventions we discuss in this manuscript (a) acknowledge the racial injustice and inequity perpetuated within and through college athletics and (b) seek to mitigate that harm by better preparing practitioners to recognize and disrupt it.

In this article, we reflect upon interventions to counteract white supremacist athletic department cultures. We discuss our attempts at dismantling white supremacy in athletics through two interventions: one through a graduate curriculum for students in graduate assistantships in athletics and/or who are pre-professional and a second with current athletic practitioners. Both interventions occurred at OU – an exemplar of big-time college athletics and the corresponding racial paradoxes previously described. In sharing our approach, we offer a theory of change to address white supremacy in athletics through critically grounded formal and informal curricular offerings that mutually reinforce each other to reshape organizational cultures. We conclude by acknowledging that interventions will inevitably remain imperfect and incomplete, then discuss how to further develop future interventions and the value of such programming despite ongoing limitations. Although we intended to publish this piece when we were still OU employees, some of the factors that made this work so necessary also contributed to our individual choices to move on from Oklahoma. This work is difficult and ongoing. What we report here are worthwhile, yet

incomplete, interventions. We hope that this article can serve as a model for other scholar-practitioners who may be able to adapt and use it to carry the larger goals forward.

Theories of Change

These two interrelated racial justice interventions were grounded in critical theories of race and racism. When discussing whiteness, we utilize CWS, an expansive area of scholarship united in the pressing need to identify, so as to dismantle the structural, institutional, and individual manifestations of white supremacy. Under our current racial order, *whiteness* is often inaccurately defined as a set of invisible and unearned privileges (McIntosh, 1989); in contrast, CWS locates whiteness as an outcome of racial domination (Leonardo, 2004). CWS is rooted in Critical Race Studies (CRS) and Theory (CRT) – a collection of structural and systemic explanations of white supremacy emerging from Black legal scholars in the 1980s (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). CWS defines whiteness as emerging from historic, social, cultural, political, and economic processes that elevate and unify white people, at the expense and exclusion of People of Color (Gusa, 2010; Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2009). In part, racial domination is maintained through the socialization of whites to misunderstand how race and racism operate (Fields, 2001; Leonardo, 2009; Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Thus, by definition, *anti-racist spaces* must address the structural components of how racism informs all our institutions *and* dispel the inaccurate and often individualized explanations of racism that inform a white worldview (Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Doing so requires acknowledging white people's limited and inaccurate understandings of racism; centering People of Color's stories and experiences with racism, including Scholars of Color's accounts of racism; framing racism as a multi-layered process that manifests at individual, ideological, interaction, and structural levels; and creating space for white people to re-learn about racism (Cabrera, 2018; Leonardo, 2004; 2009; Mills, 2003).

Discussing the totality of racism in this fashion requires reiterative, ongoing, and dispersed interventions. CWS and CRT assert that racism is in flux, taking on new iterations and shapes (Gusa, 2010; Leonardo, 2009). Therefore, combatting racism requires ongoing consciousness-raising and recommitments to racial justice work (Cabrera, 2018; Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Even when higher education provides CRT or CWS curricula within graduate programs, exposure to such theories usually reflects a single point-in-time learning opportunity that is unlikely to drive life-long commitments to anti-racist practices (Cabrera, 2018). The same is true of professional development and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives for professional staff and administrators (Adamian & Jayakumar, 2018). In contrast, eradicating white supremacy in organizational cultures and hierarchies requires regular, ongoing interventions aimed at undoing the ideological and material underpinnings of whiteness (Leonardo, 2009). As such, all practitioners, regardless of their previous training, can and should engage with regular and anti-racist interventions.

Harm Reduction

We approached each intervention from the perspective of *harm mitigation*, rather than seeking to "solve" racism. This ethos aligns with theory and best practice in several ways. Notably, CRS asserts that racism is an everyday and persistent reality, and *racial progress* is dependent on interest convergence and, ultimately, limited by the fleeting nature of that convergence (Bell,

1980). As such, we approached our work with realism about the difficulty of producing sustainable and/or systemic change. Recognizing that we would neither be able to implement perfect nor permanent solutions, we instead sought to intervene where possible, believing that mitigating harm is always worthwhile (and, in fact, a moral imperative). Although the harm reduction paradigm is complementary to CRS, they are rarely explicitly linked in the scholarly literature on anti-racist practice (one exception is Ozias, 2023). Table 1 provides examples of how the concept of harm mitigation or reduction is utilized in several disparate fields and movements, including public health (Des Jarlais et al., 1993; Lee & Zerai, 2010; Marlatt, 1996; Roe, 2005; Stancliff, 2015), violence prevention (Hoxmeier et al., 2020), philosophy (Dea, 2020; Kleinig, 2008), and transformative justice (Mingus, 2021).

Table 1

Harm Reduction

Context	Harm Reduction Example(s)
Public Health	The harm reduction paradigm in public health has been described as "front line public health" and "pragmatic" (Stancliff et al., 2015); it emphasizes mitigating risk and harm, rather than abstinence from – or punishment for – potentially risky behaviors (e.g., drug use or sex). Examples of harm reduction interventions can include needle exchanges, safe injection sites, safe sex campaigns, condom distribution, safe harbor laws, decriminalization and attendant regulation (e.g., of drug use or sex work), and Narcan trainings.
Violence Prevention	Bystander intervention trainings directly address and are structured according to the logic of harm mitigation. Such trainings teach multiple forms of intervention (often framed as the 5 'Ds': direct, delegate, delay, distract, and document) and to assess which intervention will be most effective at mitigating immediate harm, taking into account how the intervener is best positioned to intervene and prioritizing immediate safety (including the intervener's safety) over fully addressing the issue in the moment. It is more important to thwart an impending sexual assault, for example, than to educate about consent or to hold the perpetrator accountable in that moment. Bystander interventions can be used to disrupt various forms of violence, including gender-based violence and racial microaggressions. Bystander intervention underscores individuals' responsibility and ability to intervene, training participants to do whatever they can, when they can, to mitigate harm.
Transformative Justice (TJ)	TJ requires reassessing immediate responses to violence to ensure we address it in ways that don't perpetuate harm. "At its most basic, it seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging [sic] in harm reduction to lessen the violence" (Mingus, 2021, p. 17). Furthermore, this perspective highlights the nuance of harm, recognizing that there is often ongoing harm exacted in the course of attempting to redress an initial harm. As such, TJ demands the dismantling and remaking of systems for addressing violence and harm, while also mitigating and preventing harm by always centering accountability and communal care.

There is one area of possible tension between these theoretical underpinnings and our own practice: whereas TJ argues that violence is reproduced by existing systems, we have attempted to work *with* existing systems (though not from within them), even as we recognize the limitations thereof. Nonetheless, our approach is in line with the idea of working *with* those in existing systems to mitigate harm, while simultaneously building alternative systems. Ideally, the goal of this approach is to build a *bridge to a new system* through your work, rather than to reach an endpoint of 'reform' to the current system. Harm reduction has sometimes been criticized for focusing solely on reducing high-risk behaviors instead of addressing systems (e.g., Hoxmeier et al., 2020; Wuthrich, 2009). Conversely, we approached harm reduction from the expanded, more comprehensive starting point of *vulnerability reduction* (Ezard, 2001), which takes into account both the social systems that create conditions of vulnerability to risk and the reduction of immediate risks.

Anti-Racist Interventions in College Sports

In this manuscript, we reflect on two interventions that aimed to prepare athletics practitioners to develop their own anti-racist praxis. The first intervention occurred through reshaping a graduate curriculum. The second intervention targeted current athletic staff not enrolled in graduate school. Both interventions were implemented in an iterative, mutually informing (and reinforcing) way due to the relationship between OU's Intercollegiate Athletics Administration (IAA) concentration, nested within the Adult & Higher Education (EDAH) MEd program and the OU Athletic Department. Each intervention benefited from the working relationship between IAA and OU Athletics, but they were functionally situated in one unit or the other. For a short time, there was evidence of a true partnership between IAA and OU Athletics in working toward anti-racist goals. The students in the IAA program are graduate students employed in athletics assistantship positions (GAs) and/or pre-professional students interested in careers within intercollegiate athletics. As such, the first intervention – formal curricular changes in the IAA concentration – had direct and indirect impacts on OU Athletics and the field more generally, despite its narrow focus on IAA graduate students.

The second intervention involved tailored workshops and training sessions for current practitioners, including upper administration, within OU's athletic department. Hosted by faculty in the IAA program, these trainings offered theoretical and research-informed content on the pressing issues facing athletic departments and challenged practitioners to change existing department norms. Like IAA's graduate curriculum, the practitioner professional development programming sought to train participants to *intervene* in and *disrupt* inequitable practices and policies within their current and/or future workplaces. In this sense, a third, ongoing, form of intervention was embedded in both curricular interventions. As such, we intended to build sustainable cultures wherein practitioners themselves could engage in ongoing justice work, rather than solely relying upon sporadic, temporary (and therefore ineffective) DEI workshops (Adamian & Jayakumar, 2018) or the labor of Practitioners of Color (Quaye et al., 2020). This third, meta-form of intervention was particularly important to bridge the tension between the dual necessities of (a) inviting in DEI experts and truly valuing their expertise and (b) tailoring programming to the specific context and building increasing ownership of the anti-racist intervention within the athletic organization.

In the following sections, we describe the design and implementation of each intervention and discuss how it contributed to our theory of change. While both authors were heavily involved in each intervention, for clarity, each author narrates one intervention section from a first-person perspective. The first author, Dr. Siduri Haslerig, narrates revisions to IAA's graduate curriculum, and the second author, Dr. Kirsten Hextrum, narrates the development of anti-racist programming for athletic practitioners. Both narrations discuss how the interventions were grounded in CRS and sought to disrupt white supremacy in athletic organizations. In writing this article, we engaged in an iterative practice of reflexivity (Pillow, 2003), which informed and improved our methods contemporaneously; furthermore, in retrospect, our reflexivity deepened our understanding of our attempts at racial justice programming. We share our reflections and programming efforts to provide a model for scholar-practitioners, both in creating responsive and effective interventions and in enacting reflexivity about their own praxis.

Intervention 1: Revising a Graduate Curriculum for Social Change (Dr. Siduri Haslerig)

OU's Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education (JRCoE) and Athletics Department have long-standing relationships. The JRCoE houses an academic concentration in Intercollegiate Athletics Administration (IAA), situated within the Adult & Higher Education (EDAH) MEd program. The IAA emphasis area began in 1998 and became a formal concentration in 2013. The IAA program prepares aspiring athletic practitioners to pursue a range of careers in college sports. IAA students complete the required coursework in EDAH, which provides them with a breadth of knowledge about higher education. They also complete specialized courses surveying the most pressing issues in college sports. The concentration annually enrolls approximately 35 students who hold Graduate Assistantships in OU Athletics.

When I arrived at the University of Oklahoma in 2014, the IAA program approached training practitioners from career, business, and technical vantage points, and had recently incorporated an increasingly student affairs perspective (Bernhard et al., 2016; Navarro et al., 2015). The courses offered little critique or interrogation of underlying forces of exclusion and domination that undergird college sport and/or how to transform athletics into a more equitable and inclusive environment. This issue was not unique to OU; athletics practitioners are often untrained and unprepared to address racial equity topics and may have little prior experience working with racially diverse students and coworkers (Bernhard & Haslerig, 2017). When I became the director of IAA in 2015, I endeavored to build stronger faculty capacity by recruiting and hiring two tenure-track assistant professors (including my coauthor, Dr. Kirsten Hextrum). In designing the job calls and descriptions, I intentionally sought faculty whose professional experience, research agenda, and positionality aligned with expanding diversity, equity, and inclusion in college sports.

My first initiative was to ensure our two "diversity" courses in the existing IAA curriculum – "Diversity in Sport" (later renamed "Race and Ethnicity in Intercollegiate Athletics")*)* and "Gender Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics" – were grounded in critical and justice-oriented theories and research. For "Diversity in Sport," I revised the course from a framing that emphasized racial progress and Black athletes' accomplishments and 'firsts,' toward a course that engaged with racial theories, media literacy, and intersectional racial justice. Doing so added rigor and relevance to the course, and it also challenged students in ways that the previous course had

not, resulting in our growing awareness of the need for a third course, as discussed below. When Dr. Hextrum was hired, she redesigned "Gender Issues." The class content originally included little or no explanation of gender theory and instead unfolded as a semester-long explanation of Title IX enforcement. She went about revising this narrow (and inaccurate) conceptualization of the gender issues endemic to college sports by grounding the class in various feminist and queer theorists.

My next initiative was to work with the new faculty to change the IAA curricular requirements to include a social foundations course. Any one of three course options could fill this requirement: "Race and Ethnicity in Intercollegiate Athletics," "Gender Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics," or "Inclusive Praxis in Intercollegiate Athletics." Reforming the curriculum to ensure all graduates of the IAA program would engage with social issues and theories in their coursework was an intervention borne of our belief that practitioners would need knowledge and tools in order to navigate systemic oppression in their own professional practice. Mandatory social justice or diversity coursework is both maligned and, at times, necessary for change. Enrollment in these courses prompted some students to seek justice and equity in their praxis as they entered the athletic department, through which they began to reform college sport itself.

I designed "Inclusive Praxis in Intercollegiate Athletics" specifically as the third option for the social foundations requirement so graduate students could acquire the *skills* to impact change. The need for this skill development workshop became clear to me because of experiences I had teaching "Race and Ethnicity in Intercollegiate Athletics" (formerly "Diversity in Sports"). The first time I taught "Diversity in Sports," students shared that the content challenged them to reach new understandings of race and racism. Yet students also reflected that they lacked tools to *address* the problems they now recognized. In other words, students asked: "What do we do with this knowledge?" They expressed concern that, by simply working in sports, they might inevitably perpetuate racism and other forms of oppression. And they sincerely asked me, "What do we do? Are you saying we shouldn't go into athletics administration?" This was not a question I anticipated. Through these interactions with students, I shared my belief that athletics needs critically-oriented practitioners who can (a) identify and understand racism within athletics, (b) work toward positive institutional change, and (c) mitigate racial harm, in ways both individual and systemic. I was also forced to recognize that my course, which exposed students to critical theory and research, nonetheless left them feeling inadequately prepared to incorporate this knowledge into their practitioner work. They could identify racism and systemic injustice, but they still did not have the tools to actually dismantle or interrupt racism as practitioners.

As a result of that uncomfortable realization myself, I developed the "Inclusive Praxis" course as a workshop focused on building specific skills around everything from bystander intervention to facilitation methods to equitable hiring practices. We also discussed how to navigate the practical daily challenges of this work in an early career, including power dynamics and students' (reasonable) concern about keeping their jobs if/when they interrupt injustice. As important as it is to be grounded in scholarship and, more specifically, in *critical* scholarship, I learned that we also needed to train students with actionable skills. Students who intend to be practitioners will often be in positions to mitigate harm, so they need the tools to do so effectively. This is particularly important, given the tendency to treat newer professionals, as well as those with marginalized identities, as more equipped to approach these topics. There is a need for explicit

skill development regardless of students' positionality; for example, being a Black person does not mean a student necessarily knows specific histories, understands certain theories, or has the skills to effectively facilitate conversation. Yet untrained early career Practitioners of Color are often tasked with doing labor around these difficult topics (for example, see our discussion of *mission creep* within the Athletic Diversity Council in our article "A case of interest divergence" in this issue).

Several of the topics and tools from the inclusive praxis course have impacted my larger approach to training practitioners and the meaning I make out of both the successes and setbacks we experienced with these interventions. In particular, harm mitigation has become increasingly foundational to this work for me. As a scholar who studies inequity and oppression from the structural rather than individual perspectives, this has been a somewhat paradoxical shift. I still believe it is imperative that we understand and address the structural and power relations undergirding inequity; however, I also recognize the value of intervening on an individual level – and the potential for individual intervention to concretely prevent harm in a given circumstance.

Bridging our Interventions

Through my experiences teaching "Race and Ethnicity in Intercollegiate Athletics" and designing "Inclusive Praxis," I saw the need to continue this work beyond the graduate curriculum. Similarly, previous work within athletics reinforced the necessity of explicit curricular preparation for graduate students. With the revised IAA curriculum, students were better prepared to understand social justice frameworks and implement equitable practices in athletic departments. However, IAA students were entering work environments in which their predecessors and supervisors had by and large not received similar training and, in many cases, were instead embracing and continuing to perpetuate the oppressive systems we taught about. As such, simply sending new professionals into these harmful and destructive athletic cultures with new knowledge was not enough; they were sent to enter those cultures and then either adopt them or have their careers limited by their lack of adherence. The most extreme cases would be those who got pushed out or departed the athletics field altogether.

