National Black Sport Participation and Physical Activity Report

(NBSP²AR)

New Balance Institute for Innovative Leadership in Sport (I²LS)

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Report Authors:

Dr. Joseph N. Cooper
University of Massachusetts Boston
Ms. Rachel Shinnick
University of Massachusetts Boston
Dr. Shannon Jolly
Independent Researcher
Dr. Ajhanai Keaton
University of Massachusetts Amherst



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Dr. Joseph N. Cooper

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Dr. Shannon Jolly

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Dr. Ajhanai Keaton

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Introduction

One of the most popular cultural practices in the United States (U.S.) is sport. The connection between sport and education dates to the 19th century when primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools offered physical education courses and school-sponsored athletic teams as an extension of the educational experience. Within these activities, participants are encouraged to develop leadership, character building, teamwork, problem solving, confidence, and work ethic skills. In addition to these benefits, sport has also been used as a tool to promote racial progress in the form of desegregating sporting spaces and providing access to educational opportunities through athletic participation (i.e., college scholarships). Black youth, high school, and college athletes have been highly recognized for their athletic prowess across the U.S. Their successes include local, state, regional, national, and even international accolades at the individual and team levels.

Notwithstanding the positive benefits of sport participation, there has also been a wealth of research that highlights negative consequences associated with sport participation for Black student athletes across all levels. These negative outcomes include lower graduation rates, athletic identity foreclosure, mental health challenges, experiences with discrimination and abuse, encounters with racial and athletic stereotypes, and post-athletic career transitional issues. Since the benefits and detriments associated with sport participation are contingent upon specific conditions, we deemed it appropriate to create a comprehensive report that outlines patterns among and between Black youth, interscholastic, and college students (both athletes and non-athletes). The identification and analysis of these patterns provides insights for policy makers, educational leaders, athletic administrators, and other key stakeholders for improving access to high quality sport participation and physical activity opportunities. The ultimate goal of this report is to enhance positive life outcomes for Black students (e.g., holistic wellness, academic achievement, and personal and professional career success and satisfaction). Within this report, data is organized into the following sections:

- Black youth sport participation
- Black interscholastic sport participation and physical activity
- Black intercollegiate academic, athletic, and social experiences and outcomes

Executive Summary

Within the U.S., there lies a paradox at the intersection of sport and race. On one hand, Black athletes have achieved the highest heights of success across a range of sports such as Lebron James in basketball, Serena Williams in tennis, Patrick Mahomes in football, Simone Biles in gymnastics, and Allyson Felix in track and field to name a few. Black excellence in sports has been a hallmark of U.S. history dating back to the desegregation effort of Jackie Robinson in Major League Baseball (MLB) in 1947. The prominence and impact of Black athletic success is evident in the landmark National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington, D.C. where an entire section of the archive is dedicated to sport achievements. As one of America's most popular cultural exports, suffice it to say sport and more specifically, Black athletic prowess, is a coveted and lucrative endeavor. In contrast to positive associations, there are also alarming trends associated with Black youth, adolescent, and young adult access to and engagement in healthy physical activity resources and organized sport participation. These negative trends associated with barriers to safe physical activity and sport opportunities include higher obesity, malnutrition, mental health decline, and sleep deprivation rates (Johnson et al., 2021). Sport participation is often described in terms of involvement in organized competitive sports ranging from public community, private grassroots, interscholastic, and intercollegiate programs. However, a unique aspect of this report is the expansive examination of Black youth, adolescents, and college student engagement in both recreational physical activities as well as competitive organized sport.

Over the past several decades, there have been numerous reports published on the state of youth participation in sport such as The Aspen Institute's *National State of Play Reports* from 2016-2024, *Public Private, and Charter Reimagining School Sport Reports*, and *Community State of Play Reports* (The Aspen Institute, 2024). Additional reports that have garnered attention for policy makers and sport education stakeholders include the Tucker Center for Women and Girls in Sport 2018 Research Report on Developing Physically Active Girls: An Evidence-based Multidisciplinary Approach (Williams et al., 2020) and the University of Southern California Race and Equity Center Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division I Sports report (Harper, 2018). The latter report was among the most recent reports to build upon the seminal American Institutes for Research (AIR) study published in 1989 titled, *The Experiences of Black Intercollegiate Athletes at NCAA Division I Institutions*. The AIR (1989) study was novel because it served as one of the first studies to examine a national sample size of Black student athletes' experiences and outcomes. However, there remains a need to better understand the nature of Black youth, adolescent, and college students' experiences with physical activity and organized sport. The current report fills this gap.

The National Black Sport Participation and Physical Activity Report (NBSP²AR) offers several unique contributions. One, the inclusion of national data of Black youth, adolescents, and college students offers a much needed socio-ecological analysis of the barriers and facilitators

for positive developmental outcomes for this population. Secondly, the report offers disaggregated analyses of Black youth, adolescent, and college students, which illustrates the heterogeneity of experiences among these groups. For example, not all Black youth, adolescents, and young adults participate in organized competitive sport either by choice or a lack of access. It is important to understand the nature and quality of experiences and outcomes for those who participate in recreational physical activity equally as much as it is imperative to study those who participate in organized competitive sports. Furthermore, among those who participate in organized competitive sports, the experiences and outcomes are not monolithic. The intersectional analysis in this report accounts for various factors such as the interplay between race, gender, social class, school location and type, sports, and physical activities. Lastly, this report offers a theoretically grounded approach to understanding Black involvement in physical activities and sports and presents empirically driven recommendations for improving experiences and outcomes for this population.

Summary of Report Findings

- The youth sports participation racial opportunity gap is most pronounced between the ages of 6-12 where Black youth are less likely to participate in organized sports compared to their non-Black peers.
- Nearly half of all Black youth ages 6-12 in the national longitudinal data analyzed did not participate in organized team sports.
- Students who attend large public urban high schools on average are offered fewer school sponsored sport opportunities compared to their peers who attend large public suburban and rural high schools.
- The school sports structural resource gap refers to the lack of access to adequate facilities, staffing, and finances for the school sponsored sport participation at large public urban high schools, which provides an explanation for the disparities in sport participation rates between those who attend those schools and those who attend large public suburban and rural high schools.
- Large public urban high school students are twice as likely to express not participating on high school sport teams due to a lack of opportunities that interest them compared to their counterparts at large public suburban and rural high schools.
- Black adolescents (ages 13-17) participate in team sports at higher rates than their White, Hispanic, and Asian counterparts.
- Students from large public urban high schools are more likely to earn a college scholarship compared to their peers who attend large public suburban and rural high schools.
- Nearly two-thirds of Black high school students do not engage in physical activity for 60 minutes five or more days a week. National health standards recommend at

- least three to five days per week of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) per week.
- Three-fourths of Black female high school students and over half of Black male high school students do not engage in physical activity for 60 minutes five or more days per week.
- Over a half of Black high school students do not attend physical education (PE) classes at least one day a week.
- Black college athletes represent nearly one-fifth of all Division I athletes, but Black students overall constitute less than 10 percent of all undergraduates at these institutions. We describe this trend as the *Black athletic overrepresentation* phenomenon.
- Division I and II Black college athletes on average graduate at higher rates than their Black non-athlete student peers. We describe this phenomenon as the *athletic academic matriculation advantage*. Notably, this trend was not observed at the Division III level.
- Black college athletes are less likely to graduate with bachelor's degrees within six years compared to their non-Black college athlete counterparts.
- Black male college athletes, particularly those who participate in football and men's basketball, experience the lowest graduation rates among college athlete sub-groups that were disaggregated by race, gender, and sport.
- The largest *racial graduation gap* across all National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) divisional classifications is at the Division II level.
- Across all three NCAA Divisions, Black male college athletes persistently graduate among the lowest rates compared to their non-Black athlete peers (male and female).
- Division II Black college athletes who attend HBCUs graduate at higher rates than their Black college athlete counterparts who attend non-HBCUs. We describe this phenomenon as the *HBCU educational effect*.
- Division III Black college athletes graduate at significantly lower rates than their White college athlete counterparts.
- Black former athlete college graduates are more likely to earn an advanced degree compared to their non-Black former athlete college graduate counterparts. We refer to this phenomenon as the *educational opportunity optimization response* (EOOR).
- Black college athletes across all NCAA divisions are less likely to report experiencing a sense of belonging on campus compared to their non-Black college athlete peers.
- Black college athletes are more likely to report personal experiences with racism and/or racial trauma that negatively impacted their mental health compared to their non-Black college athlete peers.

• Black college athletes are more likely to engage in social justice activism compared to their White college athlete counterparts. We refer to this phenomenon as the *Black college athletes' burden*.

Socio-Ecological Context and Literature Review

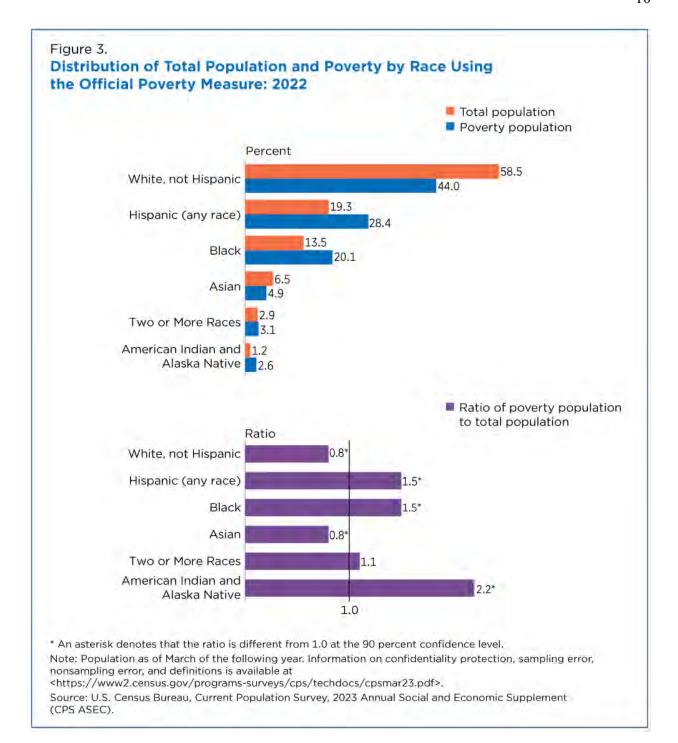
In 2000, Dr. Harry Edwards, renowned sport sociologist and one of the leading scholarly authorities on Black sport participation in the United States (U.S.), outlined what he called the institutionalized triple tragedy facing Black communities. He argued the structure of the U.S. society, including a lack of access to an array of resources for upward mobility beyond sport and racialized messages in education and mass media, created conditions whereby Black sport participation contributes to detrimental developmental outcomes. This triple tragedy involves an internalization of an unrealistic belief in a professional sports career among Black youth, a lack of holistic investment and development in areas beyond sport, and broader community underdevelopment due to a decreased focus on addressing systemic issues. Subsequent scholarship described these sociological conditions facing Black youth, adolescents, and young adults as encounters with racial discrimination, social isolation, economic deprivation, academic neglect, and limited leadership opportunities (Cooper, 2012). Although the reality of this assertion occurs all too frequently, it is important to note that all Black youth, adolescents, and young adults do not experience sport, physical activity, and education in the same way. Hence, it is important to engage in critical socio-ecological analyses to better understand which conditions contribute to different outcomes (Cooper, 2019).