As former students entered the profession, hungry to change long-standing white supremacist cultures, they described encountering units resistant to change. Through our conversations, they shared their frustrations with their athletic departments, which were untethered from critical praxis. They asked how they could implement critical curricular training in their units and in some cases attempted to do so themselves, with varying degrees of success. Therefore, in addition to ongoing training for early career and pre-professional practitioners, we realized targeted support for longer-standing administrators was also needed. Otherwise, athletic departments would continue to socialize new members of the organization into existing, harmful, racist cultures, ideologies, and practices. The need for ongoing training for current practitioners has been confirmed by research. Effective racial justice work is necessarily ongoing and most effective when done in the community and with organizational support (Adamian & Jayakumar, 2018). The counter-hegemonic movement sweeping the U.S. in the summer of 2020 provided an opportunity to implement ongoing, effective, critical racial justice work for current athletic practitioners. The next section, narrated by Dr. Hextrum, describes this intervention.

Intervention 2: An Anti-Racist Book Club (ABC) for Intercollegiate Athletics Practitioners (Dr. Kirsten Hextrum)

In May 2020, I was in conversation with the OU Athletics Diversity Committee (ADC) about how to provide racial justice training for staff and support for Black students. OU Athletics leadership felt a renewed need for such trainings in light of the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM), high-profile examples of Black athlete activism, and calls for greater attention to the racial inequities plaguing college sports (Cooper et al., 2023). In collaboration with Dr. Dolores Christensen, the chair of the OU ADC and licensed sports psychologist, we piloted a five-week summer workshop series to (re)educate the primarily white coaches and staff on the workings of structural racism in athletics and train participants to incorporate racial justice practices in their units.[1]

As discussed below, OU Athletics gave me full autonomy to design the curriculum and implement the programming. However, the athletic department maintained its control of the promotion, branding, and naming of the events. Despite my fervent desire to name the workshop series with explicit racial justice language, they insisted the series title reference the summer's *anti-racist book club zeitgeist* (Johnson, 2020). Even when I explained (a) the performative (and therefore ineffective) reputation associated with white book clubs (Johnson, 2020) and (b) that our workshops would not not use a central book as our curriculum, the athletics administrators were intransigent about keeping the "Anti-racist Book Club" and "ABC" branding. This initial conflict exemplifies the tension between the series' critical content and the white supremacist organizing tendencies undergirding athletics, as well as the delicate art of negotiating those tensions. For example, in refusing to run it as book club, I challenged and pushed the department to be more critical, but the invitation to do this work was contingent on the branding, so I ceded that point.[2]

Initial interest was approximately 40 participants. We invited Sara Grummert, then a PhD candidate at the University of California, Riverside (who now has a doctoral degree) and an emerging expert on whiteness in intercollegiate athletics. While my coauthor and other Faculty of Color had strong relationships with OU athletics, three white women scholars – Dr. Christensen, Dr. Grummert, and myself – intentionally took responsibility for the labor to design and implement ABC in order to contravene the frequent *diversity penalty* imposed on Scholars of Color (Quaye et al., 2020).[3] The intervention also unfolded during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a global disaster that exacerbated the racialized inequitable workloads in higher education (Simien & Wallace, 2022).

[1] See the article "A case of interest divergence" in this issue for more depth on the origin of ABC programming.
[2] ABC was not the only time faculty from the College of Education have been tasked with leading DEI initiatives for Athletics and faced conflicting or counterproductive branding efforts. An event intended to provide a platform for Black athletes to speak frankly to white administrators was rebranded as "Humanity Talks." As another example, OU athletics also insisted on using the settler-valorizing nomenclature of "Sooners," as well as the attendant mascots, throughout DEI marketing materials, despite our frequent and substantive objections. Our critical scholarship contributed to ABC's effectiveness while also being a source of discomfort for those in athletics. These tensions are of interest for future research: How do we sustain engagement in trainings that challenge core norms of the organization? What areas of practice continue to resist implementing changes, even after extensive education?
[3] The ABC program—and our research on it—intentionally inverted traditionally problematic racial dynamics in the researcher-subject relationship as Dr. Haslerig, a biracial Black woman, took the lead on the research, whereas Dr. Hextrum, a white woman designed and implemented the anti-racist trainings.

ABC aimed to educate primarily white coaches and staff about institutionalized racism in and out of sport, and how to best serve a diverse student population. To achieve this goal, we designed a five-week series by creating a syllabus, diverse activities, and breakout/small group discussions. The series occurred via Zoom, both to achieve pandemic safety protocols and to ensure participants could engage in this content away from their workplace and/or in a safe and quiet space.

Both the content and pedagogy were grounded in CWS. As one example, we ensured that any knowledge about race and racism shared in the series emanated from Black scholars and activists because those who are most harmed by oppression and have worked to dismantle inequality have the truest view of the manifestations of power (Collins, 2005). For instance, rather than drawing on white scholar Robin DiAngelo's work to describe white privilege, we centered Black scholars' writing in this area, e.g., W.E.B. DuBois (Black reconstruction), Cheryl Harris (whiteness as property), and Kimberlé Crenshaw (intersectionality). As white facilitators, we were explicit that we were not the authorities on race and racism. Our class experts were the Black authors and speakers featured throughout the series. Our role was to push the mostly white participants to engage in the content provided by Black scholars and activists.

We also recognized that DEI trainings are often undercut by their temporary, periodic, and mandatory formats (Quaye et al., 2020). Despite the department's enthusiasm for ABC, we were clear that no one could be mandated to participate. We also were clear that ABC must be on-going and sequential, encouraging participants to volunteer to attend the first, and every subsequent session, to continually (re)build their knowledge base. We also departed from many anti-racist workshops and programs that train white people to identify their own racist biases, actions, and tendencies (Cabrera, 2018). CWS critiques such practices as (re)centering whiteness, perpetuating narratives of white victimhood, and doing little to improve the material lives of People of Color (Cabrera, 2018; Leonardo, 2009). Instead, we utilized CWS to train practitioners to foster a lifelong professional praxis committed to mitigating racism in their organization.

Along with chairing the OU Athletics Diversity Committee, Dr. Christensen is an adjunct instructor for the IAA program. As such, we both had experience teaching current and future athletic coaches, staff, and administrators. We drew on these experiences to select a range of topics for our pilot program. We decided that this series should review the foundations of racism in the U.S. Topics in the first series included reviewing the history of U.S. enslavement and colonialism; discussing various iterations of white supremacist ideology; and considering the link between racism and meritocracy. We designed a syllabus for the summer and required participants to read it before each session (see Table 2 for a sample syllabus). Prior to each session, I met with Drs. Christensen and Grummert to review the possible themes of the day and brainstorm activities and discussion questions. I began each session with a brief lecture on the day's content to build common and collective background knowledge on a core theme of the week. Next, we posed several discussion questions related to the week's topics. We gave participants a few minutes to sit quietly, reflect, and gather their thoughts. We then entered three, randomly assigned breakout rooms led by Drs. Christensen, Grummert, and myself. As breakout room leaders, our role was to facilitate the discussion and push participants to engage with the course readings and topics. We then returned to the main Zoom room and had each group share what occurred in their breakout room. We then facilitated a large group discussion, seeking common themes across the breakout

groups. I concluded the session with a "preview" for next week where I discussed how each reading related to the upcoming unit. This is a practice I use in classes, so students have a framework to engage with the texts.

Table 2

Representative Examples from ABC Syllabi

SUMMER 2020		
Topic	**Overview**	**Readings and Engagements**
July 14th "I Don't See Color": Colorblindness as Racism	This week we consider one manifestation of racism in the current era: colorblindness. This form of racism characterizes the apolitical, race-neutral discourse pervasive throughout sports and works to deny the real harms of racism facing Athletes of Color and the real privileges white people accrue.	--Letter from a Birmingham Jail on the white moderate --Bimper Jr., A.Y. (2015). Lifting the veil: Exploring colorblind racism in Black Student Athlete Experiences. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 39*(3), 225-243
July 28th Launching Forward: The case for reparations	In our final week of the summer we will consider how to address the intertwined racial and economic systems characterizing American capitalism and college sports. We will examine the case for reparations as one possible solution, discussing its possibilities and constraints.	--Coates, T-N. (2014 June). The Case for Reparations. *The Atlantic.* --Athlete activism, *The Undefeated.*
FALL 2020		
September 15th "Shut up and Dribble": Activism in Sport	Our first week introduces participants to the history of Black sport activist. In doing so, we consider how supremacy manifests in society, how Black communities have struggled against white supremacy, and how sport provides an ambiguous platform to retrench and resist racism.	--Smith, J. M. (2009). "It's Not Really My Country": Lew Alcindor and the Revolt of the Black Athlete. *Journal of Sport History*, 36(2), 223-244. --We Charge Genocide. (2014 September). *We charge genocide: Police violence against Chicago's Youth of Color.* --Players of the Pac-12 (2020 August 2). #WeAreUnited. *The Players Tribune.*
Oct 6th In/Hyper-Visible Athletes: Black Women's Contradictory Athletic Experiences	Racism sharply divides America into those who benefit from and those who are harmed by supremacy. Black Americans have long self-identified as a collective through their shared experiences with racial discrimination and efforts to undo said	--Statement by Combahee River Collective --Oluo, J. (2018). *So you want to talk about race.* Seal Press. Chapter 5: What is

	discrimination. But the power of racism is its varied manifestations. As race encounters other modes of oppression such as class, gender, and sexuality, the manifestations of discrimination morph and multiply. This week we center the experiences of Black women to investigate the contradictions, complexities, and multiplicitous dimensions of harm that result at the intersection of race and gender.	intersectionality and why do I need it? --Newman, B. (2018 September 11). *The long history behind the racist attacks on Serena Williams. Why Women bear the brunt of racist depictions*.
SPRING 2021		
March 10th Celebrating Women's History Month: Black women athlete activists	This week we are focusing on Black women's activist movements and how they have and continue to manifest in/through sport. We will be paying particular attention to not only the erasure of Black feminist politics in sport, but also what revolutionary aspirations often get lost when attempting to combat that erasure. In other words, we aim to foreground the radical political projects and theorizing that drive and exist within Black feminisms, rather than solely highlighting individual activists.	--Radicalizing Feminisms from "The Movement" Era. In *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* by Joy James --Joy James Conversation --How Black Women Athletes Paved the Way for the NBA Strike --Kelly Loeffler Doesn't Belong in the WNBA
April 14th Diversity in the workplace, Part I: How white supremacy aids and abets white advancement and retention in athletics	In response to participant feedback, we will provide two workshops discussing the overrepresentation of white people, and especially white men, in athletic leadership. We will begin with an overview of how white supremacy normalizes white people's advancement and retention within athletics. We will examine how the access and opportunity structure for athletics employment, hiring considerations, and climate favor those from white communities. We will also consider the relational impact of white supremacy in that white advantage always comes at the expense and harm of People of Color. We will consider how athletic departments designed to elevate white people multiply the difficulties facing those from Communities of Color to access, ascend, and thrive within college athletic employment.	--Cooper, J. N., Nwadike, A., & Macaulay, C. (2017). A Critical Race Theory Analysis of Big-Time College Sports: Implications for Culturally Responsive and Race-Conscious Sport Leadership. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics, 10,* 204-233. --Peruse TIDES *"race and gender reports" on professional sports, international sports, and sports media*. --Flattery, C. (2020 October 21). *The souls of Black professors*. Inside Higher Ed.

After each session, Drs. Christensen, Grummert, and I met to debrief. We discussed the prominent topics that arose, what problems participants encountered when engaging with the texts, signs of white guilt, immunity, or defensiveness (Cabrera, 2018; Fields, 2001; Leonardo, 2009), and how best to combat these. We used our debrief sessions to plan for the following week.

The Year-Long Program

At the end of the first workshop series (summer 2020), Drs. Christensen, Grummert, and I designed a participant survey. We sought insights from participants about their overall experience, asked for any feedback that could inform future workshops, requested their insights on what worked well/what could be improved, and asked how likely it would be for them to participate in future series. We disseminated the survey to anyone who attended at least one session. The surveys with participants yielded overwhelming support to continue to do this work and to keep the format relatively consistent. We communicated the survey results to OU's athletic leadership team and asked if we could continue the programming into the 2020-2021 academic year in a virtual format. OU Athletics supported our work and said they would continue to advertise our workshops to staff. Drs. Christensen, Grummert, and I spent August designing a fall workshop series. We also met several times to discuss what we learned from this first series and what could be improved for future work. Our conversations led to four major takeaways, which we used to design the year-long series.

First, we felt that the summer series drifted from its original mandate: responding to the murder of George Floyd and corresponding BLM movements. Each week was intended to relate BLM to athletics, but throughout the summer the conversations more often centered on athletic-specific concerns such as the lack of racial diversity in athletic staff. We recognized this drift but were encouraged because participants were still discussing a facet of racism. In preparing for the fall, we decided to scaffold the entire series with a focus on the tenets of BLM. We opened with athlete activism as an entry point to remind the participants about what racism is and what forms of activism have been successful in combating it. We closed the series with a discussion on carcerality, introducing participants to the specific ways that prisons, incarceration, and criminal justice produce racism and coordinate across institutions to institute carceral logics.

Second, we found the unique experiences of Black women were too often erased or diminished. The topics and examples raised by participants, instead, centered on Black men's experiences. We debated about how best to ensure Black women were heard in this space and concluded that we needed dedicated weeks to discuss topics particular to their experience (Carter-Francique et al., 2013; 2017; Ferguson, 2023). We created two weeks to discuss intersectionality. In the first week, the goal was to explore how Black women are both hyper- and in-visible in athletics. In the next week, we reviewed the Black transwomen's experience in sport as a way to explore race-based gender violence and surveillance.

Third, the readings and topics framed racism (accurately) as institutional and structural. However, participants often minimized athletics' institutional role in racism. They could recognize the markers of institutional racism in some areas, i.e., in housing, education, and politics, but often skirted the markers of institutional racism in their own workplace: intercollegiate athletics. As one example, while we were engaging in the summer workshop series, OU athletics returned football

and men's basketball to campus to train in the midst of the global pandemic. The university made national news for the number of players who caught COVID-19 and the inadequate institutional safeguards in place. When pressed on the racialized dynamic of which staff would most benefit from the return to play (predominately white) and which athletes would be most harmed (predominately Black), workshop participants denied the institutionalized mechanisms at work. Instead, they either avoided the topic altogether or cited the existing safeguards in place to diminish further COVID-19 spread. Building upon this experience, we designed the fall workshop series to incorporate weekly readings on the specific manifestations of institutionalized racism within intercollegiate athletics. We also added a topic on sport and colonialism to discuss Oklahoma's role in the attempted eradication of Native peoples and the continued harm the university enacts by using colonial symbols in their athletic mascots.

Finally, we observed that participants often minimized institutional racism by demanding "practical" solutions to the problems we described. We also felt that underneath this demand was a real desire to make a change in their daily lives. We decided to conclude each week by featuring a Black-owned business. We encouraged participants to modify their personal and professional habits to redistribute resources away from white-owned businesses and toward Black-owned establishments.

Throughout the 2020-2021 academic year, we hosted a total of 12 workshops. We also expanded the programming in Spring 2021, hosting three sessions collaboratively with Kansas State University. This idea arose from our fall series as ABC participants kept asking how their colleagues at other institutions grappled with similar issues and questions. Throughout the year, we preserved our CWS roots and extended our theory of change. We kept the curriculum rooted in the perspectives and experiences of those most harmed by racism, incorporated intersectional perspectives and theories, and pushed participants to consider their own role in perpetuating racism and as change agents. We also continued our evaluation practice, conducting a total of three surveys throughout the year and completing qualitative interviews with a subset of participants in Summer 2021. Participants overwhelmingly had positive reflections on ABC and asked for more programming. However, we were unable to continue the programming in 2021-2022 (see "A case of interest divergence" in this issue for a full explanation). In the next section, we discuss our vision for how ABC could better integrate with IAA's curriculum, expand to additional institutions, and remain sustainable.

The Unfinished Work of Our Racial Justice Initiatives

CWS advises that anti-racist approaches be endemic and ongoing (Cabrera, 2018). Therefore, the interventions we presented, i.e., curricular changes to IAA and yearlong programming within athletics, are insufficient. We recognize the need to continually revisit our curriculum, revising courses and pedagogy while creating new classes and content. Similarly, anti-racist programming for practitioners must be embedded in organizations – ideally a daily praxis – to gain traction. Based on experience, we attempted to design ongoing curricular and programming efforts but were unsuccessful in our implementation. We share our vision and constraints here for others to adapt in their own classrooms, graduate programs, and/or athletic departments.

Proposed Evolution of ABC

Throughout our yearlong ABC initiative in 2020-21, we knew we would need additional institutional support to maintain and grow the program. The program evolved into an almost full-fledged course, with the intellectual and emotional labor needed to keep our standards and commitment to quality and racial equity. Creating cultural change requires application. As insiders/outsiders, we were limited in our impact on athletic departments. However, peer learning and leadership have the potential to bridge those limits and benefit the organization (Lave & Wenger, 1991). With these constraints and possibilities in mind, we envisioned a praxis series where participants would apply the curriculum by examining and discussing specific scenarios that occur in their workplaces. Our proposed praxis series was informed by the lessons from Dr. Haslerig's course. Our hope was to develop a facilitator training program to recruit and educate athletic practitioners to lead both the workshop series and praxis meetings. The combination of content-specific, ongoing training designed by faculty experts and praxis workshops led by qualified practitioners could have provided multiple, sustained, and expansive opportunities for racial justice education throughout the organization.

Through the facilitator training program, practitioners would be taught to identify, disrupt, and redirect interpersonal and institutional racism. Training others within the athletic department to facilitate would have been invaluable for building the capacity of the partnership, cementing its sustainability, and – perhaps most importantly – increasing athletics' responsibility for this work so we could have continued to partner. This level of change not only needs repeated interaction and intervention; it also requires ongoing assessment and evaluation geared toward program improvement. Our praxis series would also need trained evaluators who could monitor the program's feedback and provide ongoing support to the facilitators. In doing all of the above, our hope was to cultivate a "community of practice," one that accommodates our overlapping areas of expertise to create a new community and that is committed to shared knowledge and participation with each other's cultural practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98).

In sum, to maintain ABC, we developed a proposal for a multi-year grant to support the sustainability of the collaboration, expand and deepen the programming, and study its impact. We planned to continue the faculty-led twice-monthly workshop series, develop an accompanying praxis series and a training series for new practitioner-facilitators, and implement iterative multi-method program evaluation and improvement. The vision and implementation of ABC were largely unfunded and done in our own time, unpaid (see article "A case of interest divergence" in this issue for elaboration on contradictions and challenges on unfunded/under-funded anti-racist work). We sought various funding and institutional support to make our vision a reality; none of those efforts were successful. Athletics and the College of Education were both supportive of compensation for our labor – as long as the *other* entity would fund it. Funding would have offset the immense labor in designing, maintaining, and studying the program. We also saw funding – whether in the form of direct payment, a negotiated course buyout, or through some other mechanism – as vital to demonstrating OU athletics' investment in anti-racist programming beyond performativity (Cooper et al., 2023). Sustainable programming required intentional capacity-building to have more and/or larger groups, include more institutions, build expertise and capacity *within* athletics, and free JRCoE faculty to share their expertise in generative ways with the partner organization, rather than perpetually serving as uncompensated facilitation labor.

Implications

Racial harm produced *within* athletics is often rendered invisible by athletics' prominent position as a site of racial integration in the popular imagination (Hextrum, 2020a; 2020b). Nonetheless, the reality of racial harm within athletics has material consequences for both the lived experiences and ultimate outcomes for college athletes. Although it is not a panacea, implementing targeted training on racial justice issues within athletics for practitioners is one aspect of any robust plan to address the severity of these issues and mitigate their negative impact on college athletes. Robust research on such programming is essential to evidence-based decision-making, program improvement, and the generation of scholarly knowledge.

In this article, we shared the design, implementation, and future vision of two interventions aimed at disrupting white supremacy in college sports organizations: (a) revising course content and program requirements for a graduate concentration in intercollegiate athletics administration and (b) developing ongoing anti-racist programming for athletics staff and administrators. We also acknowledge challenges in ensuring these efforts are replicable and sustainable. Although our interventions have been limited by institutional, cultural, and structural factors (those faced by ABC are discussed in depth in our article "A case of interest divergence" in this issue), we believe our theory of change could (and should) be applied by other institutions.

First, we suggest an audit and revision of the graduate curriculum to ensure critical approaches are interwoven through all courses. In our experience, the graduate curriculum may espouse commitments to diversity work and/or display that the classes engage with equity concepts, but including these words and phrases is a far step from implementing critical theory and research in the course content and methods. Furthermore, naming classes with certain critical language, and not delivering this content, *performs* diversity while obscuring systemic inequality (Leonardo, 2009). We recommend faculty who teach athletics-centric courses or seek to develop intercollegiate athletics concentrations ensure that they meaningfully incorporate critical theories in their course design and pedagogy.

Second, in the span of one class, it can be difficult to expose students to critical approaches and train them how to put theory into practice. While implementing critical programming, we suggest faculty prioritize exposing students to ways to enact change in their future careers. Initiating praxis courses, series, or discussions is vital to live up to the philosophy of critical theory (as most espouse moving beyond critique to activism, see Leonardo, 2009) and ensure we retain critical and diverse practitioners in the athletics profession.

Third, partnerships with faculty and athletics are rare and difficult but can produce transformational change if institutionally sponsored. Throughout this article, we offered lessons on how faculty could design an ongoing and sustainable model of anti-racist praxis in their units in partnership with athletic departments. However, such programming requires that faculty and facilitators' time, labor, and expertise be valued and compensated.

Lastly, we argue that the value of this anti-racist work persists despite its imperfection and impermanence. Although we are, of course, interested in developing effective programming and demonstrating the impact of our theory of change, we also recognize that harm reduction is an

ever-present goal that can be accomplished even in the midst of limitations and failures. Given the impact of harm reduction on individuals, we believe we have an obligation to keep implementing anti-racist interventions, even when the programming is inevitably temporary.

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A Case of Interest Divergence: An Athletic Department's Anti-racist Book Club

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Abstract: In this article, we present the implementation and eventual dissolution of anti-racist programming within one athletic department as an exemplar case. The anti-racist programming represented the potential of a counter-hegemonic effort to disrupt white supremacy in athletic organizations. It also represented a unique partnership between faculty and athletic practitioners. Throughout this article, we present the context of the case, discuss the challenges and opportunities of anti-racist programming, and describe the programming's dissolution. We frame our accounts and observations through the Critical Race Theories of interest convergence, divergence, and imperialist reclamation (Bell, 1980; Guinier, 2004; Nishi, 2022). We conclude with implications for higher education activists interested in engaging in similar efforts at their institutions.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, interest convergence, interest divergence, imperialist reclamation, anti-racist programming, anti-CRT movements

Anti-Racist Programming in Intercollegiate Athletics

In our article "Interventions in Support of Anti-racist Praxis in Athletics" published in this special issue, we detailed the theory of change behind two anti-racist interventions for athletics practitioners. One intervention changed a graduate curriculum while the other was a year-long anti-racist professional development series for intercollegiate athletics coaches, staff, and administrators. In this article, we center the establishment and dissolution of the anti-racist professional development series, marketed as the *Anti-racist Book Club (ABC)* by the athletic department. As discussed in the previous article, ABC arose through the strong, long-term working relationship between faculty in an intercollegiate athletic concentration of a graduate program and an athletic department. Our previous article alluded to the dissolution of the programming due to ideological misalignments and inadequate institutional funding. The program's promise and eventual demise, we believe, illustrates how interest convergence, divergence, and imperialist reclamation undermine racial justice work in higher education.

In building our case, we discuss the broader context – both nationally and institutionally – that spawned the anti-racist programming. We introduce the specifics of our case: a partnership between a graduate program focused on intercollegiate athletic administration (IAA) and athletics practitioners, both housed at the University of Oklahoma (OU). OU is both an exemplary and an

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exceptional case. As a member of the Big 12 Conference[1], it has a long history of winning conference and national championships. It is also a part of "Big-Time" athletics, with budgets and revenues exceeding $100 million annually. OU Athletics' public prominence, both regionally and nationally, positions the department as a potential leader in the field. As we discuss in greater detail here, instances of white supremacy and counter-movements for racial justice at OU have taken on national importance. The partnership between our graduate program and the athletic department also makes OU a somewhat exceptional case. OU has one of the few graduate programs nested in a School of Education with faculty who specialize in critically examining intercollegiate athletics administration. Here, we share insights about how our partnership emerged and evolved while working toward racial justice in college sports and broader society.

Our case is situated in various Critical Race Theories (CRT), namely interest convergence, divergence, and imperialist reclamation (Bell, 1980; Guinier, 2004; Nishi, 2022) to showcase a cycle we encountered in our racial justice work. We document: (1) how counter-hegemonic movements arise to combat white supremacy, (2) how such movements can become co-opted by hegemonic interests to preserve the status quo all while performing diversity work, (3) how the aims of institutionalists and insurgents diverge, (4) how insurgent efforts are stymied, and (5) how white supremacy expands its reach and territory following counter-hegemonic movements. In recounting this cycle, we do not offer a determinative account. Rather, we remain hopeful that such efforts can be impactful, at least on the individual level, even as we recognize and detail the challenges these theories predicted.

Context, Relationship(s), and Researchers' Positionality

OU's Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education (JRCoE) and Athletics Department have long-standing relationships. The JRCoE houses an academic concentration in Intercollegiate Athletics Administration (IAA), situated within the Adult & Higher Education (EDAH) Master of Education (MEd) program. IAA prepares aspiring athletic practitioners, including approximately 40 students who also hold graduate assistantships (GAs) in OU Athletics every year. Drs. Hextrum and Haslerig directed the concentration and taught in IAA for most of their faculty careers (see "Interventions in Support of Anti-racist Praxis in Athletics" in this special issue).

As researchers of issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in intercollegiate athletics, we have professional expertise on the various manifestations of power, inequality, and hierarchies cultivated throughout college sports (e.g., Haslerig, 2017; Haslerig et al., 2019; 2020; Hextrum, 2018; 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2021b; 2023). We have frequently delivered ad hoc presentations within athletics in support of DEI, including on behalf of the Athletics Diversity Council (ADC) and as Didactics for Athletics' psychological services (PROS) interns. Next, we discuss the history of racist incidents and racial justice programming at OU and within OU Athletics. Importantly, the development of ABC depended on our expertise and relationships built over time, predating the moment of extreme interest convergence that enabled the implementation of the more comprehensive program.

[1] We conducted ABC while OU belonged to the Big 12 conference. As part of the larger conference realignment and pursuit of ever-larger television revenue, OU left the Big 12 and joined the Southeastern Conference in 2024.

History of Racial Justice Programming in OU Athletics

OU Athletics designed the ADC program in the early 2000s to create entry-level opportunities for People of Color to gain high-quality practical experience in athletics administration as GAs. *Interest convergence* illuminates the origin of ADC. The program responded to concerns that a nearly entirely white workforce oversaw the extraction of the exploited labor of Black revenue athletes. Bringing more "diversity" into athletics could lessen the visual manifestation of college programs running as plantations – with white coaches and administrators disciplining, controlling, and profiting from unpaid Black laborers (Hawkins, 2010). Programs that create entry-level positions for People of Color were and remain common across higher education. Invariably, "focusing on the pipeline offers incomplete solutions to a complex problem" (Griffin, 2019, p. 275). These programs are designed to admit *token* People of Color into the organization to claim the unit has diversity (Nishi, 2022). However, that conception of diversity is limited to *numerical diversity* (Nishi, 2022), and representation alone cannot reform an institution. Numerical diversity is important; but it is a precondition not a solution for dismantling white supremacy (Bell, 1980; Guinier, 2004; Gusa, 2010; Nishi, 2022). Furthermore, these programs often limit People of Color's mobility – routing them toward careers with little advancement opportunities or inadequate mentorship (Gusa, 2010; Nishi, 2022). Lastly, pipeline programs usually only address the entrance to the organization, while failing to contend with leaks along the pipeline. This results in (a) failure to add meaningful numeric diversity (i.e., a revolving door) and (b) further overconcentration at the entry level. OU athletics reflected these pitfalls. Twenty years into the ADC program the organization had failed to meaningfully counter the over-representation of white administrators, particularly at the higher levels (in 2020, 81% of all OU athletics staff identified as white).

The ADC program within OU athletics encountered another common issue in higher education: mission creep (Gonzales, 2012; 2013). Over the years, the program morphed to address a secondary problem within the athletic department – inadequate diversity training and preparation of staff. ADC graduate assistants were in turn tasked with organizing (and in some cases implementing) ongoing staff development on diversity. ADC faced two conflicting imperatives: providing a career pathway into athletics for underrepresented populations and running professional development programs on topics related to DEI. These two imperatives are often in conflict, as the secondary purpose creates problematic labor expectations for untrained ADC interns and does not ensure high-quality programming. It also aligns with white institutional interests, as the department can claim they participate in practices like "inclusive excellence" or "diversity initiatives" without dismantling whiteness or supporting a critical mass of People of Color joining the organization (Nishi, 2022). In contrast, the interventions – IAA curricular changes, ad hoc workshops, and ABC – drew upon faculty members' content and pedagogical expertise, and, in doing so, explicitly challenged the racist foundations and organizational imperatives of the athletic department.

The regional and campus context of OU also enabled and informed our anti-racist interventions. A series of racist incidents rocked OU over the past eight years (see Figure 1), both localizing and underscoring the urgency of the concurrent national Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. OU Athletics had an important – and sometimes outsized – role in the student and institutional responses to these incidents. Furthermore, because we had pre-existing and ongoing

relationships with the athletics department and key stakeholders, we were uniquely positioned to partner with them on this anti-racist programming – and we were able to do so quickly in response to the renewed urgency of racial justice work during summer 2020.

Table 1

Non-exhaustive list of anti-Black incidents, organizing, and institutional responses at the University of Oklahoma

	Anti-Black incident and/or Black organizing	**IAA, athlete, and/or athletic dept. response and/or involvement**	**Institutional Response(s) and/or contemporaneous changes**
August 2014	Nationwide protests following Michael Brown's killing; conspicuously little organizing in Oklahoma		
Fall 2014	Ongoing *OU Unheard* protests and organizing by Black Students		Lack of institutional response, despite extensive college paper coverage
March 2015	SAE video leaks, fraternity singing racist chant that includes racial slur and lynching allusions; makes national news and garners response from President Obama	-Athlete Eric Striker releases response video on social media, national sport media coverage -Football cancels Spring practice and marches -Black athletes are invited to sit down with then-university president Boren	-Expulsion of chant-leaders -Eviction of fraternity chapter (suspension by the national org) -Statements condemning -Institute mandatory, one-time diversity experience training for incoming undergraduates -Creation of "Office for University Community"
2015-16	Trump campaign and subsequent election.		
2018	New university president, Gallogly; immediate layoffs and deep cuts; tensions with those serving traditionally marginalized and/or minoritized groups, insecurity about university support		
Spring 2019	Three blackface incidents; Protests and formation of Black Emergency Response Team (BERT)	-Athletics' all-staff meeting, organization of internal athlete affinity groups	-University town hall, public calls for Gallogly resignation
Summer 2019	Gallogly steps down, Harroz named interim university president		
Fall 2020	-Trump passes executive order banning CRT		-Search of inaugural OU VP for Diversity and Inclusion

Jan-Feb 2020	-Two faculty use racial slurs in class, no meaningful reprisal -Protests, sit in, & BERT demands (i.e., faculty training and provost firing)	-Some athletes participate in BERT protests	-Harroz meets with BERT -Commitment to required faculty diversity training (implemented online starting Fall2020) and full DEI course for freshmen (in development)
May 2020	International protests following police murder of George Floyd; little organizing in Oklahoma		
Summer 2020	Ongoing nation-wide BLM protests	-Athletics encourages attendance at BLM march, several team-specific protests & unity marches -"ABC" workshop series begins	-Harroz named as university president (without national search) -Provost steps down
AY2020-2021	Spring 2021- OK legislature passes 1775 (anti-CRT bill)	-Fall and Spring iterations of ABC -Spring 2021 ABC expands programming to Kansas State -OU athletics initiates hiring process for first athletics-specific DEI officer.	-New institutional equity officer starts in Fall2020 -Search begins for Director of Gateway Course & Ranked Renewable Term instructors
Summer 2021		-OU Athletics hires an Associate Athletic Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)	-Announce alternative Gateway to Belonging courses to avoid violating Oklahoma House Bill 1775
AY2021-22		-New Assoc AD of DEI brings programming in-house, implements changes in contravention of ABC theory of change	-Ongoing critique of Gateway implementation, including from instructors; Gateway course begins
Summer 2022			-Announcement that all communication must go through the central DEI office -Auditing and censoring of units' diversity statements, etc.