In connection to the plight of Black communities more broadly, Black youth sport involvement is integrally connected to socio-ecological conditions that are rooted in historical, political, economic, and cultural complexities. For example, despite only constituting 13.5% of the U.S. population, Black people represent 20.1% of those who live in poverty (see Figure 3 below) (U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 2023). This disproportionate representation in impoverished conditions is connected to the history of Black economic deprivation dating back to the pre-Emancipation era (Darity & Mullen, 2022). Sport sociologist Dr. Lori Martin theorized that sport participation patterns along racial lines are largely determined by opportunity structure rather than personal interests (Martin, 2024). In her book, White Sports/Black Sports: Racial Disparities in Athletic Programs, Martin (2024) highlighted how Black youth are more likely to grow up in neighborhoods that are defined as sports deserts compared to their non-Black counterparts. A sports desert is defined as urban and rural neighborhoods with low-access¹ to a range of organized sport and designated physical activity opportunities (Martin, 2024). Relatedly, in an analysis of national data on youth sport participation rates, Black, Terilizzi, and Vahratian (2022) found that higher levels of family income and parental educational attainment were associated with increased youth involvement in organized sports between ages 6-17. Additional findings from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) data brief revealed that youth in the South were less likely to be involved in

¹ Martin (2024) defined low-access communities as those that comprise a minimum of 500 people and/or one-third of the census tract's population that preside over one mile from a facility that offers a range of sport opportunities.

organized sports compared to their counterparts in other regions of the U.S. (West, Midwest, and Northeast) (Black et al., 2022). Since Black people disproportionately reside in Southern states (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023), less likely to earn a college degree, and less likely to earn higher household incomes compared to Whites and Asians (Darity & Mullen, 2022), these findings illuminate the systemic disadvantages facing a large swath of Black youth in the U.S.

Compounding these longstanding socio-structural barriers, research on youth sports dating back to the early 1990s has indicated a sharp decline in public funding for school-based and community sports and a concomitant increase in private and pay-for-play youth sport programs (Eyler, Piekarz-Porter, & Serrano, 2019; Jayanthi et al., 2018; Pandya, 2021). Sport researchers have attributed these trends to the sprawling impact of neoliberalism whereby market forces, competition, and privatization are valued more than public goods and egalitarian resource allocation across social classes and racial groups (Brooks, Knudtson, & Smith, 2017; Coakley, 2021a; Martin, 2024). Consequently, as Hawkins (2010a) stated "When America Sneezes, Black America Catches Pneumonia" (p. 96). Stated differently, since Black people are disproportionately represented among those with lower household incomes in the U.S. (Darity & Mullen, 2022), when public funding for youth sports is reduced it has a pronounced adverse impact on Black youth. These disadvantageous arrangements illuminate the structural intersectionality facing Black youth whereby they are marginalized based on multiple socially imposed markers including their race, gender, and social class to name a few (Cooper, 2019; Howard, 2014; Wilson, 2008).



Another consequence of structural inequities as it relates to access to sport and physical activity opportunities is the disproportionate racial participation patterns across different sports. Harrison, Harrison, and Moore (2002) stated that African American sport and physical activity choices are integrally connected to racial identity development. They argue African American youth are more attracted to sports that affirm their racial and cultural identities and attract a larger number of participants from similar backgrounds as their own. The authors highlighted how Black youth often sample various sports such as baseball, tennis, and swimming, but due to a confluence of structural and interpersonal factors they opt out of these sports and choose to pursue engagement in basketball, football, and track and field at higher rates (Harrison et al., 2002). Buttressing this hypothesis, scholars of Black youth sport and physical activity participation have found their engagement in certain spaces (and concurrent disengagement in others) is less associated with their inherent individual preferences, but rather a byproduct of conditions that facilitate and/or limit structural support for their sustained engagement in positive developmental environments (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Cooper, 2019; Harrison et al., 2002; Ogunrinde, 2023).

One of the unique aims of this report is to acknowledge and explore how Black youth are not monolithic and their sport and physical activity experiences are not either. For example, given the distinct impacts of gendered racism in the U.S. society, Black males and females experience both intersecting and divergent challenges as it relates to sport and physical activity experiences. For example, sport in the U.S. remains largely synonymous with maleness – for example, professional sports leagues for men do not have a gender demarcation whereas those for women do, male sports are resourced at significantly higher levels than female sports, male sports receive more media coverage than women's sports, etc. (Staurowsky et al., 2020; Williams et al. 2020). Despite increased sport opportunities for women and girls post-*Title IX of* the Education Amendments of 1972, research still indicates gender gaps in terms of resources and participation (Staurowsky et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020). When accounting for structural intersectionality, data reveals Black girls and adolescents are disproportionately disadvantaged when compared to their peers. More specifically, Flowers (2015) highlighted the gender essentialist nature of *Title IX* as it relates to its impact on Black girls and women. Since *Title IX* focuses on sex and gender discrimination, Flowers (2015) argued the amendment does not allow for intersectional analyses and enforcements of the law without the inclusion of separate legislations. Thus, as it relates to sport, when Black girls and women experience discrimination in interscholastic and intercollegiate contexts, they must seek remedy through multiple laws such as Title IX and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Research on national datasets has revealed that Black girls are less likely to be physically active compared to their peers. For example, using data from a *National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Growth and Health Study*, Kimm et al. (2002) found that Black girls between the ages of 8-19 experience less engagement in physical activity compared to White girls in the same age

range. Data indicated that Black girls reported lower levels of physical activity starting at age 8 and the gap increased by the time they were 19. For example, by age 16 and 17, 56 percent of Black girls compared to 31 percent of White girls reported no habitual leisure-time activity. Additional findings indicated that pregnancy was associated with lower levels of physical activity for Black girls and only later in adolescence was parental education associated with reduced physical activity (Kimm et al., 2002). Although declines were observed for White girls, the extent of the decline and the gap between Black and White girls underscores how habitual leisure activity is both racialized and connected to ecological conditions.

In another study sponsored by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, Kelly and colleagues (2010) found that Black girls in 6th grade reported lower levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA; 19.5 minutes per day) compared to their White (22.8 minutes per day) and Hispanic (21.7 minutes per day) peers. Regarding vigorous physical activity (VPA), a similar trend was noticed where Black girls reported lower levels of engagement (4.2 minutes per day) compared to White (4.7 minutes per day) and Hispanic (4.5 minutes per day) girls. Black girls also had higher levels of body mass index (BMI), self-reported experiences with receiving free or reduced lunch, and experiences with being at home alone compared to White girls. Regression analyses of these variables revealed age, BMI, and social support from peers were significant factors for predicting levels of MVPA and VPA for girls. School climate, particularly relationships with teachers, was also associated with Black girls and their engagement in VPA; however, this group reported lower levels of support from school climate compared to their non-Black same sex peers (Kelly et al., 2010). These patterns at the youth level can contribute to long-term health consequences as well. For example, Kalinowski et al. (2023) found that a majority of Black women in their national study did not meet recommended targets for physical activity. Collectively, these findings show how environmental factors such as living in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and experiencing less support in school contributes to adverse health outcomes for Black girls, which influence physical activity behaviors later in life. Thus, structural and interpersonal factors *rather than* solely or primarily intrapersonal factors explain Black females' involvement in physical activity. Incorporating the input of Black female participants in program structure and implementation is an essential component of culturally responsive practices that allow for them to communicate the best ways to circumvent and mitigate structural and interpersonal barriers (Carter-Francique, 2011, 2013; Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Ogunrinde, 2023).

Additional empirical research on Black girls and adolescents has highlighted how a confluence of socio-ecological factors contributes to their engagement, as opposed to their disengagement, in sports and physical activity. Using a Black Feminist Thought (BFT; Collins, 1993) approach to analyzing Black middle school girls' involvement in sport and physical activities, Ogunrinde (2023) found participants delineated their experiences with school-sponsored activities versus out-of-school environments. Regarding the latter, participants described how their higher level of engagement was connected to the emotional bonds with their

family members in these settings compared to school activities. In contrast, school-sponsored sport and physical activity opportunities involved less support from administrators and educators and more emphasis on boys' involvement in these activities in comparison to out-of-school spaces. Ogunrinde (2023) summarized the Black girls' responses about the gendered nature of their school-sponsored sport experiences when she said: "...sport in this context was seen as a privilege for girls and a necessity for boys" (p. 489). The author concluded that any intervention efforts focused on improving health outcomes for Black girls must account for how "power and privilege shape individuals' beliefs about themselves, social relationships, engagement with social institutions, and policymaking" (Ogunrinde, 2023, p. 479).

In the context of social class, Black girls, adolescents, and young women are overrepresented in track and field and basketball across all levels of sport primarily due to the economic access barriers (Staurowsky et al., 2020). For example, at the college level the five sports with the lowest percentage of racial diversity among women's sports were equestrian, field hockey, ice hockey, lacrosse, and rifle (Staurowsky et al., 2020). In response to existing structural constraints associated with financial resources and geographical location, organizations such as the Black Women in Sports Foundation (BWSF) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Sportsmen's Tennis and Enrichment Center (STEC) in Dorchester, Massachusetts were established. Founded in 1992, the BWSF offers opportunities for Black girls in fencing, tennis, lacrosse, field hockey, golf, soccer, and softball (BWSF, 2024). The BWSF programs include after school and summer activities as well as financial support for participants from the primary to postsecondary levels. Established in 1961, the STEC was the first African American tennis club in the U.S. and for over eight decades the center has provided tennis and wellness opportunities for scores of Black youth in the greater Boston area (STEC, 2024). Similar to BWSF, STEC provides after school and summer programming for youth, adolescents, and adults that center on health and wellness as well as academic enrichment. In order to redress the extent of structural challenges facing Black girls and adolescents, there is a need for increased funding for programming that centers this group's developmental needs such as the efforts exemplified by the BWSF and STEC (e.g., public recreation, private organizations, and public-private partnerships).