Note: Limited to Fall 2014 onward, when the first of our co-authors arrived at OU.

After the January 2019 blackface incidents, OU Athletics Department held an all-staff and college athlete Town Hall. Athletes of Color requested a space to connect with one another about shared experiences as minoritized students at a predominantly white institution. Support for this kind of space was immediate. Athletes' second request – a space for white athletes to meaningfully address their own role in (re)creating racism – was more difficult to implement. Due to their

respective expertise, Drs. Christensen and Hextrum facilitated the "White Allies Antiracism" group dedicated to dismantling white supremacy in college sport. Over the year, Drs. Christensen and Hextrum organized and shared materials for a white athlete allyship program, grounded in racial justice research and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS).

The white athlete ally program faced a major challenge: student efforts were undercut by power relationships within the athletic department. Coaches, staff, and administrators were unaware of, and at times unwilling to engage in, racial justice work. We invited OU athletics staff to voluntarily attend our meetings, but they declined. Athletes also said that when they attempted to discuss racial justice with their teams during or outside of practice, their efforts were rebuffed or shut down. They were told that practice should focus on athletic-specific topics such as proper form when tackling. These tactics by coaches demonstrate how race-neutral discourse is deployed to inaccurately position athletics as free from racialized processes. Race-neutral discourses allow white individuals and organizations to evade culpability in the racialized experiences of athletes and abdicate responsibility for ameliorating racial harm (both generally and that which is specific to athletics; Hextrum, 2020a; 2021). Hearing athletes recount these stories showed us the extreme need to intervene at the staff and administrator levels. Without that parallel intervention with practitioners, empowering white athletes to become allies was insufficient to create racial change in athletic department cultures.

Throughout 2019 and 2020, Drs. Christensen and Hextrum had ongoing discussions about how to develop racial programming for athletic coaches, staff, and administrators. Yet, with our more-than-full-time jobs and an apathetic (and sometimes resistant) OU administration, we could not build the momentum needed to establish regular, ongoing workshops for coaches and staff. In May 2020, following the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, college athletes across the nation demanded that athletic departments facilitate interracial dialogue between Black college athletes and the overwhelmingly white athletic staff; implement critically and empirically grounded racial justice training for white athletic staff; and create departmentally-sponsored spaces to address systemic racism in intercollegiate athletic programs. This form of activism in college sports reflects how athletes use their broader social standing and status to pressure administrators to change the structure, policy, or practice of athletic departments (Cooper et al., 2023a). The combination of recurrent police murders and Black athlete activism convinced OU athletics to finally implement critical racial justice workshops. Thus, the ABC program arose from those calls and the long-term relationship(s) between OU athletics and the IAA graduate program.

Theory: Interest Convergence/Divergence

2020 laid bare the ongoing racial injustices and inequities within the United States, thereby creating an opening to deepen and expand racial justice initiatives across all terrains of social life, especially sports. An unprecedented number of Black college athletes (53%) participated in some form of racial justice protest between the summer of 2020 and winter of 2021 (Cooper et al., 2023b). Additionally, college athletes used their platform to draw attention to inequities within sport and beyond, linking their racial exploitation in athletics to broader racial violence (Cooper et al., 2023a). Recurring and unprosecuted killings by police, and other state-sanctioned violence against Black people, reinvigorated and expanded the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement while

the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately ravaged Black and Brown communities. Moreover, the Trump campaign and presidency (2015-2020) mainstreamed white supremacist discourse and violence, stoking white grievance about minority advancement and reviving eugenics-era theories about inherent racial difference (Leonardo, 2020). Trump's 2020 defeat further emboldened and radicalized this backlash.

The resurgence of BLM in 2020 was often referred to as a "racial reckoning" that would allegedly usher in an enduring societal correction. In hindsight, the summer of 2020 unfolded through the logics and power dynamics of *interest convergence*, later setting up an *interest divergence* (Bell, 1980) and imperialist reclamation (Nishi, 2022; Thompson Dorsey & Venzant Chambers, 2014). Bell's (1980) notion of *interest convergence* contends that "the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). Key to Bell's theory is the notion of accommodation. The portions of racial equity that align with white interests will never offer true racial equality because such effort "threatens the superior societal status of middle- and upper-class Whites" (p. 523). Instead, the accommodations resemble an "appearance" of racial justice; an appearance that must be legible and laudable to white-dominant society (Bell, 1980, p. 523). Thus, when racial equity is approached through the logic of *interest convergence,* the resulting changes are always incomplete, temporary (Bell, 1980), and, as Guinier (2004) found, often stigmatizing to racial minorities.

Interest convergence also establishes the conditions for a subsequent *interest divergence.* Divergence arises "when Whites in power decide that the interest convergence balance is no longer tipped far enough in their favor, interests diverge and there is severe backlash and power grab by Whites" (Nishi, 2022, p. 250). Convergence/divergence need not unfold linearly. Interest divergence can originate from white people who felt left out of the original convergence, as was the case with poor, rural, and working-class whites during the Civil Rights Movement (Guinier, 2004). Poor white backlash to the Civil Rights movement occurred concurrently with racial liberalism and progressive reform (Guinier, 2004). Thompson Dorsey and Venzant Chambers' (2014) notion of *imperialistic reclamation* also speaks to the concurrent racial process of re-establishing white supremacy in and through interest convergence. Imperialistic reclamation names how white people seize back – and extend – their power over racial minorities, as infamously exemplified by the concept of "Make America Great Again."

Summer 2020 saw the greatest racial uprising since the Civil Rights movement. Yet, like the Civil Rights movement, BLM's vision of racial justice – predicated on the demand that all US institutions recognize and support Black people as fully human – misaligned with white elites' interests (i.e., to maintain white control, authority, and dominance over American life). The modest yet powerful call of BLM – that *Black Lives Matter* across all aspects of society – proved too threatening to white supremacy. In this case, we discuss how we attempted to enact BLM in one athletic department. Our experience offers one example of how the cycle of interest convergence, divergence, and reclamation, resets racial hierarchies and stymies justice efforts (Thompson Dorsey & Venzant Chambers, 2014).

Interests Converge: The Development of ABC Workshops

Athletic departments are often the most prominent representatives of their institutional hosts (Bernhard, 2016). As such, in 2020, athletic administrators faced immense external pressure from the public as well as pressure from Black athletes to respond proactively to exigent racial inequities. This external pressure established the conditions for interest convergence: *inaction* by athletic departments at this moment would have harmed their status more than partial action toward reforming their policies, practices, and culture. In this context, OU's athletic administrators and staff recognized and acknowledged they were undereducated on race and racism and therefore unprepared to enter, much less *host*, racial dialogues. Still, they were newly inspired to work toward racial justice and recommitted to supporting Athletes of Color. A formalized partnership between OU athletics and JRCoE emerged from this acute and time-sensitive need for a foundational racial justice education program for athletics practitioners, yet it was also the culmination of years of less formal partnership(s) and trust-building. The series, titled the *Anti-Racist Book Club* (ABC), was a response to 2020's national racial justice movements. We designed our intervention to identify and disrupt manifestations internal to college athletics. (Please see "Interventions in Support of Anti-racist Praxis in Athletics" in this special issue for a longer discussion of the naming and branding tension in ABC.)

The calls for ongoing anti-racist programming coincided with the NCAA's suspension of all athletic practice and competition. With existing practice schedules and routines upended, coaches were more willing – since there was little sacrifice on their part – to use designated athletic training times for racial justice conversations. Additionally, Black athlete activists were drawing attention to the racially exploitative labor systems of college sports, with Pacific-12 conference (Pac-12) players issuing a set of demands before they would return to play (Associated Press, 2020). These actions might have persuaded white athletic department officials that (modest) racial justice reform was in their *interest* if they hoped to preserve the collegiate model of athletics.

The first step required listening to Black college athletes and designing any forthcoming programming according to the needs they articulated. To this end, OU and Kansas State University Athletic Departments collaborated on "Humanity Talks," a nation-wide listening session that invited Black college athletes to name and discuss the most pressing racial inequities in college sports. Over 550 college athletes, coaches, staff, and administrators attended the session; Drs. Christensen and Hextrum participated as facilitators. Two major recommendations from the listening session were that white staff and coaches, in particular, (a) need athletic-tailored training on race and racism and (b) should create space for community members to dialogue about race and racism. These objectives are interdependent: staff cannot productively create space for racial dialogue unless they have further training.

After the Humanity Talks, Drs. Christensen and Hextrum created a summer-long workshop series for staff and coaches to discuss race and racism in their units. The programming intended to (re)educate primarily white coaches and staff on how white supremacy manifested in college athletics and to disrupt racism in their workplace (see "Interventions in Support of Anti-racist Praxis in Athletics" in this special issue for a longer discussion of the theoretical and pedagogical approaches undergirding ABC). Initially, Dr. Haslerig was also asked to contribute to the workshop series; she refused in order to oppose the disproportionate emotional and material labor

so often asked of Women of Color. She remained in conversation with the facilitation team. The ABC program – and our research on it – intentionally inverted traditionally problematic racial dynamics in the researcher-subject relationship so that Dr. Haslerig, a biracial Black woman, took the lead on the research, whereas Dr. Hextrum, a white woman, designed and implemented the anti-racist trainings. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that Dr. Hextrum's positionality as a white woman likely lent her credibility, access, and autonomy in creating the ABC program, whereas Dr. Haslerig or other Scholars of Color may not have been trusted by athletic administrators (nor participants) with as much latitude in designing the curriculum.

The collaboration between OU athletics and faculty from JRCoE to provide racial justice programming was even more remarkable given athletic departments' notorious insularity. Scholars have documented the difficulty of, and population-specific tactics for, obtaining access to do research within college athletic departments (e.g., Benson, 2000; Bimper et al., 2013; Carter-Francique et al., 2013; Hextrum, 2018; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). This partnership, including JRCoE's control of curriculum development, and the invitation to research the partnership itself (and its products), was unprecedented. As critical scholars who have published research critiquing the norms, practices, and impacts of intercollegiate athletics on equity in various contexts (Haslerig, 2017; Haslerig et al., 2019; 2020; Hextrum, 2018; 2020a; 2020b; 2021), being invited to partner with the athletic department is both rare and indicative of an organizational willingness to be challenged and grow.

Early Signs of Divergence

As soon as ABC began, interest divergence emerged. On May 26, 2020, OU athletics announced that in-person football practice would resume on July 1st as teams across the US planned for a Fall season (SoonerSports, 2020). With no vaccine in sight, hospitals at capacity, and deaths climbing, most of US life remained quarantined, yet not football (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2020). Athletes across the country protested the return to play by posting on social media, calling for safer conditions, and opting out of the Fall season (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2020). Despite the resurgence of BLM and COVID-19, little materially changed in college sports in the summer of 2020 (Cooper et al., 2023b). Athletes, especially those in revenue sports, were coerced to return to campus and face-to-face practices. Overall, the "underlying dynamics" of football, "a sport built on the physical sacrifice of unpaid workers," the majority of whom are Black and rendered expendable, were left "entirely unchanged" (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2021, para. 20).

As we [Dr. Hextrum and colleagues] developed the programming, we recognized that our own roles were contradictory and tension filled. We agreed to provide the programming during the height of the pandemic *only* if we could do so virtually. As knowledge-workers – a group that largely could and did work safely from home during the early days of the pandemic – we had the privilege to conduct ABC virtually (Jones, 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2020a; 2020b). Throughout the summer of 2020 we conducted ABC via Zoom, safely isolated in our homes or private offices. Meanwhile, Black football players returned to play to fund the salaries of the athletic department employees we sought to (re)educate. We attempted to engage participants in a conversation about the contradictions of conducting our anti-racist work in relative safety while Black athletes put their lives on the line. We pressed participants to consider the immense sacrifice(s) college athletes were making to fund their salaries. In raising these

conversations, white participants displayed defensive moves, e.g., changing the subject, saying race was not the driving force in a situation, or blaming the victim (DiAngelo, 2011). Such tactics are common when white people are forced to reconcile with their racial advantages (DiAngelo, 2011). For instance, participants said that football players were often "better off" or "safer" when living on campus and competing for universities rather than returning to their home communities and sheltering in place. This defensive move (re)positions racial exploitation as *benevolence* and reinforces racial tropes of downtrodden, impoverished, Black athletes *saved* by sport (Hextrum, 2021). Moreover, rather than acknowledge the racial disparities between who could and could not work safely from their own home – in athletics, the mostly white department staff worked remotely, whereas the mostly Black unpaid front-line athletic laborers in football had to train and compete in person – white athletic staff and coaches in ABC parroted the athletic department's position that athletes *choose* to play for the love of the game. The language of choice has long been deployed to excuse structural inequality, inure dominant groups to the harms ensured by disenfranchised populations, and maintain status-quo power relations (Leonardo, 2004; 2009; Mills, 2003; Nishi, 2022).

At this same time, the conditions that created the interest convergence – national racial uprisings and Black athletes' threatening to walkout of their athletic obligations – were eroding. Return to play reset the established racial hierarchies of athletics. During May 2020, athletic departments were uncertain if a football season would occur at all. The combination of public concerns about the pandemic and the promise of racial reckonings that could reset labor relations in athletic departments placed the Fall 2020 season in jeopardy (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2020; 2021). Football players across Power Five Conferences organized Twitter campaigns to request increased safety precautions and racial justice measures (Cooper et al., 2023b). As the summer wore on, athletic departments were successful in their efforts to pressure athletes to return to practice and competition. Several high-profile athletic leaders and coaches participated in public and symbolic efforts to support athletes' concerns – retweeting BLM statements, wearing anti-racist t-shirts, or marching in racial justice efforts – yet these same officials did not substantively work toward reforming the racially exploitative underpinnings of college athletics (Cooper et al., 2023b). Instead, the combination of symbolic efforts of support (i.e., temporarily hosting racial justice workshops) and coercive efforts (i.e., threatening to revoke scholarships) prevented progressive changes. By Fall 2020, the football season *returned to normal* (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2020; 2021). In turn, athletic leaders safely reclaimed their role as beneficiaries of racial exploitation. Return to play, therefore, initiated *interest divergence.* Athletic departments no longer had an *interest* in supporting racial justice initiatives. While observing the divergence unfold, we continued with our workshop efforts. Individual white members – often low-ranking – were still interested in learning about and participating in racial justice efforts, however limited.

Challenges for Sustainability: Dissolution of ABC

ABC required tremendous intellectual and emotional labor, which was ultimately uncompensated. Un- or under-compensating racial justice work reflects interest divergence – it may be in white organizations' interest to pursue this work, but only when it costs little (Nishi, 2022). By asking for compensation, our interests diverged. OU Athletics was unwilling to sacrifice *any* of their financial or material power – we requested the equivalent of the adjunct teaching rate (a few thousand dollars for a department whose annual budget exceeds $100 million) – to design

and lead racial justice programming. After a year of sustained program development, expansion, and delivery, OU athletics offered $1,500 in research funds to Dr. Hextrum alone. Dr. Grummert (a graduate student at the time) and Dr. Christensen received no compensation. This was after repeatedly assuring Drs. Hextrum and Grummert that they would be compensated for the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 sessions. Only exploitative labor practices were in their interest.

We sought grant funding to create research infrastructure as well as partnership sustainability and capacity-building. These activities included: continuing the workshop series; developing a Praxis Series; creating and implementing training for new practitioner-facilitators; iterating multi-method program evaluation and improvement; and hiring a postdoc to assist with program evaluation. This support was vital to advance our partnership and to realize and institutionalize our racial justice efforts. Our program vision would have created a lasting and sustainable model utilizing reciprocal partnership across OU athletics and JRCoE. By training additional facilitators, we could have built the capacity to hold more and/or larger groups sessions, we could have expanded to additional institutions, *and* we would have ensured that JRCoE's faculty expertise was shared and utilized in generative ways. Unfortunately, not only were we not awarded the grant funding to support the institutionalization of ABC, but OU Athletics withdrew funding to support facilitators after the fact. The undervaluing and disrespect of our time, expertise, and labor fractured our partnership.

As white women facilitators, we recognized the need for us to take on the labor of DEI work so that People of Color were not further traumatized and burdened with it (Quaye et al., 2020). We also recognize our own inadvertent complicity in devaluing DEI initiatives by ultimately doing this work for free (under false pretenses, yet the impact persisted). Due to that understanding, as well as the deep sense of betrayal engendered by the remuneration bait-and-switch, we paused our involvement in ABC in the summer of 2021.

In 2022, OU Athletics approached the facilitators separately to request they restart the program. During one meeting, it became clear that athletics' leadership misunderstood the nature and content of the intervention, given that they belittled the rigor and scope of the program, and ultimately attempted to appropriate ABC – the product of Dr. Hextrum's immense intellectual investment and labor – and reproduce it without the appropriate expertise or quality controls.

We also paused our work due to the national imperialistic reclamation occurring in 2021 against Critical Race Theory (CRT), particularly within education. In September 2020 President Trump passed Executive Order 13950 "Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping", an effort to curb diversity training throughout the federal government (Federal Registrar, 2020). The executive order prohibited discussions of meritocracy, privilege, biases, and colorblindness and was widely seen as the first anti-CRT legislative effort (Wallace-Wells, 2021). In 2021, over 20 states, including Oklahoma, passed similar legislation at the state level, restricting how educators discuss race, gender, class, and sexuality in education (Hextrum et al., 2022). Oklahoma's HB1775 targeted higher education by preventing any mandatory curriculum, training or orientation with content alleged to include race and sex stereotyping and bias. The bill also prohibited any "sexual counseling" (Hextrum et al., 2022). In the lead up to the bill's passage, OU athletics was conspicuously silent, even as the bill prohibited any mandatory training related to DEI in higher education – training their own department had hosted and solicited for decades. Without clear

guidance or protection from the university about how to engage in racial justice work in this climate, we paused our trainings. Here, *reclamation* is evident. The supposed racial reckoning never achieved its stated aims (i.e., recognizing Black people's humanity) and white elites and policymakers extended their advantage by stripping educators of their modest ability to openly discuss racism in school. The nationwide anti-CRT movement (re)positions white people as victims of a villainous CRT curriculum (Hextrum et al., 2022). As of publication, 229 local, state, and federal agencies have introduced 750 anti-CRT governmental actions (University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA] School of Law, 2023). This vehement conservative reclamation has expanded beyond CRT and is permeating into attacks on any area of American life that is perceived as a threat to those in power or the status quo.

Conclusion

This case documented the difficulties of creating sustainable, anti-racist work within a white supremacist society. We centered one unique partnership – between critical scholars of sport in a college of education and athletic department practitioners – to illustrate how whiteness can disrupt radical change to institutions. In describing the rise and eventual dissolution of our workshop, we situated our insights within the CRT concepts of interest convergence, divergence, and imperialist reclamation (Bell, 1980; Guinier, 2004; Nishi, 2022). Our case arose from and paralleled anti-racist movements occurring at the national level. ABC began during international, months-long protests in support of Black Lives. During the summer of 2020, white interests turned en masse to racial justice work, with spontaneous groups of white people creating CRT book clubs and downloading anti-racist syllabi (Johnson, 2020). White consciousness-raising was on the rise.

College athletics, in large part due to Black athlete resistance and activism, became a prominent site for racial reckonings in the summer of 2020 (Cooper et al., 2023a; 2023b). This organizing provided the opening and momentum needed to introduce anti-racist work to white athletics staff and coaches. We introduced ABC in the Summer of 2020 in an attempt to embed anti-racist programming within OU athletics. We hoped that doing so would eventually reform white supremacist organizational cultures, practices, and policies. In sharing our story of implementing ABC, we documented a cycle in which white powerbrokers and institutional leaders may initially support and endorse anti-racist work (if it seems in their interest to do so) but later co-opt, withdraw, and undermine racial justice programming. We found our aims initially aligned with OU athletics but quickly diverged in how we approached our work, designed and marketed our programming, and imagined our future goals for change.

As the summer wore on, college athletics seemed particularly resilient to anti-racist efforts and Black activism. Athletic departments did not change their operating principles and instead coerced athletes to return to in-person play (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2021). Concurrently, OU athletics withdrew support from ABC, declining to fund our initiative. Without a sustainable funding model, we could not effectively embed our programming in the department. Spring 2022 was our last iteration of the programming as we withdrew our support. But OU athletics indicated they would continue with a version of ABC even though they lacked the expertise and infrastructure to do so. By hosting supposedly anti-racist workshops, OU athletics can present themselves as supporting equity without undoing whiteness in their organization. In this sense, they can cultivate the *perception* of an equity-focused unit while expanding and extending their

racially exploitative athletic model. Cultivating a perception of diversity while expanding inequality is a common tactic observed when white supremacist institutions host uncritical diversity initiatives (Griffin, 2019; Guinier, 2004; Nishi, 2022).

The dissolution of ABC somewhat paralleled the national backlash and imperialistic reclamation sweeping the US. The wave of anti-CRT legislation, e.g., banning curriculum, reading materials, training, and books from public institutions, has enveloped most of the US (UCLA School of Law, 2023). Eradicating the discussion of race from public workshops and classrooms reflects imperialist reclamation as the white elite push legislation to counter-act racial consciousness-raising efforts designed to elevate Black Lives in all sectors of society.

Throughout this article, we have described the unrelenting attempts to preserve white supremacy despite national activism and advocacy. In writing this article, we reflected on our experience at the local level when enacting change on our university campus. As CRT scholars ourselves, we were consciously aware of the interest convergence, divergence, and reclamation cycle at work. Yet we continued our programming for 12 months while the athletic department disengaged, co-opted, and eventually undermined our partnership. We asked ourselves, on more than one occasion, if racial justice programming for white people could ever work. We do not have a neat and clear answer to that question, nor have we attempted to produce one in this article. Yet the outcome of that ambivalence should not be to cease all racial justice efforts. Throughout our year-long programming, white people voluntarily came week after week, eager to learn, hoping to change, and committing to do more for Black Lives. Most of these participants had not previously engaged in racial justice work and, likely, would not have done so without the initial institutional encouragement from the athletic department and the ongoing structure of our workshops. We believe that these small, individual moments of consciousness-raising can and do have an impact on organizations. We will continue to advocate for our vision of transformative intersectional racial justice (see article “Interventions in Support of Anti-racist Praxis in Athletics” in this special issue), one that is not compromised and co-opted by white elites attempting to preserve their authority and power.

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"In the Arena": Reflections on Critical Public Engagements in College Sport

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Abstract: In this paper, we reflect on the challenges, opportunities, motives, imperatives, and strategies of engagement associated with public scholarship about college athletics. Public scholarship has become a trendy topic across the academy as universities increasingly push academic workers to boost institutional brands suffering from purposeful chronic defunding through highly visible engagement in the public sphere. We argue that although public scholarship is a vital part of academic work, principal imperatives driving this form of labor should be political/ethical rather than promotional. It is therefore not enough for academic workers to simply generate data for academic audiences, as without public dissemination, the impact is inherently limited and exclusionary. While public engagement is a necessary and important part of our work, it is fraught with the contradictions inherent to the critique of the same institutions that demand that engagement in the first place, as well as the associated collateral intellectual and personal damage that comes from wading into public debate. We provide an autoethnographical account of our personal experiences as scholars intervening in public discourse around the rights of campus athletic workers and our own encounter with ESPN college basketball personality and former college coach Dan Dakich. This account enables us to trace some institutional and personal strategies for educators to create protective measures, build community, and mobilize solidarity against real or perceived harassment. Such tactics aim to help scholars produce public work that genuinely contributes to societal conversations, challenges prevailing misconceptions, and centers the voices of minoritized, abused, and exploited athletes above all.

Keywords: Public scholarship, autoethnography, alt-Right, college sports, ESPN, harassment

Public Engagement as Political Labor

Public scholarship has undoubtedly become a trendy topic across the academy as universities increasingly push academic workers to boost institutional brands suffering from politicized attacks as well as purposeful chronic de- and underfunding through highly visible engagement in the public sphere. Yet, the focus on public scholarship has also been critiqued as a shift toward the "promotional intellectual" (Williams, 2018, para. 2). Although public scholarship is a vital part of contemporary academic work, it is perhaps taken for granted that the appropriate

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imperatives driving this form of labor can and perhaps should be political/ethical rather than promotional. For scholars who focus on the working conditions of college athletes, for example, it is not enough simply to generate data for academic audiences; without public dissemination, the impact is inherently limited and exclusionary. Academic-only publications leave little-to-no hope of ameliorating the unjust conditions we all share complicity in as members – with varying power – of the higher education community that faces college athletic workers. Indeed, academic paywalls and other academic gatekeeping techniques are exclusionary by definition. By preventing scholarship from entering public discourse, academic publications exclude from the conversation the very people we study, the people we are complicit in exploiting, and whose health and lives could improve the most. It is therefore a moral imperative for scholars – especially those who occupy relative levels of power and privilege in academia – who study varying forms of exploitation, harm, injustice, and exclusion, to put in the labor to make their work accessible for the communities they benefit from.

Public engagement is simultaneously fraught with the contradictions inherent to a critique of the very institutions that demand that engagement in the first place, as well as the associated collateral intellectual and personal damage that comes from wading into public debate (Cottom, 2017). We offer an autoethnographic account of our personal experiences as scholars intervening in public discourse around the rights of campus athletic workers and our own encounter with former ESPN college basketball personality and college coach Dan Dakich. In so doing, we offer a series of strategies that scholars might engage – centered around protection, community-building, and solidarity amongst educators – to handle online conflicts of their own. Though not exhaustive, it is our hope that these strategies can enable us to keep producing public work that genuinely contributes to societal conversations, challenges prevailing misconceptions, and centers the voices of minoritized, abused, and exploited athletes above all. We examine the stakes of public discursive antagonisms; the gendered and racial forms that harassment can take; and institutional, communal, and individual strategies for grappling with ensuing harassment. We also explore how this experience of media spectacle creates further grounds for solidarity between academics and athletes, as experiences of social media harassment and abuse become increasingly normalized for athletic workers and public scholars alike.

On the Promise and Challenges of Public Work

In the 2004 Presidential Address at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Michael Burawoy (2005) famously called for sociologists to respond to the growing gap between sociological discourses and the social world under study. Burawoy asked sociologists to acknowledge the "umbilical cord that connects sociology to the world of publics" and its "particular investment in the defense of civil society" (Burawoy, 2005, p. 1). Burawoy explicitly called for the development of a distinct form of *public sociology*, whereby scholars would focus on connecting their academic activities with public dialogue within and among public spheres. Similarly, in the 1989 Presidential Address before the American Historical Association, Louis Harlan (1990) noted the importance of structural changes within academia and the need for a new modality of public history to respond to the discipline's "weakening hold on the general reading public" (Harlan, 1990, p. 3). Indeed, these calls are perhaps reflective of a broader trend among social science and humanities disciplines to make their work more digestible and accessible to various publics in order to 'save' their disciplines from the perils of advanced neoliberal capitalism

and its systematic privileging of skills-based educational programs. The growth and development of public scholarship has, to some extent, likely benefited academic departments at elite institutions in the social sciences and humanities through its inherent self-promotional characteristics.

The benefits of public scholarship are clear: various publics can benefit from drawing on research communities' knowledge and skills to address important problems and issues; universities and academic workers can strengthen their teaching and research programs, which enrich the student experience; civil society benefits from democratic involvement of knowledge sectors; scholarly debates are part and parcel to contemporary democratic processes; and research helps us understand myriad forms of harm and inequality experienced by the most vulnerable in society – groups that tend to have little access to higher education and research in contemporary racial capitalist societies (Alter, 2005).

But as Tressie McMillan Cottom (2017) has reminded us, when the top figures in academic disciplines speak of public scholarship such as scholarly association presidents, they typically mean discourse that serves *traditional erudite scholars*. That is, the group that reflects the status quo beliefs and practices of the disciplines. What happens, however, when scholars challenge orthodoxy? When they engage in critical public scholarship that challenges status quo ideas and the groups that benefit most from them?

While the promise of public scholarship is mostly fraught with idealistic and optimistic ends, much less discussed are the significant challenges, issues, and practices that threaten the basis of public engagement praxis. People can choose to respond to public scholarship that challenges status quo assumptions about the social world with a far more combative and overtly dangerous attitude than academic work typically receives. Such risks include harassment, threats, abuse, and even negative professional and personal consequences that are not experienced equitably among racialized, gendered, class-based, and otherwise minoritized individuals and groups (Bhattacharyya & Murji, 2013).

For these reasons, our experiences cannot be universalized. The three authors are racialized as white, are cisgender and heterosexual, and occupy privileged locations within our social and professional worlds. This includes the community we've built through our podcast, *The End of Sport.* We are thus significantly inoculated by our proximity to white supremacy against the worst forms of abuse experienced in both online and in-person environments by people far more historically excluded and minoritized than us. Our shared whiteness, for example, shields us from the harmful racism and misogynoir that our colleagues racialized as Black or Brown often endure. These realities motivate our ongoing commitment to publicly identifying and resisting fascism, white supremacy, etc. on the podcast, Twitter, and elsewhere.

We wish to issue a significant content warning to readers regarding misogyny, threats of physical and sexual violence, and references to white genocide. We consciously chose to share a select number of the harassers' discriminatory engagements and threats. This online targeting shows how Kalman-Lamb and Mellis did not experience harm to equivalent degrees based on their genders within American patriarchal and misogynistic norms. Including the threats enables us to accurately detail how 'the Right' can choose to respond to public scholarship conducted by people

with our positionalities. Furthermore, it allows us to imagine how much worse it can be for people who are more minoritized. These realities can be hard for people to envision until they experience it themselves. Leaving them out of the analysis would, we believe, undercut the necessity of the strategies we propose at the end. It would, moreover, misrepresent our experiences and the trauma that ensued for Mellis especially.

The events documented herein might be considered a mild iteration of the harassment and abuse that are ubiquitous aspects of political engagement for marginalized scholars and activists from all fields. It is in this context that our intervention is based. We explicitly aim to shed light on some of the challenges associated with critical public scholarship by focusing on our own experiences of harassment and abuse in the online space. We hope that by illustrating concretely the Right's strategies and the language they weaponize against public scholars, more of us can push collectively for institutional protection, actively show solidarity with and assist one another in times of crisis, and enrich communal bonds of support and resistance. As fascism continues to grow globally and locally in the United States (U.S.), our communal resistance and solidarity will be more important than ever. Institutions must understand that people on the Right purposefully attack individual scholars as an avenue to control institutional legitimacy, funding sources, enrollment numbers, higher education, and education as a whole.

Methods: On the Experience of Public Scholarship

Borrowing from Hayano (1979) along with Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 739), we approach autoethnography as a genre of "writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" However, autoethnographic work does not end within cultural systems. We contend that autoethnographic methods are unique and nuanced tools researchers can use to connect first-person accounts and personal expressions, narratives of the self (Richardson, 2000), and self-stories (Denzin, 1989), with much broader *political* discourses. In this way, we view public scholarship as a mediator between the personal and the political (Jones et al., 2012) and argue that the analysis of those interrelations is a crucial component of academic work as scholarship becomes more and more normalized within academia (Alexander, 2016). Just as sport is *always* political, so, too, are the academic work and critical public scholarship that focuses on sport.

The following analysis is based on our experiences engaging in critical public sports scholarship from 2020 to the present. It includes a variety of mediums such as podcasts, social media (most notably on Twitter), public interviews, and several major mainstream media journalistic and opinion-editorial interventions. We draw our experiences primarily from a number of our encounters with high-profile sports media personalities, such as former college basketball player, coach, and ESPN analyst Dan Dakich, and subsequent interactions with social media users and audiences. In so doing, we explicate some of the strategies that folks who want to engage in public scholarship might find helpful as they navigate polarized spaces like sport.

The core of the conflict stems from a series of Tweets published on Dakich's personal account targeting college athlete Jalen Johnson, which were critiqued by Nathan Kalman-Lamb for 'punching down' an unpaid campus athletic worker (Kalman-Lamb, 2021d). The exploitation of campus athletic workers is a central theme of Kalman-Lamb's scholarly interest and thus

important to his public engagement work, as well as a core element of our podcast's project. Following this first interaction, Dakich began targeting Kalman-Lamb's personal and professional life while other critical sports scholarship community members, e.g., Johanna Mellis, interjected with their own scholarly expertise. Subsequently, Dakich subjected numerous scholars, including Mellis, to targeted personal and professional attacks on his Twitter – known as "X" since Elon Musk changed the name in July 2023 – and radio show. More specific details on this series of events are outlined below.

Based on these interactions with sports media members, we examine the stakes of public discursive antagonisms, the gendered and racialized forms harassment can take, and the forms in which abuse tends to manifest. Perhaps more importantly, we trace possible institutional, community, and individual strategies for grappling with ensuing harassment and the opportunities for building and mobilizing solidarity between academics, athletes, laborers, and critical sports journalists, who all tend to be targeted for online harassment.