Reinforcing the benefits of intentionally designed youth sport programs of Black girls, researchers have highlighted the unique components of these types of interventions. Common findings across these studies have highlighted how physical activity and sport participation for Black girls and young women is strongly contingent upon the extent of cultural connectivity, positive peer and adult support, and self-efficacy internalized by the participants (Arinze & McGarry, 2021; Carter-Francique, 2017; Olushola et al., 2013). For example, Arinze and McGarry (2021) surmised from their research on Black girls that sport-based youth development programs incorporate intersectionality, peer experiences, and peer influence in their programming efforts. In terms of positive benefits, Barbeau et al. (2007) found that Black girls' involvement in a 10-month afterschool physical activity program contributed to improved body

composition and cardiovascular fitness for those who participated in the program at least two days per week. The PA program involved 25 minutes of skill instruction, 35 minutes of aerobic PA, and 20 minutes of stretching and strengthening (Barbeau et al., 2007). The authors concluded that the necessary levels of PA to improve body composition are beyond what is currently allocated in physical education courses in K-12 schools, which means additional time must be structured for moderate to high intensity PA for youth to ensure more positive health outcomes (Barbeau et al., 2007). Furthermore, these studies illuminate the benefit of strategically deployed physical activity and sport-based development programs that are centered on Black girls' engagement and positive health outcomes.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services identified several barriers to initial youth sports participation and for continued involvement in their National Youth Sports Strategy report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Barriers to initial involvement are a lack of access to play spaces, cost, social factors, lack of interest or knowledge, and time and competing demands (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Barriers to continued participation are cost, lack of enjoyment, lack of physical literacy, pressure from others, physical factors, stress and burnout, and time constraints and other priorities. According to the U.S. Department of HHS physical literacy refers to the ability to engage in a range of physical activities with confidence and context specific coordination in connection with developing oneself holistically (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). As a result, the department proposed an ecological systems framework for eliminating these barriers that includes the following six levels of intervention: a) individual or intrapersonal (youth), b) interpersonal (adults who interact with youth), c) organizational, d) community, and e) public policy (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019, see Figure 4 on page 60). This proposed framework aligns with Raymore's (2002) ecological approach to understanding influences (facilitators and constraints) on leisure behaviors, which included the following three categories: a) intrapersonal, b) interpersonal, and c) structural (see Figure 1 on page 43). Collectively, research on youth sport and physical activity participation has documented how structural, social, and cultural factors play a major role in behavioral patterns. The current report extends knowledge on this population using national datasets and offering an expansive critical socio-ecological analysis of this data.

In addition to socio-structural barriers, another major issue adversely impacting Black girls' and adolescents' sport and physical activity patterns is the lack of media coverage of women's sports in general and the stereotypical depictions of the select Black women athletes more specifically. A consequence of these problematic and pervasive media images and narratives is Black girls and adolescents are less likely to be exposed to a range of positive and diverse sport role models compared to their male counterparts (Brown, 2018; Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005; Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016; Cooky & Rauscher, 2016; Ogunrinde, 2023). When Black women athletes are covered in the media, they are often portrayed in stereotypical ways that either objectify,

sexualize, distort, and/or typecast them. Common gendered racist media coverage of Black women athletes such as Serena Williams, Venus Williams, Gabby Douglas, and Angel Reese include the mad Black woman, the non-ideal feminine, the promiscuous/hypersexual, and animalistic/primal stereotypes (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016). In each instance, there are harmful messages sent to Black girls and adolescents that communicate to them that in order to be accepted they must minimize one or more aspects of their authentic Black femininity.

Even after gaining access to organized sport opportunities, these spaces also constitute contested terrains. Corroborating findings from research on Black women college athletes has documented their experiences with being devalued, disrespected, and discarded due to their race and gender (Bruening et al., 2005; Carter-Francique, 2013; Cooper & Jackson, 2019; Ofoegbu, 2022; Ojemaye et al., 2024; Withycombe, 2011). For example, in a study of Black women college students, Carter-Francique (2011) found that the sociocultural environment was a major determinant of this group's engagement in physical activity and campus recreation facilities and associated with their awareness or lack thereof obesity symptoms. Similarly, Ojemaye and colleagues (2024) presented a socio-ecological model that outlined the following factors associated Black women college athletes' heightened anxiety levels:

- Minority status stress intersectionality
- *Outsider within status* isolation
- Athletic stressors
- *Outcome* Black female college athletes' lived experience with anxiety (see Figure 1 on page 243).

The socio-ecological framework in their study underscored how any efforts designed to improve positive outcomes for Black girls and adolescents must move beyond deficit-based approaches and account for the multi-level factors that influence them (Ojeymaye et al., 2024). Hence, beyond providing access and exposure to healthy physical activity and sport opportunities for Black girls, adolescents, and women, it is important that these programs and interventions adopt culturally responsive approaches that account the unique experiences of and within this population (BWSF, 2024; Carter-Francique, 2011; Kalinowski et al., 2023; Olushola et al., 2013; Ogurinde, 2023).

Black girls and adolescents are not the only group uniquely disadvantaged within the structural norms of the U.S. Given the gendered racist nature of sport socialization, Black males also experience distinct challenges. In the context of the U.S. society, across social wellness indices from mortality rates (e.g., deaths due to homicide, high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, and diabetes) to juvenile detention rates to incarceration rates to school attrition rates to unemployment rates, Black males are unquestionably among the most vulnerable populations in the country and this condition is deeply connected to the pervasive anti-Black misandry embedded in all major social institutions (Cooper, 2019; Curry, 2017; ETS, 2011; Howard, 2014;

Noguera, 2008). As a result, sport participation has been viewed as one intervention for improving Black boys' developmental outcomes. Since sports from their inception in the U.S. were reserved for and associated with men and boys, Black males are particularly susceptible to being attracted to sporting spaces because it is one of the few areas of society where they consistently receive widespread respect, adulation, and support (Cooper, 2019). The problem is this arrangement is that Black male sport participation dating back to the mid-1800s has been embedded within the broader racial contract in the U.S. whereby exploitation is maintained albeit in a disguised form (Cooper, 2019; Hawkins, 2010b; Rhoden, 2006; Singer, 2020; Smith, 2009). For example, when Black men during the 19th century were granted limited access to sports such as boxing and horse jockeying, their participation was intended to serve the economic and social interests of White elites who funded these endeavors than benefit the Black males, their families, and the broader African American community (Cooper, 2019). In exchange for their services and talents, Black males were afforded at a minimum temporary relief from enslavement conditions and at a maximum freedom from bondage altogether. Hence, Cooper (2019) theorized that the introduction of Black male involvement in sport in the U.S. was connected to a desire to secure a resemblance of human dignity (distinct from athletic identity as referenced in contemporary literature) and equal citizenship rights within a context where Black people as a whole were relegated as inferior to White people. This foundational understanding is pivotal for understanding modern day socialization experiences of Black men and boys involved in sport and physical activity (Cooper, 2019).

Between the early 19th and early 21st centuries, the philosophy of muscular assimilationism has been popularized in African American communities whereby sport participation is viewed as a means for demonstrating excellence in a public space that can lead to advances in human and civil rights for the group within and beyond sport (Henderson, 1939). Originating with the Protestant Christian ethic, renowned African American sport organizer, historian, journalist, and administrator Edwin Bancroft (E.B.) Henderson promoted this term throughout African American communities in Washington, District of Columbia (D.C.) during the early 20th century when he introduced the sport of basketball to youth living in that area. The muscular assimilationism philosophy became part and parcel of the broader New Negro and Civil Rights movements that emerged during the 20th century (Cooper, 2019). The popular belief was that if sports could be integrated and African Americans could demonstrate their talent and prowess in these spaces, then it would serve as an example for the rest of society to follow. For example, many attribute the success of the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) landmark school desegregation decision to the progress fomented by the desegregation of America's pastime (baseball) by Jackie Robinson seven years prior in 1947 when he was selected to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers (Harris, 1994). Even before Jackie Robinson, the visibility and popularity of prominent African American male athletes such as 4time Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens and former heavyweight boxing champion of the world

Joe Louis were positioned as cultural icons who represented the great American democratic experiment post-Emancipation.

This historical context provides a necessary framework for understanding the unique conditions that impact Black boys' and adolescents' identity development and experiences in connection to sport and physical activity. Within this unique cultural space, Black boys' and adolescents' have been conditioned and incentivized in material ways to pursue sport success because it has been and remains associated with respected masculinity, social status, financial benefits, and cultural and multi-racial adoration. This collective hubris along the historical and contemporary positionality of Black males as a vulnerable population in the U.S. results in a paradoxical dynamic whereby overidentification and over-involvement in sport has been normalized (Cooper, 2019; Edwards, 2000; Rhoden, 2006). In fact, an abundance of scholarship on Black male youth's involvement in sport underscores the prevalence of this reality. For example, in an ethnographic study of 20 African American male former Division I college athletes, Beamon (2010) found this group was subjected to a preponderance of messages from their family, communities, and mass media that socialized them to prioritize sports over other activities. The resulting outcome of this socialization was athletic identity foreclosure, which refers to the inverse relationship between time, identity association, and resource allocation towards athletic development and comparable efforts towards development in areas beyond athletic participation (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). Beamon (2012) described the long-term adverse impact of athletic identity foreclosure for African American males:

Many continued to have foreclosed athletic identities even after retirement. They are unable to redefine themselves and feel that society makes it difficult to do so. Their families, friends, and even strangers continue to value them as great athletes which hinder identity reformation (p. 205).

Beamon's (2008, 2010, 2012) research affirmed Castine and Roberts' (1974) hypothesis when they posited that sport behaviors and outcomes are a byproduct of a socialization process involving the interplay between personal attributes, socializing agents, and environments that either enhance or minimize access to and support for athletic development in comparison to other areas such as academics, the arts, and/or vocational skill development. Thus, when micro-, meso-, and macro- level messaging and corresponding support for Black males centralizes their athletic development versus their holistic development they are likely to contribute to what Edwards (2000) described as the institutionalized triple tragedy.

In a similar vein, William C. Rhoden (2006) used the term *conveyor belt* to describe the process of Black male athlete talent extraction from their native communities starting during their youth and continuing through young adulthood. The talent extraction is engineered by major shoe companies, big-time college sport programs, professional sport leagues, and other sport stakeholders (Rhoden, 2006). He argued this conveyor belt de-incentivizes Black male

youth from investing their time, energy, and talent in any areas outside of sport because the allure of various material benefits (e.g., athletic scholarships, apparel and shoes, celebrity status, and access to networks and resources not readily available to Black people more generally) is enticing to any group, but particularly to those who have been subjected to intergenerational economic deprivation (Cooper, 2012; Darity & Mullen, 2022).