We contend that our experience as critical sports scholars and, at times, academics who produce journalistic accounts of the intersections of harm, exploitation, race, gender, and class in sport, may help shed light on some of the challenges, contradictions, and collateral professional and personal damage that accompanies the necessary, important, and critical public work undertaken by scholars across disciplines and substantive areas. The act of willfully engaging in critical public scholarship *does not mean that* we, nor others, consent to public harassment or malicious *doxxing*, threats of harm or violence, or any other form of online or in-person abuse. Doxxing is defined here as the release of personal or identifying information about an individual on the internet. We hope this intervention offers a direct counter-narrative to the notion that public scholars 'bring it on themselves' by participating in public critique while, importantly, outlining a set of strategies for those to alleviate the potential for abuse and harm.

The most important contribution of this intervention is our attempt to trace some strategies for scholars interested in critical public scholarship to produce public work that genuinely contributes to important social and political discussions. We also hope to challenge prevailing misconceptions that permeate the public sphere and reinforce and promote social and racial justice that centers the voices of marginalized, abused, and/or exploited athletes above all, which often results in the direct targeting and harassment of those who challenge the status quo. Frustratingly, experiences of social media harassment and abuse have become increasingly common and normalized for athletic workers, critical sports journalists, and public scholars alike.

The Alt- and Increasingly Mainstream Right

Scholars have documented a set of familiar tactics used by those associated with the *alt-Right*, and increasingly by the *mainstream Right*. The alt-Right, or *alternative right*, is conceptualized as an "atomized, amorphous, predominantly online, and mostly anonymous" collection of groups (Hawley, 2017, p. 3). They constellate around a core belief that *white identity* is under attack from liberal elites, academics, and so-called *social justice warriors* (Hermansson et al., 2020) Globally, we are in what Cas Mudde (2019) has called the *fourth wave of postwar far-right politics,* whereby far-right ideas and politics are increasingly becoming mainstream.

One of the Right's many goals in America is to control the learning of history and education, a tactic that aligns with a decades-long conservative strategy traced by historian Nancy MacLean (2017). The alt-Right's alarming shift to the mainstream is visible through the GOP's intense pursuit of an *anti-Critical Race Theory* (CRT) strategy regarding classroom teaching. Their efforts center around the teaching of U.S. history: they seek to deny our nation's foundation in white settler colonialist dispossession and genocide of indigenous people and anti-Black enslavement, and how our resulting, systemic racism continues to oppress and harm groups deemed to be outside the acceptable bounds of white supremacy. Perhaps most well-known are their book bans and attempts to curtail the teaching of themes that address past and contemporary inequities, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., in the classroom at all levels. Attacks on the permanence of tenure have followed in states like Georgia, Florida, Ohio, Texas, Iowa, North Carolina, and more. Similarly, by June 2023, nearly half of U.S. states enacted roughly 60 laws related to banning transgender kids in sports, limiting children's access to LGBTQIA literature, and deciding whom doctors may treat based on sex assumptions (typically trying to eliminate transgender people's access to gender care), etc. (Parks, 2023). By attempting to control education and people's bodies, these laws aim to further entrench their perspective and views of the world in order to protect the status quo from what they perceive to be dangers to their position: feminism; the democratization of power and culture with the rise of social media; changing demographics; and the growing acceptance of Black, Brown, and LGBTQIA+ people's existence, human rights, and influence.

Activists, media personalities, and others with various levels of access to political power are also key figures in disseminating ideas and implementing strategies that harm marginalized communities. Christopher Rufo, Tucker Carlson, Chaya Raichik, Charlie Kirk – and Dan Dakich – often use humor and other tactics to label efforts towards diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism, anti-racism and feminism as evidence of supposedly anti-white movements like white genocide, socialism, and communism, (for more see Beran, 2019; Bjork-James & Maskovsky, 2017; Kusz & Hodler, 2023). This is not to say that Rufo and others are solely taking their cues from the Republican Party (GOP) Rufo for example, is considered a creator of the *anti-CRT panic*: in summer 2020, he urged the White House to implement an executive order to abolish Critical Race Theory training from the federal government on the *Tucker Carlson Tonight* show. Soon after, President Trump flew him to Washington, D.C. to help craft such an order that curtailed how contractors giving federal diversity seminars could talk about race (Wallace-Wells, 2021). Rufo successfully made a name for himself by stoking the anti-CRT fires: not only did he consult on language for over ten state bills restricting instruction or courses, but Florida governor Ron DeSantis appointed Rufo to the Board of Trustees at the New College of Florida in January 2023 (Wallace-Wells, 2021). The seemingly increasing alignment between such figures and political leaders continues to cement the authority and mainstreaming of formerly alt-Right ideas and tactics.

As a result of changing dynamics, educators at allegedly liberal institutions, such as universities and the mainstream media, are increasingly at risk of encountering coordinated harassment campaigns. Viveca Greene (2019) discussed how individuals employed by these institutions are not necessarily the primary targets of such campaigns; rather, the alt-Right seeks to attack the institutions *themselves* to sow distrust. Their other targets are the 'normie' audiences who they believe can be red-pilled or convinced through their slew of campaigns that white

(Greene, 2019), Christian, straight men are under siege and that liberal institutions are complicit in attacking them, undermining their authority, and even seeking to disempower them in society.

Indeed, those associated with the alt-Right don't seek to attack educators and academics individually but as a larger group with institutional influence in U.S. society. Richard Spencer laid bare his intentions in 2016 after George Ciccariello-Maher's Tweet-based controversy. The incident resulted in the latter's institution, Drexel University, rebuking Ciccariello-Maher's Tweets and the faculty member's resignation. Spencer said afterward:

> We are a bloc now with power. Institutions respond to us. A year ago, this same university wouldn't have blinked before responding to complaints with a generic "we support the free expression of our teachers" blurb…This is what winning looks like, people. You'd better get used to it (Anglin, 2016).

More recently, in April 2022 at Hillsdale College, Rufo declared a need to "lay siege to our institutions" such as K-12 education (Rufo, 2022, para. 1). Among the "aggressive means," he suggested included "attacking the credibility of our institutions" (Rufo, 2022, para. 20)

The main audience for these tactics consists primarily of white men, young and old alike, who feel as if the left-leaning movements and ideas listed above are actively trying to disempower and disenfranchise them. Within the sports world, these mostly young, educated, technologically savvy white men are often drawn to sites like Barstool Sports and Outkick, which deliberately eschew the political and cultural norms of neoliberal multiculturalism (Kusz & Hodler, 2023). At the time of the incident, Dan Dakich worked as a basketball sports commentator on ESPN and had his own sports talk radio show, *The Dan Dakich Show*, on a local network. Dakich expressed his most inflammatory remarks about us on sports talk radio, which emerged as a place where men feeling threatened by feminism and gay rights – and arguably movements for Black, Brown, and transgender political rights – could return to and express a prefeminist masculinity (Horrocks, 1994) It allows men to reproduce their conception of (white) male dominance through a re-inscription of ideas that support their desire to dominate others (Goldberg, 1998). For example, *The Jim Rome Show* is not simply a "completely obnoxious site of monolithic masculine discourse" in part due to its homophobic tenor; additionally, the show's focus on sexual identity and elision of racism make it a tool for the discrimination and oppression of others (Nylund, 2004, p. 160).

Although some listeners of Dakich's radio show likely overlap with Barstool's audience, many seem particularly drawn to a Bobby Knight ethos: a man who is well known for numerous abusive and violent interactions with athletes on his teams. This isn't surprising, considering Dakich played for Knight at Indiana University in the early 1980s and then coached with Knight for twelve seasons. Knight famously used physical violence against players. Not only did he throw a chair during a 1985 game, but a tape also emerged of Knight choking player Neil Reid in 1997. According to Indiana player Todd Jadlow's memoir, *Jadlow: On the Rebound,* Knight's physical and sexual violence seemed common and relentless (Cobb, 2022). He punched Jadlow in the head, squeezed players' genitals, threw tampons at Darryl Thomas, a Black player, and instructed managers to wallpaper Thomas' locker with photos of female genitalia, and much more. While we would be remiss to attempt a deconstruction of the formation of Dakich's subjectivity, it is easy to

see how Knight's behavior likely deeply influenced Dakich's approach to sports commentating and interactions with others. Knight's behavior maps onto mainstream and even far- and alt-Right ideologies and audiences. As we'll show, Dakich espouses similar views. Being hosted by a local Indiana station, Dakich's audience might not include as many educated and savvy white men as Barstool. But he shares affinities and employs tactics similar to Barstool and its president Dave Portnoy (Kusz & Hodler, 2023).

Our Experience: On the Stakes and Harm of Public Scholarship

Our foremost experience that received intense backlash from our public engagement arose due to sports commentators' unsubstantiated critiques of Duke basketball player Jalen Johnson in early 2021. Johnson announced on February 15, 2021, that he was opting out of the remainder of the 2020-2021 NCAA season to prepare for the NBA draft and recover from a foot injury. He announced this during the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, months before the U.S. had made vaccinations available to the majority of Americans. The stakes of Johnson's announcement, and the possible risks he accepted by opting out of the NCAA season, deserve nothing but admiration from onlookers. Johnson evidently prioritized his own health and safety amidst notoriously harmful working conditions. Notably, even if his decision was entirely motivated by a desire to prioritize his professional prospects, such a choice would be both entirely personal and eminently understandable given the profoundly exploitative conditions of college basketball. No worker owes unpaid labor to an institution. This, however, is not a widely held position. Though some of us applauded his decision, detractors abounded. As James Dator (2021) described it, "In a sport that so often shows a lack of care for athletes, Johnson decided to take care of himself – and people are mad" (Dator, 2021, para. 3). Indeed, many people – many white men – chose to respond with anger at the 19-year-old Black male athletic worker's self-protective decision. Those with the largest platforms on social media chose to shout their fury from the digital rooftops. Responses included CBS Sports commentator Jon Rothstein decrying Johnson's decision as quitting (Rothstein, 2021).

Our engagement began when Nathan Kalman-Lamb collated multiple commentators' Tweets to illustrate their self-serving hypocrisy. Some of them had over 259,000 Twitter followers compared to Johnson's 22,000 Twitter followers as of January 2022. The sports commentators 'punched down' on Johnson: they were invested in Johnson and others' continuing to play so they could comment and profit *from* the players' exploitation. As Kalman-Lamb pointed out, "Jalen Johnson may not be allowed to get paid for his name, image, or likeness, but why should that stop Seth Davis from cashing in on them?" (Kalman-Lamb, 2021b). By illustrating how many sports commentators chose to use their platforms to publicly humiliate Johnson, Kalman-Lamb demonstrated their commitment to reinforcing and profiting from the exploitation of college athletic workers. Out of all the sports media personalities who decried their anger, then-ESPN commentator and personality Dan Dakich went to the greatest lengths to double down on his stance to continue profiting from Johnson's decision. In one Tweet, Dakich mocked both the premise of Johnson's exploitation and those of us supporting him by saying, "Wait For It…the college basketball media will figure out a way to tell us that Jalen Johnson quitting Duke was because of him being 'exploited'" (Kalman-Lamb, 2021a).

From the start of Dakich's posts on Johnson, he aimed to *control through exclusion* who should and should not be allowed to engage credibly in the discussion over the athletic worker's decision. Dakich's efforts were an inherently political project. Much like how Dakich, Gottlieb, Rothstein, and others within the college sports media complex decried Johnson's opt-out, Dakich attempted to use similar mechanisms to discredit our expertise and keep us out of the discussion's arena. Dakich claimed that due to our lack of experience "in the arena" as athletes or coaches, we had no legitimate position from which to offer our analyses compared to him and his colleagues (Dakich, 2021a).

Returning to Viveca Greene's point that the alt-Right seeks to undermine the credibility of individual scholars to attack supposedly left-leaning institutions, Dakich likely aimed to delegitimize higher education's involvement in discussing college sport. Although he currently works at Outkick Media, a far-right sports site, Dakich at the time may not have self-identified as a member of the far- or alt-Right. However, Dakich proved extremely comfortable and even gleeful in using far-Right tactics in his engagement with us. Dakich's use of far-Right tactics is better associated in the sport realm with the company Barstool and its founder, Dave Portnoy. After being accused of a misdeed, Portnoy infamously refuses to apologize, reflect, and back down; rather, he goes on the offensive to protect himself and Barstool by portraying himself as the supposed falsely accused to his followers. He seeks their assistance to browbeat the victim(s) and his liberal and left-leaning detractors. His followers – known as 'Stoolies' and who Kusz and Hodler (2023) categorize as the 'white fratriarchy' – then rally to his defense in the digital space. This is exactly what happened when two women accused Portnoy of sexual assault in a *Business Insider* article in 2021: an online mob formed to follow Portnoy's lead to harass the *Business Insider* writer, editor, and others who shared the piece on social media. Mobilizing problematic audiences is a strategy that Dakich himself has welcomed, most notably by Tweeting to and reTweeting senior media members at Barstool and inviting them onto his Outkick show.

Dakich's claim was erroneous in at least three major ways: (a) athletic experience, while immensely valuable, is not the only means of generating knowledge about sport and sporting cultures, particularly when the knowledge in question pertains to structures more regularly scrutinized through scholarly training; (b) many sport scholars are former athletes and even coaches, including Johanna Mellis who was a Division I swimmer and later club swim coach; and (c) the expertise gained from years of scholarly training has led to the development of research connections between critical sports scholars and athletes in the arena, which is the basis of public interventions themselves. Our perspectives as sports scholars are not rooted in personal belief; rather we aim to amplify voices that have been systematically ignored by many in the sports media. By ignoring these, Dakich attempted to delegitimize our expertise as scholars of sport studies by claiming that we lacked experience as athletes and coaches in the arena. He aimed to illustrate that we lacked all credibility to engage meaningfully in the discussion.

As more scholars joined the fray to debunk Dakich's unsubstantiated claims with research and evidence to support Johnson's decision, Dakich's engagement devolved. He attacked our personhood and willfully misinterpreted our analyses to support his position, platform, and stability. For example, it was only once Johanna Mellis entered the fray that Dakich resorted to misogynistic language, referring to Mellis and others' points as "b*tching" about athletes from outside the "arena" (Dakich, 2021b). Like much of the right-wing media, Dakich was not interested

in the facts; as Kalman-Lamb and Mellis both Tweeted, he aimed to misunderstand and portray our points as hot takes to be used later to fill airtime and feed the audience for his radio show (Kalman-Lamb, 2021c; Mellis, 2021a). For example, he misinterpreted several of our responses about how the NCAA and universities actively prevent athletic workers from pursuing their education. Instead, he described one colleague's statement to mean that we were racists because we did not think Black athletes were intellectually capable of getting their education. Dakich shifted from bad-faith critique to baseless personal attacks to deflect from himself. He demonstrated this by questioning if our colleague's point about athletes' access to education was "racist or sexist or both" (Dakich, 2021c). He thereby attempted to weaponize accusations of racism and sexism without any theoretical, conceptual, ontological, or empirical basis and seemed to deflect from his own concerns regarding accusations of racism. Dakich moreover employed another common tactic of trolling: rather than always replying directly to our Tweets, he often quote-Tweeted us instead. This tactic enabled him to amplify his perspective on Johnson and us to his followers instead of responding to our critiques. As will be discussed more below, since trolls aim to sow confusion amongst their victims to prevent the latter from successfully taking control of the conversation and narrative, Dakich clearly used this as a strategy to confuse and prevent us from gaining the upper hand.

Although we stopped engaging directly with Dakich once the conflict escalated, he was not ready to stop targeting us for his personal gain – again, much like he'd done with Johnson and several other people in his career. Dakich and his wife failed to lure us back into a debate by subTweeting us and taunting Mellis in particular for blocking them. More distressingly, however, a few days later, Dakich took to his ESPN radio show, the *Dan Dakich Show*, to present his tirade against Johnson and us to his thousands of listeners and gain their support (Kennedy, 2021). In his tirade, Dakich spelled out Kalman-Lamb's name, stated his office hours, and insulted his physical appearance (Wolken, 2021a). Since then, Dakich has continued to polemicize against professors by frequently Tweeting statements like "professors are the worst of the worst" (see Figure 1). At times, he has used the authors' personal Twitter profile pictures to signal to his followers that he will be discussing us on his Outkick show (see Figure 2).