In a similar vein, renowned Black male studies scholar, Tyrone C. Howard (2014), noted in his book titled, Black Male(D): Peril and Promise in the Education of African American Males, that African American males are susceptible to what he describes as the athletic seasoning complex. The athletic seasoning complex refers to a process that involves intense early exposure into sports from youth through adolescence. This intense socialization involves the "holdback phenomenon" whereby Black males are intentionally held back a year in their academic grade classification (also known as reclassification) for athletic development purposes (Howard, 2014, p. 78). Private and prep schools are primary sites where this phenomenon is utilized given the flexibility of their eligibility rules. Athletic centric private and prep schools that recruit talented Black males serve as feeder systems to the Division I and junior college programs and subsequently professional sport leagues (Cooper, 2019; Hawkins, 2010b; Rhoden, 2006; Singer, 2020; Smith, 2009). The problem with these arrangements involves the overemphasis on Black males' athletic prowess and development at the expense of their holistic development especially given the fact that a majority of them will not matriculate to the professional sport ranks. Thus, they are viewed and treated as disposable commodities or as Beamon (2008) described as "used goods" once their athletic careers were exhausted (p. 358). Another component of the athletic seasoning complex is the internalization of "the save the family syndrome" (Howard, 2014, p. 78). Since young Black youth are more likely to grow up in households with a single mother compared to their peers (OJJDP, 2023), Black boys and adolescents are more likely to feel pressure to fulfill adult responsibilities such as providing financially for their families. Using data from the U.S. Census report, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) found that in 2022, 51.2% of all Black children live in single parent households compared to 21.3% of White children (see charts below) (OJJDP, 2023).

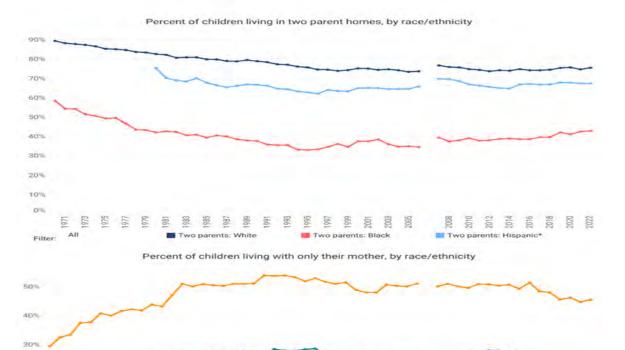
Additional data reveals that 40 percent of Black students attend high poverty schools compared to 10 percent who attend low poverty schools (see graph below) (Jordan, 2014). Hence, the vicissitudes of slavery, Jim Crow, and ongoing anti-Black racism in the U.S. has created conditions whereby Black people continue to be overrepresented in the lowest level of social stratification in terms of economic resources (Darity & Mullen, 2022; Jordan, 2014). These unfavorable structural conditions influence opportunities available and decision making processes for this population (including those related to sport participation and physical activity behaviors) on average compared to their different race counterparts.

Q: How do the living arrangements of children vary by race?

10%

Filter:

A: In 2022, the majority of white children and Hispanic children lived in two-parent homes (75.6% and 67.5% respectively), compared with four in ten (43.0%) Black children.



Note: * Persons of Hispanic ethnicity can be of any race; however, most are white. Race proportions include persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

The Current Population Survey methodology changed to more accurately reflect children's coresidence with their

98

1999

Mother only: Black

8

2008

2010

2012

The Current Population Survey methodology changed to more accurately reflect children's coresidence with their parents. This change is reflected in the estimates beginning in 2007, where two parent homes include all homes in which a child lives with both parents, married or unmarried (biological, step or adoptive). For more information please read: Improvements to data collection about families in CPS 2007 - https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2008/demo/twps08.pdf.

More than half (51.2%) of all Black children lived with one parent in 2022, compared with about one in five (21.3%) of white children.

Between 1980 and 2022, the proportion of children living in two-parent families declined for white youth (82.7% to 75.6%) and Hispanic youth (75.4% to 67.5%); for Black youth, the proportion of children living in two-parent families in 2022 (43.0%) was about the same as in 1980 (42.2%).

 Between 1970 and 2022, the proportion of children living with their mothers in single-parent households increased from 7.8% to 16.7% for white youth and from 29.5% to 45.6% for Black youth. For children of Hispanic ethnicity, the proportion living with their mother in single-parent households increased from 19.6% in 1980 to 24.5% in 2022.

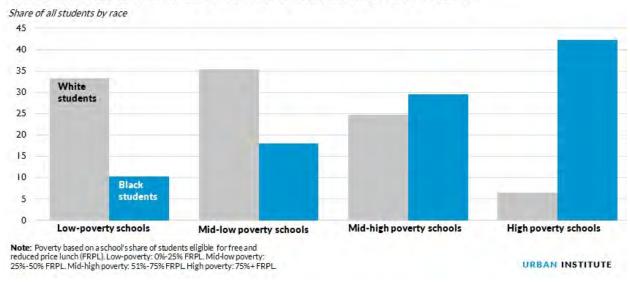
Internet citation: OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book. Online. Available: https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/statistical-briefing-book/population/faqs/qa01202. Released on January 10, 2023.

987 985

Mother only: White

Data Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Current Population Survey - Families and Living Arrangements, Historical Tables. Table CH-2: "Living Arrangements of White Children Under 18 Years Old: 1960 to Present;" Table CH-3: "Living Arrangements of Black Children Under 18 Years Old: 1960 to Present;" Table CH-4: "Living Arrangements of Hispanic Children Under 18 Years Old: 1970 to Present." [Internet release date: November 2021]. Web-based data files available at: https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/children.html.





Since athletic scholarships are coveted and there are numerous material benefits associated with sport success especially in the post-name, image, and likeness (NIL) rule change era, Black males' susceptibility to experiencing the save the family syndrome is particularly pronounced. Thus, accounting for the various socio-ecological factors impacting Black boys' and adolescents' sport and physical activity experiences and concomitant holistic developmental outcomes is essential.

Moreover, sport scholars have collectively referred to the aforementioned processes and outcomes as a form of miseducation (Cooper, 2019; Edwards, 2000; Harrison et al., 2017; Hawkins, 2010b; Singer, 2020; Smith, 2009). The miseducation through sport phenomena broadly refers to the lack of proper education of African American male youth on the history of their lineage, the intentional bifurcation of academic and athletic excellence, the conditioning of athletic manifest destiny (athletic success is viewed as a predetermined and sole means of achieving success in life for this group), and the cumulative adverse impact of holistic underdevelopment at the individual and community levels. Research on Black males has indicated their unique susceptibility to experiencing athletic identity foreclosure, role engulfment, and negative post-athletic career transition outcomes (Beamon, 2012; Cooper, 2019). In a study of Black male former Division I athletes, Singer (2020) found they self-identified as athlete-students rather than student-athletes while in college due to the expectations, time commitment, resources, and messages that centered on their athletic performance compared to their academic and personal development. Since Black males are overrepresented on athletic teams compared to their representation in the general student body at these post-secondary institutions – excluding historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) – they often internalize the message that they are only valued as athletic commodities in these spaces rather than being viewed and treated students worthy of support and investment beyond athletics (Hawkins, 2010b; Singer, 2020). As such, Cooper and Cooper (2015a) surmised that conditions,

relationships, and expectations at these institutions facilitate the desired outcomes for these athletic programs (as opposed to those of Black males and their families), which is to optimize athletic development for institutional benefits irrespective of the detriments to the holistic well-being of Black males.

In terms of experiences in academic settings, Black male athletes face frequent stereotyping and are often labeled as athletically superior and academically inferior (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Black male athletes have been shown to experience the highest rates of athletic identity foreclosure when compared to their peers (Beamon, 2012). This commitment to the athletic identity most often occurs as a result of lack of exposure to and support for exploration in a broad range of identities. In fact, a 2023 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Summit on Diverse Student Athlete Mental Health and Well-Being report indicated that a significant source of stress for minority student athletes was externally reinforced athletic identity (Kroshus et al., 2023). The effects of athletic identity foreclosure extend well beyond the athletic career of Black athletes. Many describe immense difficulty adjusting to life after sport and find that the transition from sport to a career leads to a loss of self and a struggle to redefine oneself without sport (Beamon, 2010, 2012). Athletic identity foreclosure in general, has been linked to higher occurrence of negative mental health outcomes during sport retirement, as well as lower career maturity and poor career decision-making (Beamon, 2012). Given the ramifications of the athletic identity foreclosure process, and the higher occurrence of athletic identity foreclosure in Black male college athletes, there are clearly long-term negative impacts that are disproportionately affecting the mental well-being and career health of this group.

The recognition of these adverse conditions serves as one of the impetuses for the current report whereby an expansive exploration of Black sport and physical activity involvement is conducted using a critical socio-ecological approach. The unique paradox facing Black youth, as it relates to sport and physical activity opportunities, lies within both access barriers *and* unfavorable holistic development conditions once these barriers are removed. The aim of this report is to better understand the factors contributing to various outcomes of Black youth, adolescents, and young adults in relation to sport, physical activity, and educational spaces (including engagement and disengagement experiences) and present data-informed and theory driven policy and practice reform recommendations.

Dispelling the Myth of the Monolithic Black Sport Socialization Experience

Even though the frequency and intensity of Black youth being socialized to over identify with and over involve themselves in sport is alarming, the reality is that all Black youth and adolescents do not experience sport socialization the same way or experience the same effects from their sport socialization. Stated differently, Black sport participants are not monolithic, and sport sociologists have documented the nuance in their experiences over time, space, and context. For example, in a review of research on African American males over a three decade

period (1980s-2000s), Dawkins, Braddock, and Celaya (2008) concluded there are three distinct socialization processes that are the most common among this group. The authors presented a sport participation and academic engagement typology that included the following three categories:

- Sport participation as *maintenance* for academic engagement
- Sport participation as an *incentive* for academic engagement
- Sport participation as *integrative* with academic engagement (Dawkins, Braddock, & Celaya, 2008, Figure 1 on p. 54).

The sport as maintenance for academic engagement category refers to instances when Black male youth engage in the minimal level necessary in their academic courses to preserve their athletic eligibility (Dawkins et al., 2008). The maintenance approach reflects athletic role engulfment and does not align with holistic development outcomes in the long-term (Cooper, 2016, 2018, 2019). The sport as incentive for academic engagement category refers to situations when Black male youth view academics and athletics as competing interests but maintain a high level of focus on both (Dawkins et al., 2008). In these instances, Black male youth experience a conflict between their athletic and academic identities and responsibilities but seek out ways to effectively manage their dual interests and priorities.

The sport as integrative for academic engagement category refers to the balancing of athletic and academic identities as equally important components of one's life (Dawkins et al., 2008). In a study academically motivated and high achieving Black male high school athletes in a metropolitan city, Adeyemo (2022) found that family and community support for balancing academics and athletics, enrollment in advanced placement courses, engagement with positive mentors, and enactment of healthy responses to negative anti-Black stereotypes all contributed to positive developmental outcomes for the participants. These findings affirm previous work on Black male scholar athletes that found high expectations, congruent social support for holistic development (e.g., family, community, peer, reference groups, etc.), exposure to positive identity affirmation beyond sport, and access to educational, financial, and career resources are associated with academic achievement and healthy post-athletic career transition outcomes (Bimper, 2016, 2017; Bimper et al., 2013; Cooper, 2016, 2019; Cooper et al., 2020; Fuller et al., 2017; Gragg & Flowers, 2014; Harris et al., 2014; Harrison & Martin, 2012; Harrison et al., 2015; Martin & Harris, 2006; Martin, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2010; Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010; Oseguera, 2010). With the integrative approach, Black males internalize and personify that academic and athletic excellence are not mutually exclusive. The introduction of this sport participation and academic engagement typology was groundbreaking when it was published because it offered a range of socialization processes experienced by Black males rather than a focus on a singular socialization process.