Figure 1

Tweet from Dakich's Twitter account on December 30, 2021

Figure 2

Tweet from Dakich's Twitter account on January 20, 2022

Dakich seems to do this doxxing purposefully. For example, in his February 2021 campaign, he invited his listeners to find and confront Kalman-Lamb online and in person and threaten his personal safety. Dakich's listeners and supporters may be considered *trolls*: an imprecise and debated term used to describe online users who employ tactics like humor and more abusive behaviors that amount to trolling in order to provoke a response from a targeted person or group without the victimized people understanding the trolls' supposedly true intentions (Green, 2019). Trolls use the phrase *just trolling*, Viveca Greene (2019) explains, to defend themselves and avoid accepting responsibility for any harm they and the ideological implications of their actions cause. As illustrated below by the harassment we received from trolls, they strategically seek to blame the victim when they appropriately express the hurt, damage, etc., caused by trolls, claiming that the target asked for it.

Worse yet, Dakich issued what we perceived to be a sexualized threat to Mellis. To demonstrate her own experience as an athlete, Mellis listed the workout sets she used to do while training as a Division I swimmer and then suggested that she and Dakich race one another by "going at it" in the pool (Keeley, 2021; Mellis, 2021b). In listing the workouts and directly addressing Dakich's belief that academics were 'outside the arena,' Mellis unequivocally referred to the act of *racing* one another. Yet Dakich responded to Mellis' suggestion to his listeners by saying, "Well, if you go at it in a pool, that's a public place and then I'm gonna have to get divorced…" (Keeley, 2021, para. 5) Dakich's assertion that he'd need to get divorced if he and Mellis went "at it" in a public pool was not about Mellis as a woman defeating him in a race. Rather, it was about (entirely undesired) sexual advances towards Mellis that would necessitate the divorce.

As Dora Apel explained in discussing the meaning of the rhetoric around racist jokes about Obama, "is not anchored to intent; instead it is produced by the discourses that surround the [text] in the arena in which it circulates" (Apel, 2009, p. 137). The Right's use of memes, jokes, irony, satire, etc., serves a range of serious, sociopolitical functions that aim to invite people to and build a community around white supremacist ideology, for example. Poe's law suggests that in the absence of clearly established authorial intent, it can be challenging to distinguish between extremism and satire, i.e., a parody of extremism (Green, 2019). Context, however, matters precisely because it allows for the nuanced understanding of complex socio-cultural relations between an orator and how their language is received and understood. The pattern between Dakich's racialized critiques of Johnson's decision, misogyny on Twitter, 'doxxing' of Kalman-Lamb, and our perceived suggestions of undesired sexual overtures towards Mellis illustrate Dakich's beliefs and language about sport, exploitation, racism, sexism, and more. His values and words paint a clear picture of how and why his supporters' responses to them are harmful to groups that have faced structural and historical discrimination and violence. As Apel (2009) explained, "There is a clear distinction between someone punching up and someone punching down the social ladder" (p. 138). Targeting us also diverted attention away from unsubstantiated opinions regarding the primary issue at hand: Johnson's opt-out, his agency as a Black man against NCAA racial exploitation, his university, coaches, athletic department, and the media.

Since the original Twitter incident, Dakich has been consistent in his targeting of the authors. Following a series of major media reports, Dakich initially deleted his Twitter account on February 27th, before briefly returning on March 1st. Later that day, following his radio show, he deactivated his account again. In June 2021, he returned to talking about us to label us as racists on *The Dan Dakich Show*. On September 28th, 2021, it was reported that Dan Dakich was no longer employed by ESPN as a basketball analyst and that he would start a new show on the Outkick network, founded by former Fox Sports personality Clay Travis (Benbow, 2021b).

On November 29th, Dakich returned to Twitter and continued to target the authors on that platform. For instance, on January 4, 2022, Dakich again used a personal profile picture of Silva to signal that he would be talking about us on his show while, not unimportantly, accompanying the picture with his own photo and his partner brandishing guns (see Figure 3). Dakich's family photo belonged to the political tactic of gun-toting holiday 2021 family pictures from GOP politicians Thomas Massie (R-KY) and far-right, professed QAnon supporter politician Lauren Boebert (R-CO) (Cathey, 2021). They posted their pictures less than a week after the horrific school shooting by a 15-year-old in Michigan who killed four students and left seven more injured.

Figure 3

Tweet from Dan Dakich's Twitter account on January 4, 2022

Dakich's Trolls and the Risks of Ongoing Engagement

Apparent Dakich supporters had commented on our Tweets about the situation for several days, and a handful had emailed us. One emailed Mellis on February 28th with a disparaging but – all things considered – relatively innocuous sentiment. They said, "So you engage with someone on Twitter and tell the [sic] to come at you, then when they do, you claim violence and sexism….now you want to get them fired. Hypocrite cancel-cultutre [sic] snowflake. Maybe you should be fired." Kalman-Lamb received a Twitter direct message stating,

> You don't even live in the U.S.? You are a joke! If your agenda against Dan Dakich is supported, I sure hope 8 [sic] don't live much longer. This world has gotten overrun with pathetic people like you who believe they are somehow entitled to say whatever they want and then are a victim when someone doesn't agree with your viewpoint and comes right back at you. What a person you are! Big pussy who was never anybody and now thinks they are. Stay in Canada PLEASE!

On March 1st, the three of us made public statements. We recorded and released an *End of Sport* episode that detailed some of what happened up to that point (End of Sport, 2021). Journalist Dana Benbow from the *IndyStar* reached out to Mellis for a comment. Trusting the *IndyStar* for its reporting on the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal and Benbow's critical analyses of Dakich, Mellis offered Benbow a lengthy comment. Benbow's (2021a) subsequent piece centered solely around Mellis's remarks. The article seemed to send Dakich's supporters into a fury, as the online pile-on spiked in the days after. Kalman-Lamb also received emails from what we perceived to be trolls. One person wrote emails to both Mellis and Kalman-Lamb using markedly different language to each. They wrote to Mellis on March 1st,

> Look in the mirror, he's not going to sexually attack you. You sound like a complete nutcase, not because you have a completely stupid view on college athletics, but because you're a soft person and sound so frail, and you blocked his wife on twitter…If you think this is over, it's not. More people support him than you know. Maybe more people should come to your office hours and visit you to have a nice discussion. That way you just can't randomly block people and not discuss this. You can't hide behind your twitter forever Doctor.

The sender was clear in using not only ableist and sexist language, but also in threatening a physical interaction during the global pandemic.

> The same person wrote to Kalman-Lamb:
> Dan Dakich is a bit much but you're coming off like a complete bitch. Don't be internet tough guy, because you can't hide behind twitter forever. Have a discussion with the person and prove your point, because the majority of people agree with him and see you and your opinion as some left leaning bitch, and when you cry about doxxing, you sound like a whiny bitch…. Anyway, don't sound like a whiny bitch and man up. Oh, and don't brag that you wrote about a book. Sure, it makes you sound like you know your subject but it also comes off as elitist and snobby...."

Kalman-Lamb was also copied on an email sent to a number of Duke administrators that suggested he should be fired for "atrocious twitter posts" (personal communication, 2021). The sender, who also referenced a recent publication in *The Daily Beast*, was particularly aggrieved that Kalman-Lamb had shared a different email he had received from someone else on Twitter that stated: "Not sure what the ESPN guy said to you but you certainly look like a prick-faced moron so I'm guessing he was right." This emailer deemed that Tweet an egregious act of professional impropriety, suggesting that "Anyone at any other institution sharing emails like this would be fired immediately." After taking their own shot at Kalman-Lamb's "weak chin," they concluded by remarking, "Very sad that Duke pays this person a salary, that is the real story here, absolutely unprofessional and disgraceful. Big Duke fan, too!" (personal communication, 2021)

More dangerously, a self-professed former Indiana police officer told Kalman-Lamb in a reply to a Tweet that he should "Stay out of Indiana." That former police officer continues to monitor and respond to Kalman-Lamb's Twitter profile nearly a year after the original incident. Other emails that Mellis received included language such as:

> Aren't you a professor? You were violated? You're lucky you don't really have to work for a living! Why don't you try teaching your students something constructive? Don't you want to teach them how we raped and pillaged the native Americans, so that now, we have to give them back the country! You and your allegedly politically correct m*rons can go back to wherever you came!
>
> You are one one whiny b*tch.
>
> Hey b*tch, I understand you are an Oral expert. I know where your office is. Maybe we can hook up.

> Does another whiny ass liberal f****** snowflake need a goddamn tissue?...You people just got six dr. Seuss books banned today you should be f****** cheering in the streets that you f****** took opportunities from children to read and learn. Take your racist whiny head out of your pathetic f****** ass and pack up your f****** hate and get the f*** out of this country. [sic]

Some emails that Kalman-Lamb received included:

> Would you please provide me with the written documentation on who/what appointed you judge AND jury on how student-atheletes [sic] are to be handled? I will quite interested to learn has a high power. Please include all verifications of your new found authority.

Mellis also received a threatening voicemail from a local number, and an email was sent to Mellis, Dana Benbow at *IndyStar*, and an address related to Dakich himself:

> I've reviewed the available evidence and have concluded that Dr. Mellis started a circle in which it appears that she engaged in Ageist attacks and displayed apparent misogyny. She belittled a 50 something year old male with knee replacements and past his athletic prime by challenging him to an athletic event, in which she has excelled. In doing so, she acted in a belittling and demeaning way…She has stated that she has experienced sexual harassment in her athletic career. Perhaps this was an opportunity to strike out…I hope that she was oblivious to her obvious Ageism and misogyny demonstrated in her challenge…I'm speculating that Dr. Mellis sees these two bias being one way: only coming from white males.

The critique about Mellis' teaching in the history classroom suggests that the sender believes in the concept of white genocide: the notion that the 'white race' is "endangered by the increasing diversity of society" due to immigration, interracial relationships and children, as well as diversity initiatives and practices (Berger, 2016, p. 3). According to Greene (2019, p. 64), "In the convoluted logic and language of the alt-right, relations of power are flipped and history is turned inside out…nonwhites are a powerful social group poised to take over the US…" In their mind, our supposed goal of political correctness – meaning that we support antiracism, fight against systemic oppression, and support the decision made by a Black man like Johnson – makes us fundamentally un-American.

The sender's critique of how Mellis teaches history – negating the validity of teaching past-present connections – is an attempt to demonstrate that history does not matter, which Angela Davis (2012) has described as a key characteristic of neoliberalism. By reminding and teaching people that racism and other social constructions are "profoundly historical," we can "continue to inhabit these histories, which help to constitute our social and psychic worlds" (Davis, 2012, p. 169). By rejecting the necessity of teaching about white Euro-American dispossession and genocide of indigenous people the sender sought support for their claim of white genocide and reverse racism. The concepts of *reverse racism* and *white genocide* are used as tools to "facilitate the actual kind" of racism and genocide (Cobb, 2018, para. 6). Much like Dakich's treatment, this

is a profoundly political position that likely betrays their racist anxieties. Being accused of racism is no small matter; yet as white scholars, the trolls did not articulate the same kind or degree of racism or misogynoir against us as they conceivably would against colleagues of color.

The emails and voicemail – especially the ones threatening to talk to her in her office, and to enact sexual violence against her – left Mellis deeply shaken. The fact that several of the harassers included their names – and even locations in some cases – personalized the harassment. In no way should an academic have to prepare themself for such horrific backlash. Despite our best efforts to respond promptly and practically to protect ourselves in case something happens, it seems impossible to fully prepare emotionally, including family members, to confront this behavior. It can lead to significant psychological harm and self-doubt, especially if people close to you force you to defend your actions because they accept the harasser's assertion that you 'brought this on yourself' in some form. Having the comradery of Kalman-Lamb and Silva, their new close circle of colleagues, plus her department and college deans helped to make Mellis feel safe and secure. As Mellis' department chair explained to her during a Zoom meeting in which she started sobbing, perfection is a product of white supremacy. No one should be expected to behave perfectly in a time of crisis like this, as there is no "perfect" response to the ever-changing tactics of the Right. This is illustrative of the importance of mobilizing communities of support when facing these types of conflicts.

Finally, whether it was connected to the interactions with Dakich or not, Mellis was contacted by a journalist for Turning Point USA's "professor watchlist" on November 8th, 2021. The sender asked for details related to her teaching, pedagogy, research profile, and public scholarship. Later that day, Mellis was added to the public watchlist. Led by Charlie Kirk, Turning Point USA has been labeled a right-wing group and has a long history of targeting supposedly liberal academics with its professor watchlist (Gabbatt, 2021). It is an explicit tactic to target and harass university professors, intimidate them into silence and censorship, and jeopardize their professional and personal lives; a practice we might expect but never accept.

Mobilizing Communities of Support: On Strategies for Engaging in Critical Public Work

When we were alerted to Dakich's radio attacks from sports journalist Ian Kennedy's article on February 27th, 2021, we immediately strategized how to respond (Kennedy, 2021). Looking back, most of these strategies centered on building our community of support in the service of self-protection. Being targeted is meant to be isolating. An intense criticism and onslaught of harassment can cause people to question the validity of their stance and their expertise, and negatively impact their mental health. When there is an overwhelming number of harassers, it can threaten one's physical and psychological safety, impact families, forestall work, and more. The non-renewal by Ole Miss of the contract of Assistant Professor of History Garrett Felber in 2020-2021 due to fraught academic and public circumstances highlights the precarious position of the public scholar. Our varying levels of instability also impacted our relative feelings of security and support: Kalman-Lamb was a non-tenure track lecturing fellow at Duke at the time, and Mellis was an assistant professor at an enrollment- and tuition-dependent small liberal arts college. As of 2016, 73% of all U.S. faculty are contingently employed and off the tenure track, meaning they lack traditional protections for freedom of speech (American Association of University Professors, 2018). In an increasing number of GOP-controlled states, tenure itself has

been dismantled (Stirgus, 2021). This means that most faculty members who seek a broad public audience for their research do so at considerable personal risk.

Perhaps one of the most common pieces of advice given to people when they're harassed is to avoid further antagonizing others by not 'feeding the trolls.' This advice can be taken in a number of ways. For some, it might mean not responding to any of the trolls or their harassment, with the idea that radio silence on behalf of the victimized person/group will cause the trolls and the news cycle to move on to their next topic of interest. It could mean putting one's social media account on private and keeping a low profile so that only current followers can see and engage with what a person is saying and doing. Yet the assumption that it is solely up to the victimized person to control what trolls do – and thereby that victimized people are inherently at fault for attracting the attention of trolls to begin with – is firmly grounded in a victim-blaming perspective that releases harassers from being held accountable for their actions. This is precisely what trolls convince their victims to believe: the people they have victimized are asking for it (Greene, 2019). This strategy aims to leave the victimized person without agency or recourse to resistance (Phillips, 2016).

If we blame the victim and not the troll, "The troll still sets the terms of their target's engagement; the troll still controls the timeline and outcome" (Phillips, 2016, p. 160). This is not to completely negate the tactic of going silent, of putting one's account on private, or another similar strategy; a person under attack may legitimately feel at any point that one of these tactics is simply the healthiest path for them. Mellis, for example, upon hearing this advice from others on February 27-28th, felt that this strategy stripped her of agency and allowed Dakich and his supporters to control the situation. Instead, she chose to follow alternative advice and built a community of support in different spheres. It was only after Mellis had recorded an *End of Sport* episode with Kalman-Lamb and Silva, provided comment for an *IndyStar* piece on March 1st – both of which allowed her to feel that she'd appropriately asserted her agency – and anticipated a potential onslaught of additional harassment that she chose to make her account private (Benbow, 2021a).

Tressie McMillan Cottom has noted that it may feel natural to pull away from an academic caught in a controversy. But this can be unproductive at best, and harmful at worst:

> We're afraid of being associated with crisis…Rarely are these attacks about a person. The worst thing we can do is isolate our colleague. It's a fear tactic. The real goal [in these harassment and attack campaigns] is to isolate and shame people (Quintana, 2017, para. 5).

Ciccariello-Maher, a former associate professor of politics and global studies at Drexel University, resigned in the wake of a controversy over his Tweets about race and the military. He has spoken about the torrent of harassment and death threats he received and his institution's rebukes against him. He told *The Chronicle of Higher Ed*, "You know that you're in the right, and yet you feel sort of surrounded….You feel as though you're being pummeled and barraged. And especially for people who aren't used to this, this is a very frightening and dangerous phenomena" (Quintana, 2017, para. 9). Community and solidarity are the only real defense against this profound sense of isolation.

As the conflict unfolded, our protection tactics evolved. However, they can broadly be categorized into six overarching strategies:

(a) Self-protection in the immediacy
(b) Cementing a close circle of support with other publicly engaged academics to share ideas and gain moral and intellectual support
(c) Proactively contacting crucial people at our institutions to establish our narrative of what happened and hopefully gain support
(d) Building support from the broader critical sport journalistic and academic communities
(e) Reaching out to academic associations for statements of support
(f) Understanding the power structure: addressing harmful rhetoric in public spaces is not implicit consent to receive targeted harassment and abuse. Protect that space however you can.