Expanding on this typology, Cooper (2019) introduced a five-category typology that highlighted the role and impact of sport involvement and educational experiences on long-term holistic development outcomes including post-athletic career transition experiences. The *Black Male Holistic (Under)Development Through Sport and (Mis)Education Model* (see Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1 below) includes the following five socialization categories:

- Illusion of Singular Success Model
- Elite Athlete Transition Model
- Transition Recovery Model
- Purposeful Participation for Personal Growth Model
- Holistic Empowerment Model

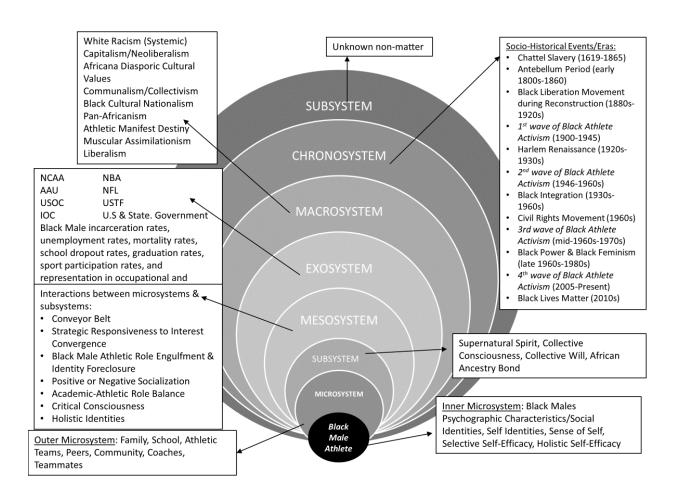


Figure 3.1: Black Male Holistic (Under) Development Through Sport and (Mis) Education Theory (Cooper, 2019, p. 124) (adapted from Bush & Bush, 2013a)

Table 3.1: Black Male Holistic (Under)Development Through Sport and (Mis)Education Socialization Models and Lifespan Phases (Cooper, 2019, p. 130)

Model	Early Youth	Adolescence	Young Adulthood	Adulthood
ISSM	Negative Sport Socialization Athletic Identity Centrality Formation Schooling Fosters Disengagement	 Athletic Manifest Destiny Conveyor Belt Muscular Assimilationism Neoliberalism 	 Athletic Role Engulfment and Identity Foreclosure Academic Neglect 	Extended Post- Athletic Career Identity Disengagement Trauma Holistic Under- Development
EALM	 Negative or Positive Sport Socialization Athletic Identity Centrality Formation Schooling Can Foster Disengagement 	 Athletic Manifest Destiny Conveyor Belt Muscular Assimilationism Neoliberalism 	Athletic Role Engulfment Academic Neglect Elite College or Professional Sport Involvement	 Professional Sport Careers Holistic (Under) Development
TRM	 Negative or Positive Sport Socialization Athletic Identity Centrality Formation Schooling Can Foster Disengagement 	 Athletic Manifest Destiny Conveyor Belt Muscular Assimilationism Neoliberalism Community Cultural Wealth 	 Athletic Role Engulfment and Identity Foreclosure Academic Neglect or Support Identity Transition Empowerment 	 Personal and Occupational Fulfillment Holistic Development
P ² EPGM	 Positive Sport Socialization Education Prioritization for Family and Cultural Empowerment 	 Academic-Athletic Role Balance Muscular Assimilationism Community Cultural Wealth 	 Strategic Responsiveness to Interest Convergence Academic Engagement Career Exploration 	 Personal and Occupational Fulfillment Holistic Development
HEM	Positive Sport Socialization Education Prioritization for Family and Cultural Empowerment	 Strong Racial Identity Cultural Nationalism/ Counter-Hegemonic Exposure Community Cultural Wealth 	 Critical Consciousness Internalized Empowerment Engagement in Counter-Actions Education for Cultural Uplift 	 Direct Resistance Against Oppressive Systems (i.e., activism) Holistic Development

Each of the five socialization models includes four developmental phases: a) *early youth*, b) *adolescence*, c) *young adulthood*, and d) *adulthood*. The models are delineated by the nature, quality, and types of support experienced by Black males and their impact on developmental outcomes. A detailed breakdown of each model is provided in Table 3.1 above. However, a summary of each model is provided here.

The *illusion of singular success model* (ISSM) is characterized by an overidentification with one's athletic identity as a result of a convergence of messaging and support from familial, community, media, and institutional sources that prioritize sport performance. The ISSM is akin to Dawkins et al.'s (2008) sport as maintenance for academic engagement category and Howard's (2014) athletic seasoning complex. From early youth to young adulthood, Black males who experience the ISSM internalize that their most valuable attribute is their athletic ability and the most viable pathway to career success is through a professional sports career. Consequently, over time there is a significant underinvestment in the development of their holistic identities and

skill sets in areas beyond sport. As a result, when the dream of securing a college athletic scholarship and/or professional sport career is unfulfilled, then Black males in the ISSM experience *post-athletic career disengagement trauma* or also known as a *post-athletic career identity crisis*. Negative developmental outcomes associated with this holistic underdevelopment process include academic underperformance, protracted mental health challenges including deflated sense of sense (and at an extreme level long-term depression), financial instability, tenuous social relationships, career confusion and unpreparedness, and at times premature deaths.

The *elite athlete lottery model* (EALM) is similar to the ISSM in terms of athletic identity and success being prioritized, but the primary difference is the likelihood of securing a professional sport career is often higher among Black males who experience this socialization model due to a range of factors not the least of which is exposure to top-level scouts, coaches, and training, advanced athletic skill development, and financial resources. Those in the EALM are identified between early youth and adolescence as promising prospects and recruited and nurtured to become future professional athletes. These individuals attend athletic-centric private, prep, and/or public schools and subsequently earn athletic scholarships or turn professional after high school. Although all Black males who experience the EALM reach the highest college or professional levels of athletic success, their post-athletic career retirement outcomes vary. Many experience similar adverse outcomes as those in the ISSM whereas others are able to leverage their athletic success and resources and successfully transition to careers after athletic retirement. The recognition of Black males who excel at sports at the highest level, albeit not the majority of this population, is pertinent to acknowledge and equally important to understand is the factors that contribute to their post-athletic career transition challenges and successes.

The transition recovery model (TRM) refers to Black males who experience similar challenges as those in the ISSM (although not to the same intensity), but instead of a prolonged encounter with post-athletic disengagement trauma or identity crisis they have a more acute adjustment period between athletic retirement and post-athletic career positive life outcomes. Black males in the TRM have a high level of athletic identity from early youth to young adulthood, but due to access to and activation of various resources such as positive supports within and beyond athletics (e.g., mentors, significant others, advocates, etc.), after athletic retirement they actualize the notion that transferable skills through sport are applicable to a range of career fields. Those in the TRM also utilize networks through athletics and other areas to nurture their career and life interests that are not centered on their previous athletic careers. Thus, these Black males experience what Cooper (2019) described as identity transition empowerment (ITE) whereby positive aspects of one's previous athletic career are infused with the development of additional identities and skills beyond athletics towards the end goal of holistic development throughout adulthood. These transitional outcomes are not accidental, but rather a byproduct of concerted efforts by both the Black male former athletes and the support systems connected to them.

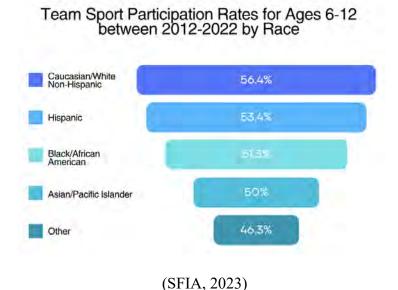
The purposeful participation for personal growth model (P²PGM) is similar to Dawkins et al.'s (2008) sport as integrative with academic engagement category whereby from early youth through young adulthood, Black males are socialized to internalize balancing their academic and athletic identities. Those who experience the P²PGM do not experience athletic role engulfment or identity foreclosure because from their introduction into sport through retirement, they understand sport participation is a means to an end and not an end in itself. These Black males often excel academically, execute clear post-athletic career transition plans, and nurture their holistic identities throughout their lives. The P²PGM debunks the stereotypical notion that all Black males prioritize athletics at the expense of their academic and personal development. Rather those in this model strategically leverage athletic spaces, networks, and experiences to facilitate their holistic development both during and post-athletic career retirement.

The *holistic empowerment model* (HEM) is closely associated with the P²PGM with one primary distinction being the presence of critical consciousness about socio-political conditions in society and the subsequent commitment to engaging in social justice actions. The HEM produces activists and social justice advocates who view their existence in all spaces, including sport, as opportunities for drawing attention to prevailing injustices and the need for local and societal transformation. Those in the HEM join organizations and engage in a range of resistance actions that focus on advancing human and civil rights for marginalized populations. The HEM refutes the mainstream assumption that athletes are politically apathetic and disengaged and underscores the reality that many Black males view sport and its public visibility as powerful mechanisms for uplifting social justice causes.

In summary, the socialization models outlined in this section highlight the heterogeneity among Black youth, adolescents, and young adults' experiences in and through sport and educational spaces. Black youth, adolescents, and young adults connected to sport and physical activity spaces are not monolithic and neither are their developmental outcomes. It is important to understand the socio-ecological (e.g., ideological, structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) factors that contribute to different outcomes so policymakers, administrators, educators, athletic staff, parents, and community members can actively create and support cultures that facilitate positive developmental outcomes. As noted in the TRM, even when negative outcomes are experienced, the goal is to connect Black youth, adolescents, and young adults with resources that assist them with overcoming post-athletic career disengagement trauma or identity crises. In addition, even though the socialization models mentioned in this section focused on Black males, the analysis of the literature on Black girls, adolescents, and young women alongside this literature suggest the latter group also experiences heterogenous socialization experiences and developmental outcomes related to sport, physical activity, and education. Thus, primary aims of this report are to recognize the heterogeneity of experiences and outcomes among these populations, analyze the factors that contribute to specific developmental outcomes, and propose effective approaches for optimizing holistic wellness and success for all Black people across their lifespans.

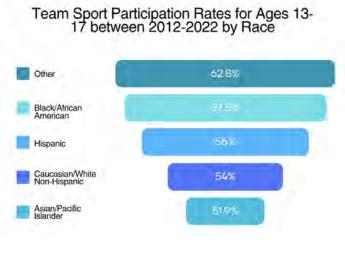
Black Youth Sport Participation

At the youth level, out-of-school sport opportunities are common in the form of community (i.e., parks and recreation) and private club offerings. However, as noted earlier, the trend of decreased funding for public youth sports has impacted access for various age groups. In particular, families with fewer economic resources are uniquely disadvantaged when public youth sports are defunded and pay-to-play opportunities are more widespread. Since Black families are overrepresented within lower socioeconomic statuses, it is important to explore the extent to which these structural constraints impact youth sport participation rates for this population compared to other racial groups. Within this section, we analyze longitudinal data on youth sport participation with a focus on racial differences.



The table above provides insight into youth team sport activities between 2012-2022. The data reveals Black/African American youth between the ages of 6-12 are less likely to participate in team sports compared to their White and Hispanic counterparts, at comparable rates as than their Asian/Pacific Islander peers, and at higher rates than their peers who identify as Other. Since introduction to sports at any early age has been associated with sustained engagement throughout adolescence and young adulthood, these findings indicate the presence of what we call the *youth sports participation racial opportunity gap*. Although the percentage differences are less than 6 percent, these nationwide gaps over a 10-year period underscore how Black/African American youth are not accessing team youth sport opportunities at the same rates as their White and Hispanic peers. Additional data from the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) *National Youth Sports Strategy* report found that Black youth were less likely to participate in sports teams or sports lessons on the weekends compared to White, Hispanic, Asian, and Other youth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Even more, the fact that nearly half of all Black/African American families surveyed by the Sport Industry

Fitness Association (SFIA) reported not participating in team youth sports at all (49.7 percent) is also alarming (SFIA, 2023). Possible explanations for these gaps are the prevalence of increased costs associated with out-of-school youth sports (Coakley, 2021a, 2021b; Pandya, 2021) and the increased likelihood of Black families living in sport deserts (Martin, 2024).

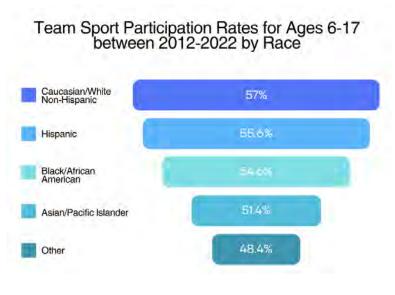


(SFIA, 2023)

Between ages 13-17, adolescents have the opportunity to participate in both interscholastic and out-of-school sport activities beyond physical education courses. As a result, the increase in team sport participation for Black/African American adolescents between the ages of 13-17 (57.5%) compared to Black/African American youth between the ages of 6-12 (51.3%) from 2012-2022 is particularly noteworthy because it provides support to the notion that school-sponsored sports are associated with increased engagement for this population. Even though the pay-for-play trend has impacted school-sponsored sports as well (Eyler et al., 2019), the extent of these requirements is not as expansive as it is for private out-of-school sport clubs. Thus, these findings suggest when financial barriers are mitigated, Black sport participation increases. However, since the data was not disaggregated by race and gender, it is difficult to determine if this increase is attributed to increased male or female participation. Previous research indicated Black adolescent girls' participation in sports declines during this period (Kimm et al., 2002). We recommend future research disaggregate data by race, gender, and social class to enable for more nuanced analyses of sport participation patterns at different age levels.

Notwithstanding, the fact that the racial differences in terms of order of groups that engaged in team sport participation were reversed (with the exception of Asians/Pacific Islanders whose percentage remained nearly identical) between the 6-12 age range and 13-17 age range shows that sport offerings for adolescents (largely attributed to school-sponsored sports) has the most pronounced positive impact on Black/African American adolescents (6.2 percentage difference) and those who identify as Other (62.8 percent of those between 13-17 participated in team sports compared to 46.3 percent between the ages of 6-12 between 2012-2022 – 16.5

percentage difference). Stated differently, early youth sport access between ages 6-12 appears to be the primary target area for intervention in terms of improving participation opportunities for Black youth.



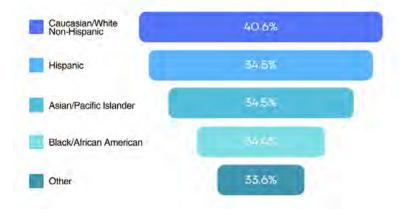
(SFIA, 2023)

Between 2012-2022, Black youth and adolescents (ages of 6-17) are less likely to participate in team sports compared to their White and Hispanic peers. The fact that over half of the Black families surveyed reported having their children involved in team sports is noteworthy. However, a more in-depth examination of the type and quality of sport experiences among this group is needed to determine to what extent positive outcomes were derived from this engagement. Nonetheless, the team sport participation data for Black youth and adolescents is encouraging particularly for the latter group.

Core Team Sport Participation Rates for Ages 6-12 between 2012-2022

The SFIA (2023) defined a core participant as someone who participated in basketball, baseball, flag football, indoor volleyball, and ice hockey at least 13 times in the last year; soccer and tackle football at least 26 times in the last year; pickleball at least 8 times in the last year. Golf and tennis are not separated by the casual and core labels. Below is the core team sport participation rates by racial groups for ages 6-12 between 2012-2022.

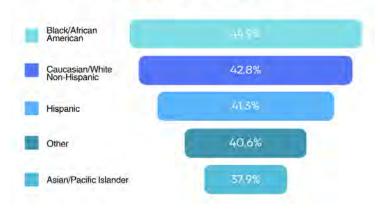




(SFIA, 2023)

This data reveals that Black youth (as well as Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Other) between the ages of 6-12 are less likely to be a core team sport participant than White youth. When comparing the 34.4 percent of Black youth who were core participants compared to the 51.3% who participate in team sports, this gap suggests this group is less likely to participate in year round sport opportunities compared to their White counterparts. Additionally, this data supports our hypothesis that the *youth sports participation racial opportunity gap* is most pronounced at the younger ages (6-12) and when accounting for the frequency and length of involvement. In order to be a core participant, it requires extensive time commitment and often more financial resources, which families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with less flexibility with scheduling and transportation are not as likely to be able to meet these demands. Hence, the *youth sports participation racial opportunity gap* appears to be associated with structural constraints facing Black families.

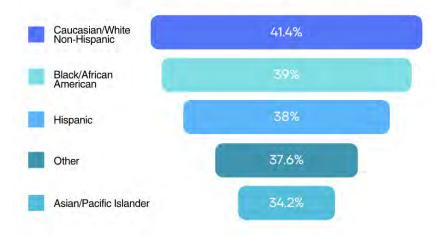




SFIA (2023)

Similar to the inverse trend with team sport participation between adolescents (ages 13-17) and youth (6-12), data for core sport participation revealed a noticeable increase in Black adolescents' involvement. In fact, Black adolescents were more likely to be core team sport participants than any other racial group. Since many Black adolescents attend public high schools, these environments offer valuable school-sponsored sports that often have a lower barrier to entry (i.e., financially) compared to out of school sports. Research has highlighted how for many Black middle school and high school students, sports serve as a incentive for their school attendance and academic engagement since athletic eligibility standards are prevalent across many interscholastic governing bodies (Adeyemo, 2022; Dawkins et al., 2008; Ogunrinde, 2023). In comparison to their different race peers, it is clear sport participation at the adolescent phase is valued by Black students. Since Black adolescents are more like to grow up in lower socioeconomic statuses (U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 2023), the emphasis on pursuing an athletic scholarship for financial support to enroll in a postsecondary institution is higher especially within a socio-ecological context where the costs of college attendance continue to soar.

Core Team Sport Participation Rates for Ages 6-17 between 2012-2022 by Race



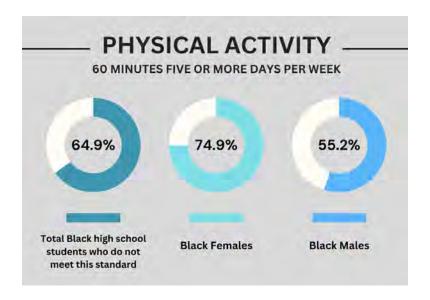
SFIA (2023)

Overall, Black youth and adolescents are slightly less likely to be core team sports participants compared to White youth and this gap is largely due to fewer opportunities between ages 6-12. Additional SFIA (2023) data shows that 23.9 percent of youth ages 6-17 who live in households with less than \$25,000 are core team sport participants compared to 44.5 percent of youth ages 6-17 who live in households with income at or above \$100,000. Although the SFIA (2023) report does not disaggregate data by race and income, comparing the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (2023), the former data suggests socioeconomic status is correlated with youth sport participation rates particularly core sport participation rates.

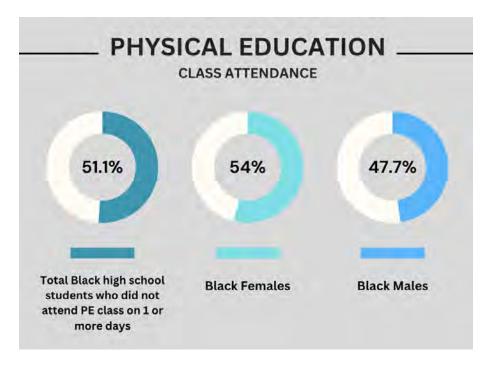
Black Interscholastic Sport Participation and Physical Activity

According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), interscholastic sports serve as an extension of the educational experience and fosters development in leadership, citizenship, and academic achievement (NFHS, 2024). Given the important transition during adolescence into young adulthood, interscholastic co-curricular offerings are particularly important for enhancing students' self-efficacy, socio-emotional skills, civic engagement, and intellectual prowess. In addition to school-sponsored sports, regular engagement in physical activity in formal and informal settings outside of school has also been found to contribute to healthy developmental outcomes for young people (SHAPE, 2024). Within this section, we highlight findings on the impact of interscholastic sport participation on student outcomes derived from multiple governmental, scholarly, and independent sources.

In 2021, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) published a national High School Youth Risk Behavior report, which included racially disaggregated data on students (CDC, 2021). Germane to the current report, we extracted select data from this survey report on Black high school students including disaggregated data based on race and gender to identify any potential differences based on these social identities. In terms of being physically active for at least 60 minutes at least one day per week, 24.2 percent of Black students (28.9% of Black females and 20.3 percent of Black males) were not physically active (CDC, 2021). On the surface, this relatively low percentage of Black high schools being physically inactive is encouraging. However, since the standards for health recommended at least three to five days per week of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week, we examined another data point to better gauge to what extent Black high school students were engaged in healthy behaviors in terms of routine physical activity. For those who reported being physically active for 60 minutes five or more days per week, 64.9 percent of Black high school students (74.9 percent of Black females and 55.2 percent of Black males) did not meet this standard (CDC, 2021). Juxtaposing this finding with the fact that 74.1 percent of Black high school students (77.7 percent of Black females and 70.8 percent of Black males) reported spending more than 3 hours per day of screen time suggests sedimentary engagement on social media, multi-media apps, or the internet more broadly is consuming more of their time on a weekly basis than healthy physical activity (CDC, 2021).