Self-protection in the Immediacy

In the immediate aftermath of interactions that lead to sustained harassment, threats, abuse, or other forms of trolling, it often makes sense to initiate temporary self-protection steps. One of the main strategies we have used is to immediately *lock* our Twitter accounts, making them private so that only those who follow our accounts may interact in public ways, e.g., retweeting, quote Tweeting, or replying to Tweets (now this is called "posting" due to Musk changing Twitter's name to X). To do this, simply go into the application settings, find the "privacy and security/safety" setting, and find the option to select "protect your Tweets." This narrows the audience for someone's tweets to just their followers, making it difficult for those not following an account originally to engage with the user or amplify Tweets in any way. It also makes it quite hard for new accounts to publicize the encounter unless they obtain a screenshot and quote Tweet from the user. This step prevents *further* harassment, as the internet army of accounts descending to target a Twitter profile faces the challenges of access to publicly interact with Tweets. Of course, it is not a permanent solution. It will not prevent all abuse or abuse already sustained, but it will quell some opportunities for the continuation of harm that often follows vexatious interactions in the public sphere.

It is possible to use the platform's privacy settings and protection protocols in other ways to prevent abuse. For example, a strategy we have adopted has been to report and block accounts engaging in harassing or abusive content; even mobilizing our communities of support (more on this below) to assist us by doing the same. This strategy does not often yield any permanent results, i.e., suspension of accounts, but can result in the deletion of abusive content by the platform itself. Frustratingly, since Elon Musk bought Twitter, this strategy seems less effective; Musk's changes have wrought instability that has perhaps intentionally rendered the report function more obsolete than before for those of us resisting fascism. We have also used internet privacy tools such as DeleteMe to regularly search for and remove our information from websites and search results. If this strategy is adopted, we recommend consulting faculty and staff contracts and collective agreements to ensure this falls within professional development funds that can be paid by the institution. It is part of our ongoing research program and should not be a personal burden.

To be clear, we suggest self-protection as a *temporary measure* to help prevent further abuse. It often will only take between 24 hours to one week to let the wave of harm pass, as discourse on the internet moves quickly. In the meantime, it is likely that the abuse will continue. Another self-protection strategy we have used is to document and save *everything you can* in a protected folder on your computer. This may cause trauma to folks being targeted; you may be reading emails or taking screenshots of messages that are incredibly harm-inducing. We recommend asking a trusted person to do this labor for you. It is important from a legal perspective to document all interactions that result from your online public work. Most institutions have strong legal language in contracts with faculty and/or collective agreements around academic freedom that protect online communications that can be linked to your research. Consult your contract and/or collective agreement to ensure this language exists and to understand your rights and institutional obligations to you as a faculty and/or staff member. The overarching political *war on higher education* from the GOP surrounding issues of racism, sexism, transphobia, Critical Race Theory, intersectionality, feminist theories, and other academic discourses, makes legal and institutional protections dynamic terrains (Pérez, 2017; Ray, 2020; Ray & Gibbons, 2021). Frustratingly, our current neoliberal, scarcity mindset of higher education forces the responsibility upon all of *us* who engage in public scholarship to ensure and strengthen protections around academic freedom in the public sphere. However, that discussion is beyond the scope of the present intervention.

Developing a Small Academic Community of Support…and Listening to Advice

The three of us developed our community through the *End of Sport* podcast long before our interactions with Dakich; the conflict merely encouraged us to expand that community. At some point during our Twitter interactions, we reached out to the other academics involved in the conversation, comprised of scholars from sociology, history, and communications/media. Commiserating and sharing ideas about how to address the conflict and erroneous claims presented online enabled us to quickly establish a rapport of solidarity over the situation. It also helped us work towards some of our other strategies, as explained below, in service of self-protection. Ultimately, this community – combined with the broader community we developed with people who publicly supported us – remains the most enduringly positive outcome to emerge from the incident. Since the Dakich incident, Mellis has also reached out to scholars enduring online harassment (especially for the first time) to offer solidarity, an ear, and possible strategies if they want them. Though admittedly, this can be emotional as well as intellectual labor, it continues the community building from February 2021. Her work has led to the enrichment and development of new friendships and bonds of solidarity in the last few years.

Establishing Institutional Narratives in the Hope of Gaining Support

This strategy is heavily influenced by Tressie McMillan Cottom's (2017) reflections on public scholarship. Immediately after hearing about Dakich's radio show, we thought about how to present the situation to our institutions. Fortunately, we had anticipated backlash from our earlier co-written pieces about the inhumanity of holding college sport during the pandemic and therefore started developing the groundwork for our support system long before the Dakich incident. For example, Mellis sent those earlier articles to her chair, Deans, and the College's communications staff. These actions helped to establish with Mellis' supervisors her practice of co-producing

research-based analyses for the public sphere and their positive impact on the public reception of Ursinus College, a small liberal arts school of 1,500 students, including over 35% athletes. We had increasingly paid attention to how the Right targeted other academics, such as Sami Schalk, who thankfully has spoken openly about what she's endured and the steps she took to protect herself. Unlike Schalk and other colleagues of color, the three of us are all white and thus remain shielded from horrific racist attacks that others engaging in public work endure. The clear anti-Black and anti-Brown racism that pervades the discourse of far-, alt- and increasingly mainstream Right leaders and followers – plus their avowed intention to maintain white supremacy – results in their increasingly virulent racist language and tactics against scholars of color. Dakich did refer to us as racists, i.e., that we are the "real" racists and not him, in a June 2021 show; using that word and its association with ideas about us as *race traitors* is a strategy displayed throughout the conflict. However, it impacts us much differently than it would a scholar of color being accused of reverse or anti-white racism.

Kennedy's article came out on February 27th, a Saturday. We knew that we needed to establish the narrative of what happened with our institutions in order to gauge their reactions and gain their support – and do so before they received emails, phone calls, or tags on Twitter from people targeting us using the issue against us. As stated, the goal here was self-protection and prevention of any further harm. Sometimes it is not possible for people to find out exactly when they are being targeted in the moment. For Mellis, this meant contacting her department chair, the College's deans, and communications people. Mellis knew she had her chair's support and that Ursinus appreciated her public work, as the school had shared her co-authored pieces to boost the institution's profile. Taking the proactive step of sending evidence of the Twitter interactions, the radio show, and explaining what happened allowed Ursinus' leadership to hear our side of the narrative. The ability to set the narrative and tone of these discussions can help academics who are under attack avoid being forced on the defensive by one's institutional superiors. Though she did not ask them for it, the College's communications staff immediately sent separate statements of support internally and externally to the public.

At Duke, Kalman-Lamb was contacted by the chief of campus police, who asked to be kept apprised of "particularly concerning or threatening communications" and offered to "have a team talk about safety planning" (personal communication, 2021). He was prompted to connect with administrators when he received an email copied to the university. At that point, Kalman-Lamb reached out to his immediate superior by phone to explain the situation. This led to the director of the Thompson Writing Program sending an email of support to two deans at the university. To Kalman-Lamb's knowledge, there was no further institutional escalation beyond that point. Mellis's institutional support especially should be offered at a bare minimum in all circumstances. Although we acknowledge the added labor of this work, we urge tenured folks especially to work within their institutional frameworks to ensure similar responses for *all* scholars.

Building Support from Critical Journalist and Academic Communities

Due to the relationships that we have developed on the *End of Sport* podcast and in our public scholarship, we knew and trusted several critical sports journalists prior to February 2021. We quickly reached out to a few of them to get their perspective on Dakich's harassment and call-to-arms on the radio. We suspected that his actions defied the norms of acceptable behavior for

journalists, but were not sure. We did enough research on Dakich to understand that he'd made discriminatory comments about people before and received little punishment. As sports journalist Dan Wolken noted in the wake of our incident, Dakich's radio show had a disturbing past, including comments that we would consider being bigoted about college athletes' tattoos, former NBA player Dwayne Wade, Michigan State fans, a high school student called a "meth head," and even a 10-year-old boy (Wolken, 2021b). The support of journalists matters because they can affect the discursive frame through which an incident or event is broadly understood by the public.

While waiting for our institutions to respond to our emails, we connected with other leading figures beyond our own small circle of support. This was done to help build the case that our institutions could not discipline us without potentially facing criticism from the academic community and the press. Again, with the goal of self-protection, this support helped us weather the storm and ensure that Dakich could not control the discursive terrain through which the conflict was constructed.

Statements of Support from Academic Associations

Of all the strategies we mobilized, we surprisingly met the most resistance from academic associations when we spoke to them about organizational support, i.e., releasing statements our behalf. The frustration at a general sense among academic associations to refuse resources or even statements of support, in particular, left us asking: what purpose do academic associations serve if they do not attempt to publicly recognize the increasing risks their members take in dismantling elitist hierarchies regarding knowledge dissemination and expanding the profile of one's field, and support them outwardly in times of crises? What are we paying membership dues for if they won't do this for members?

The most proactive and supportive association was one of which none of us was an active member: the Association for Women in Slavic Studies (AWSS), a subsidiary of a larger organization Mellis belongs to, the Association for the Study of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES). A past president of AWSS initiated a discussion with Mellis on Twitter on February 27th to share that they were putting our incident on their upcoming agenda to see if they could support us with a statement and talk to ASEEES about joining their efforts. Their proposal took a significant amount of intellectual and emotional labor off of Mellis, which is crucial in times of crisis that require victimized people to put in significant effort to protect themselves. That several top members are active on Twitter allows them to be proactive in cases such as this. They released their statement on March 3rd, 2021, and ASEEES signed on to it (Bukovoy, 2021). By that time, Mellis reached out to a close colleague on Twitter in a smaller organization focused on her nation of study, the Hungarian Studies Association, and they promptly released a statement that they shared on Facebook on March 3rd (Hungarian Studies Association, 2021).

Mellis emailed the North American Society for Sport History (NASSH) of which she was a committee member, while Silva contacted the North American Society for Sport Sociology (NASSS). NASSH agreed to develop a statement, which they released on March 6th (Journal of Sport History, 2021). On March 3rd, Silva sent an email to the NASSS listserv urging the community of sports scholars to show support and solidarity to Mellis and Kalman-Lamb on the

basis of how attacks such as this attempt to systematically delegitimize work done by all critical sports scholars. An excerpt of the email reads:

> The purpose of my email to you all today is to urge us as scholars, researchers, teachers, and NASSS as a scholarly community made up of sports scholars, to show support and solidarity to Drs. Mellis and Kalman-Lamb. As we know, sports media is often complicit in the promotion of racism, sexism, and violent misogyny that is embedded in sports, sporting culture, and sporting practices. Drs. Mellis and Kalman-Lamb have been part of a vocal opposition to sports media and their role in creating and sustaining a system of racialized, gendered, and class-based exploitation that continues to harm campus athletic workers.
>
> Regardless of where you sit on the issue of exploitation of campus athletic workers, we all have a vested interest in pushing back against those who seek to delegitimize, mock, target, harass, or otherwise devalue the work of critical sports scholars in favor of the promulgation of the status quo. As a scholarly community, we have a professional and ethical obligation to protect members of our community – despite differences of opinion or scholarly disagreements – from those who seek to devalue the necessary and important work that we do.

After a series of back-and-forth interactions with NASSS leadership and dozens of direct emails from members showing support, it was noted that, despite releasing several statements of solidarity in the past, often expeditiously published, the organization's Political Advocacy Committee would have to collect signatures to release a public statement of solidarity. After requesting and receiving a document providing statement language from Silva, NASSS leadership sympathized while indicating that "this is such an important conversation we need to have as an organization," but refused to issue a statement of solidarity. Rather, NASSS leadership suggested that Silva, Mellis, and Kalman-Lamb take on additional labor to organize a session on the topic at the next annual meeting.

This interaction highlights some of the structural and institutional barriers within our own academic communities that public scholars face. Scholarly associations tend to promote the importance of public engagement yet fail to provide the support necessary when that public work results in abuse. Indeed, the issue here is that we view online attacks and harassment as existential threats to our profession of critical scholarship. Put differently, online targeting of academics has become a purposeful and relatively successful strategy to silence critical scholars in hopes of advancing certain political ideologies. If the organizations in which we pay dues and purport to have members' best interests in mind fail to support work being done by members in real, tangible, ways, it presents fundamental issues for the ongoing professional development of the field. NASSS ultimately invited Mellis to give a keynote speech about the experience alongside esteemed journalist Shireen Ahmed at its April 2022 conference. Afterward, the president gave a public apology to Mellis. The opportunity and apology, however, could not fully address the harm done by the organization's actions in February-March 2021 that led to increased isolation and a legitimization of online targeting.

Public Critique is Not Implicit Consent to be Harassed and Abused

An important lesson we learned through these interactions was to understand that illuminating and critiquing harmful rhetoric that exists within our substantive area of scholarly interest is *not* the same as targeted, vexatious, and abusive behavior. There is a difference between calling out harmful discourse, practice, and action that exists in the social world and being abused because your work points that out. It is crucial for all scholars to understand and acknowledge that *public critique is not implicit consent to be harassed and/or abused in public space*. Indeed, we view suggestions that 'you do this to yourself by calling out bad behavior' as emblematic of the issues we are trying to solve by engaging in public critique; part and parcel of our work is to illuminate and counter harm, injustice, and inequality. If we use public scholarship to those ends, we are actually *doing* the work that we claim is vital to our research (and to research participants). The suggestion that, by virtue of participating in public critique, one consents to harmful responses is not only problematic from an epistemological standpoint. It is also incredibly hypocritical of scholars who are supposedly interested in alleviating social problems and counterproductive to that overarching project. We therefore reject the premise of this approach and instead work to strategize ways to collectively counter this narrative through our ongoing public engagement work.

Conclusion

Public scholarship is important work. Not only is it important to mobilize the knowledge created by a traditionally closed academic system and make it more accessible to broad audiences, it is also important for the promotion of civil society, critical dialogue, engagement, and liberation from oppression. We maintain that a foundational principle of academic research is to shed light on the harms, injustices, inequalities, and inequities that exist in the social world and illuminate them for all to see. In our view, public engagement should not be principally about self-promotion, but is part and parcel of our research and our moral obligation to the people and groups in which we co-construct our scholarship. We thus urge our colleagues to promote the use and uptake of public scholarship.

Despite this more optimistic view, we must acknowledge and address the risks associated with such engagement in the public sphere. We need, in our view, to be prepared for the possibility of corresponding attacks and abuse faced in response to public engagement. Part of that preparation means the ongoing development of practical strategies to respond to and alleviate to the best extent possible, the harm caused by our public engagement. In this paper, we explored some of the stakes of public discursive antagonisms, the gendered and racial forms that harassment can take, and institutional, communal, and individual strategies for grappling with ensuing harassment. We also explored how this experience of media spectacle creates further grounds for solidarity between academics and athletes, as experiences of social media harassment and abuse become increasingly normalized for both athletic workers and public scholars alike.

These strategies are simply starting points; they are not static, but dynamic processes that will undoubtedly change for us as we continue our public engagement project. If we were to promote one strategy above all, it would be the importance of building and mobilizing our scholarly and non-scholarly communities of support to alleviate some of the harms associated with online abuse sustained from public critique. Of course, building communities of support is not

always easy or equitable across modalities of identity, class, and privilege. That recognition is important to consider in our scholarship and our institutional and social contexts. It is our responsibility as a community of scholars to acknowledge and recognize the challenges inherent in public work, as well as the inequitable manifestation of risks taken by scholars who engage in this work, to do everything in our institutional and social capacities to support it.

This means recognizing, supporting, and rewarding public scholarship as academic labor. We must continue to push our institutions to approach public scholarship holistically and not just as a complement to our academic work while they simultaneously use it for their branding. They need to act on the belief that they have a vested interest in protecting us; because by attacking us individually, the Right attacks the legitimacy of higher education. Increasing public distrust in higher education through individualized attacks facilitates the Right's aim of molding it through relentless funding cuts, fascist legislation, media campaigns, and other political maneuvers to serve their oppressive ends. Institutions must develop a practice of responding robustly in defense of faculty and staff under assault. They moreover need to recognize public work in hiring practices, tenure, and promotion decisions. It also requires strengthening language in our collective agreements that public scholarship is a form of academic labor protected by academic freedom and intellectual property rights. Holding our institutions accountable to protect their workers from harm, abuse, and harassment experienced in response to this academic work is key. This work is valuable, particularly contemporary, and should be *valued* and *supported* as such.

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