Additional findings from the High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey revealed that 51.1 percent of Black high school students (54 percent of Black females and 47.7 percent of Black males) did not attend physical education (PE) classes on 1 or more days (CDC, 2021). These rates increased when asked about attendance to PE classes on five days per week whereby 80.4 percent of Black high school students (82.3 percent of Black females and 78.2 percent of Black males) did not attend. Given the trend of PE courses being removed from standard curriculum (Coakley, 2021b; Eyler et al., 2019; SHAPE, 2023), these findings may not be attributed to factors exclusively within the students' control. Nonetheless, the high percentage of Black high school students who do not attend PE classes on a weekly basis is disconcerting and signifies how this group requires concerted attention to ensure healthy behaviors are being supported. Collectively, these findings are alarming on multiple levels. First, the fact that nearly two-thirds of Black high school students surveyed did not engage in physical activity for 60 minutes for at least five days per week highlights how many of them are not meeting national standards for healthy behaviors (SHAPE, 2023). Moreover, the finding revealing the 19.7 percentage point gap between Black males (55.2 percent) and Black females (74.9 percent) in terms of not engaging in 60 minutes of physical activity for at least five days per week indicates there are distinct barriers facing the latter group. Previous research has indicated how sports cultures within and beyond schools reinforce masculine associations and thus Black female high schools may begin to selfselect out of these activities in preference for other engagements that affirm their identities and connect with their interests at a higher level (Kalinowski et al., 2023; Kelly et al., 2010; Kimm et al., 2002; Ogunrinde, 2023).

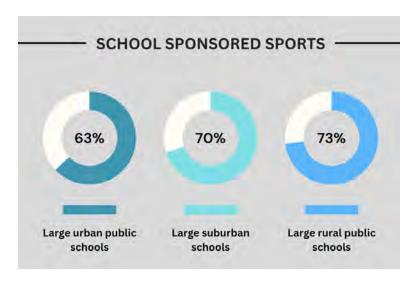


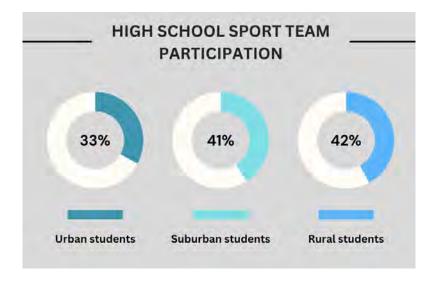
Regarding participation on a school-sponsored sports team, there were mixed findings identified between the High School Youth Risk Survey (CDC, 2021) and the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). According to the High School Youth Risk Survey, 52.8 percent of Black high school students (58.4 percent of Black females and 47.1 percent of Black males) reported not playing on at least one sports team (CDC, 2021). In contrast, results from a National Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 60 percent of Black high school students reported participating on at least one sports team compared to 55 percent of White students and 48 percent of Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). The latter data corroborates the findings from the SFIA (2023) data in the previous section on Black adolescents between the ages of 13-17 and their engagement as core sport participants. Based on the timing of the survey administrations, we surmise the CDC (2021) report may have been skewed based on the COVID-19 pandemic whereas the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2019) report was based on data collected before the pandemic and the SFIA (2023) data was aggregated over a ten year period between 2012-2022. Thus, we assert that Black high school students who are physically active are more likely to engage in these behaviors through school-sponsored sports as opposed to out-of-school opportunities.

The Aspen Institute publishes a series of *Project Play* reports on different high school types including large public urban schools, small urban public high schools, large rural public high schools, small rural public high schools, large suburban public high schools, small suburban public high schools, private schools, and charter schools (Aspen Institute, 2021a). Given the focus of the current report and available data from The Aspen Institute, we examined the large urban public schools, large suburban public schools, and large rural public schools as a proxy for

a racial comparison of Black high school students compared to their non-Black counterparts. Research has indicated that the largest percentage of Black students in K-12 schools attend those located in cities, which are also referred to as urban schools (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017; NCES, 2024). Analyzing data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Logan and Burdick-Will (2017) found that the highest share of Black students are enrolled in urban public schools (73 percent) whereas the highest share of White students are enrolled in rural and suburban public schools (95 and 94 percent, respectively).

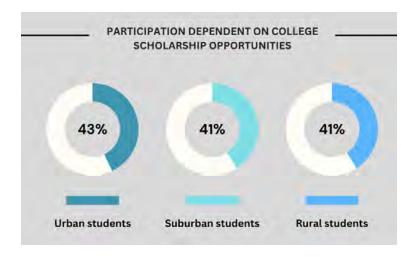
In a comparison of school-sponsored sports, 63 percent of large urban public schools, 70 percent of large suburban schools, and 73 percent of large rural public schools offered these co-curricular opportunities (Aspen Institute, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). The fact that large urban public schools on average were less likely to offer school-sponsored sports signifies the structural disadvantage facing Black high schools. Consequently, only 33 percent of urban students compared to 41 percent of suburban and 42 percent of rural students participate on high school sports teams (Aspen Institute, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Additional findings indicated that Black urban students were twice as likely to express not participating in high school sports due to a lack of opportunities that interest them compared to their suburban and rural counterparts (Aspen Institute, 2021a). Even within the popular sport of basketball, Black urban students are less likely to participate on a high school team (33 percent) compared to their Black suburban (42 percent) and Black rural (54 percent) peers (Aspen Institute, 2021a).





(Aspen Institute, 2021a)

The Aspen Institute researchers suggested the lower participation rates are less about interest levels and more about resources such as gym space, staffing, and other support needs associated with finances (Aspen Institute, 2021a). We refer to this phenomenon as the *school sports structural resource gap*. Although fewer sport opportunities are offered in urban schools, students in these settings are more likely to participate in these activities to earn a college scholarship (43 percent) compared to their suburban (41 percent) and rural (41 percent) peers (Aspen Institute, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Hence, the social conditions facing students from different backgrounds influence the reasons why they participate in sport and the meaning they attribute to this participation (i.e., sport for leisure and pleasure versus sport as a necessity for upward mobility/access to college). When disaggregated by gender, 33 percent of urban female students compared to 23 percent of urban male students expressed that they do not enjoy sports (Aspen Institute, 2021a). As noted earlier, previous research suggests enjoyment with any leisure activity is connected to positive social relationships, identity affirmation, and self-efficacy. If urban students lack a range of high-quality multi-sport opportunities within and beyond school settings, then they are less likely to experience enjoyment in the sports that are offered.



(Aspen Institute, 2021a)

In contrast to their non-Black peers who are more likely to attend suburban and rural public schools (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017; NCES, 2024), Black high school students at large public urban schools experience a *resource deficit* or also referred to as the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006), structural intersectionality (Howard, 2014; Wilson, 2008) and the opportunity gap. The Close the Gap Foundation (2024) defines the opportunity gap as "the way that uncontrollable life factors like race, language, economic, and family situations can contribute to lower rates of success in educational achievement, career prospects, and other life aspirations" (p. 1). The value of the current report lies in the centralization of race and sport participation access as part and parcel of the broader educational inequities facing Black youth and adolescents. Hence, instead of primarily focusing on resource deficits within traditional classroom settings (which are important as well), this report documents how school-sponsored sport opportunities (or the lack thereof) constitute a harm done to Black students within the prevailing racialized schooling structures in the U.S. Any efforts to redress adverse educational outcomes associated with Black students must account for the impact of access barriers to sport and physical activity opportunities.

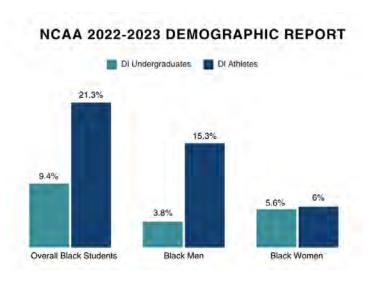
Black Intercollegiate Academic, Athletic, and Social Experiences and Outcomes

Black college athletes have received significant scholarly attention particularly those who compete at the NCAA's highest competitive level of Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) also known as the Power 5 conferences (Hawkins, 2010b; Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; Singer, 2020; Smith, 2009). The revenue generation among these athletic programs has generated both widespread popularity and extensive scrutiny regarding the incompatibility of big-time college sports and the educational missions of these institutions as well as the overall well-being of the college athletes both during and after their sport careers conclude. Even though examining Black college athletes' experiences and outcomes at the Division I FBS level is important, it is also necessary to explore those who compete across various levels of competition and institution types to better understand key factors that facilitate their positive educational, psychosocial, cultural, and occupational development. As such, within this section, we examine a range of data sources of college athletes' experiences and outcomes and analyze racial and gender differences using a socio-ecological approach.

Context Matters: Demographics, Climate, and Culture Issues

One of the major trends at the postsecondary level that differs from Black students' experiences at the primary and secondary levels is the demographic composition of these institutions. As noted earlier, Black students in the U.S. are more likely to enroll in K-12 urban public schools with students who share similar racial and social class backgrounds as them (Jordan, 2014; NCES, 2024). However, aside from at HBCUs, Black students at a majority of postsecondary institutions in the U.S. constitute a numerical minority (NCES, 2019). Researchers have documented how these campus climate conditions have presented distinct challenges to Black students (Strayhorn, 2012) and Black college athletes more specifically (Brooks & Althouse, 2013) whereby racial microaggressions, social isolation, and cultural dissonance are commonplace. Despite the fact that Black students are underrepresented in terms of representation in the general study body, one space on campus where they are overrepresented is among athletic teams. For example, in 2022-2023, according to a NCAA report Black men accounted for 3.8 percent of undergraduate students at Division I institutions while Black men athletes constituted 15.3 percent of Division I athletes (NCAA, 2023a). At Division I institutions, Black women represented 5.6 percent of the undergraduate population and Black women athletes made up 6.0 percent of the athlete population (NCAA, 2023a). Overall, Black students constituted 9.4 percent of all undergraduates at Division I institutions and Black athletes represented 21.3 percent of all athletes (with an overrepresentation in basketball, football, and track and field) (NCAA, 2023a). Black people in the U.S. constitute 13.7 percent of the national population (U.S. Census, 2023). Recent demographic data on college athletes indicates their representation on athletic teams has remained consistent; roughly 20 percent at the Division I

level, 16 percent at the Division II level, and 10 percent at the Division III level² (NCAA, 2024). These rates of overrepresentation on athletic teams compared to the general student population is not an incidental occurrence. Rather these patterns are a byproduct of institutional policies and practices that value Black students more for their athletic prowess and the economic, entertainment, and institutional reputation gains derived therein versus nurturing their intellectual and holistic skills beyond sporting spaces. We describe this phenomenon as *Black athletic* overrepresentation, which refers to the institutional prioritization of Black athletic talent and concurrent devaluation of Black talent beyond athletics. Researchers have described this arrangement as a form of racial, athletic, and educational exploitation (Cooper, 2012; Hawkins, 2010b; Jolly & Chepyator-Thomson, 2022; Singer, 2020; Oseguera, 2010). Along the same lines, 14 percent of all Directors of Athletics across the NCAA's three divisions are Black (NCAA, 2023a). When disaggregated by divisions, Black Director of Athletics comprise 21 percent of Division I (compared to 20 percent of student athletes), 13 percent of Division II (compared 15 percent of student athletes), and 9 percent of Division III (compared to 9 percent of student athletes) (NCAA, 2023a). Regarding head coaching positions, Black coaches constitute 10 percent of all head coaches across the NCAA Divisions, I, II, and III (compared to 16 percent of student athletes). These demographic trends are worth noting because they communicate the areas where Black people are valued at these institutions, which have a direct impact on Black college athletes' experiences and outcomes.



(NCAA, 2023a)

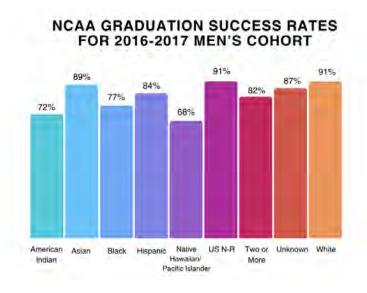
² We were not able to locate racial demographic enrollment data for the general student population for Division II and III institutions.

Regarding campus climate issues, previous research on Black college athletes has indicated they encounter multiple challenges regarding their intersecting and at times conflicting identities and roles on campuses. Scott (2014) described climate as norms, symbols, and narratives that reflect on the surface features of a given environment. Within the context of historically White institutions (HWIs) and their athletic programs, scholars have noted how colorblind racism and liberalism are prevailing norms where race and racism are minimized at best and ignored altogether at worse (Carter-Francique, 2017; Cooper et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2017). Moreover, the fact that athletes are commonly referred to as "student-athletes" differentiates them from their non-athlete peers in ways that have been deemed problematic in terms of decentralizing their academic and personal development beyond athletics as well as isolating them from the broader campus community (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). Along the same lines, climate is closely associated with culture, but these terms are not synonymous. Culture refers to espoused values, beliefs, and attitudes that are under the surface of a given milieu (Scott, 2014). Comeaux (2012) introduced the term athlete microaggressions to describe distinct encounters among college athletes with faculty, peers, and non-athletic staff on campus. Athlete microaggressions refers to "subtle or overt, verbal or nonverbal exchanges (whether intentional or unintentional) which communicate negative and demeaning messages towards college student-athletes, regardless of race, gender, or type of sport" (Comeaux, 2012, p. 191).

Although Comeaux's (2012) definition applies to college athletes across racial and gender backgrounds, research on Black men and women athletes in college has revealed this subgroup experiences racialized and gendered athletic microaggressions that are distinct from their non-Black college athlete peers. For example, research on Black women college athletes have highlighted how they have been subjected to disparate surveillance and intellectually inferior stereotypes compared to their non-Black women athlete counterparts (Bernhard, 2014; Bruening et al., 2005; Carter-Francique, 2013; Ferguson, 2023; Foster, 2003; Ofoegbu, 2023). Related to Black men, scholars have examined how their encounters with gendered racism involve the prevalence of the dumb jock stereotype, an emphasis on athletic eligibility versus academic achievement and intellectual development, social isolation, disregard for their emotional challenges, economic exploitation via athletic commodification, and experiences with athletic identity foreclosure and negative post-athletic retirement life outcomes (Beamon, 2008, 2012; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Cooper, 2012; Howe, 2023; Hawkins, 2010b; McAulay, 2024; Melendez, 2008; Singer, 2005, 2008). These findings underscore how college and universities are often microcosms of the broader society in which they exist, which highlights the value of adopting socio-ecological analyses of these conditions in relation to Black athletes' developmental experiences and outcomes. Within this section, a socio-ecological approach with particular attention to intersectional identities are incorporated to better understand the factors that contribute to specific experiences and outcomes for Black college athletes.

Racial Graduation Gaps

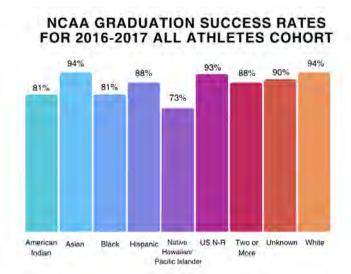
Graduation outcomes are widely deemed as a success metric for educational institutions including colleges and universities. The NCAA collects data on athletes' graduation rates and disaggregates this data by sport, race, gender, and divisional classification. Given the focus on the current report, we examine college athlete graduation data using a socio-ecological and intersectional lens to offer theory-driven explanations for any racially disparate outcomes. According to a recent NCAA (2023a) report, the Division I graduation success rates (GSRs) from the 2016-2017 academic year revealed both racial and gender disparities. Division I is the highest competition level within the NCAA and includes programs that offer athletic scholarships and at least 14 sports per institution. Division I programs are commonly associated with the multi-billion dollar annual March Madness basketball tournaments and college football playoff series (Huma & Staurowsky, 2012). The high-level of commercialization and corresponding economic revenue generation has resulted in this division receiving the majority of the scrutiny from critics that argue these institutions and programs are engaging in educational mission drift whereby financial and political benefits supersede foundational academic missions (Cooper et al., 2017; Hawkins, 2010b; Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). The critical examination of academic data among athletes at this level provides partial insight into the extent to which these programs are upholding their academic missions in a racially equitable manner.



(NCAA, 2023a)

The NCAA GSR is a metric that assesses what percentage of athletes graduate within six years of initial enrollment while accounting for transfer athletes (NCAA, 2023b). The NCAA (2023a, 2023c) report revealed that Black male Division I athletes graduate at the third lowest rate among all college athlete racial and gender groups at 77 percent. The only groups that

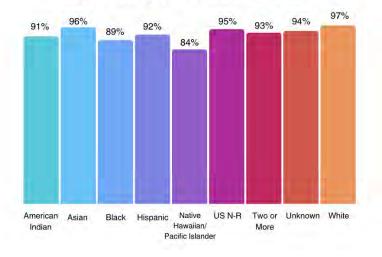
graduate at a lower rate than Black male athletes are American Indian male athletes at 72 percent and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander male athletes at 68 percent. The fact that Black male athletes graduate at double digit rates lower than their White, Hispanic, and Asian peers underscores the prevalence of racialized academic outcomes at these institutions.



(NCAA, 2023a)

Additional evidence for this claim is reflected in the overall rates when gender groups are merged and data is disaggregated by race only, Black athletes graduate at the second lowest rate (81 percent) only ahead of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander athletes (73 percent).





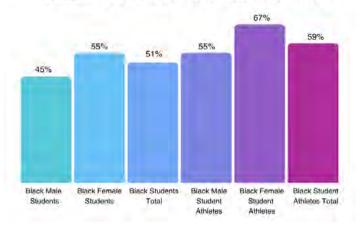
(NCAA, 2023a)

For Black women, although they fare better than their Black male counterparts, they also graduate at lower levels (89 percent) compared to all their non-Black women peers with the exception of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander women athletes (84 percent).

Beyond athlete comparisons, the NCAA (2023a) report also allows for analyses between all students and those who are athletes. This type of comparison elucidates to what extent athletic participation is associated with academic persistence. Compared to Black male students overall (45 percent), the four-year class average for Black male athletes was 55 percent. Similarly, the four-year class average for Black women students overall and Black women athletes was 55 percent and 67 percent, respectively (NCAA, 2023a). These double-digit percentage point gaps suggest athletic participation does contribute to increased academic persistence efforts for Black students. We describe this phenomenon as the *athletic academic matriculation advantage*. The NCAA's institution of academic progress rates (APR), GSRs, and related eligibility requirements along with the sense of belonging and institutional attachment associated with athletic participation are possible explanations for these increased graduation rates compared to Black students who are non-athletes. Athletes also have access to athletic-related resources (e.g., athletic scholarships, athletic academic support, athletic alumni, etc.) that differ from their non-athlete peers which could also explain their higher graduation rates.

Nonetheless, the fact that less than half of all Black men irrespective of athletic status who enroll in college do not graduate within four years is alarmingly and requires ongoing attention and interventions. Even among Black men who participate in athletics, nearly half of them (45 percent) do not graduate within four years so although this type of engagement yields some positive persistence outcomes, it does not redress the full range of challenges facing this group in terms of persistence through graduation. In addition, the fact that Black men athlete graduation rates (55 percent) are lower than every racial and gender sub-group of students who are non-athletes with the exception of American Indian/Native American men (48 percent) and women (54 percent) underscores the unique vulnerability of this population along with their Black men non-athlete student peers (45 percent). Notwithstanding, since Black women athletes graduate at a rate (67 percent) noticeably higher than the average for Black students overall (51 percent), it is important to explore the factors that contribute to this outcome for this group and ways to improve support for them and their Black peers (both non-athletes and athletes). Intersectional analyses of disaggregated data are essential for understanding nuanced dynamics among sub-groups such as Black men athletes compared to Black women athletes as well as both groups compared to their non-athlete peers within and outside of their racial group.

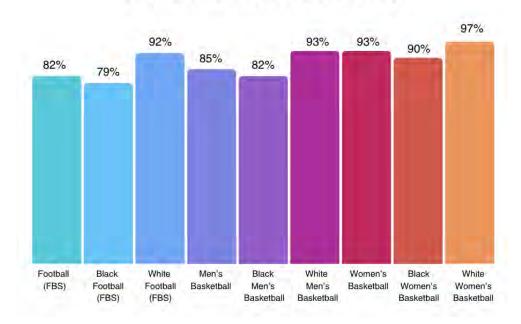
FOUR YEAR AVERAGE GRADUATION SUCCESS RATES FOR NCAA DIVISION I



(NCAA, 2023a)

The data below reveals that even though a majority of Black football, men's basketball, and women's basketball student athletes graduate within six years, they still experience lower graduation rates when compared to their White counterparts. In the case of Black football student athletes, they graduate at 13 percentage points lower than their White peers and 3 percentage points lower than the overall graduation rate for football student athletes (NCAA, 2023c). For men's basketball, Black men graduate at 11 percentage points lower than their White counterparts and 3 percentage points lower than the overall graduation rate for men's basketball student athletes. Similarly for women's basketball, Black women graduate at 7 percentage points lower than their White peers and 3 percentage points lower than the overall graduation rate for women's basketball. The persistence of these racial graduation gaps since the NCAA began tracking this data in the early 2000s underscores how the quality of the educational opportunities granted to student athletes is not colorblind and thus requires a race-conscious approach to creating conditions that facilitate racial equity.

SIX YEAR GRADUATION RATES

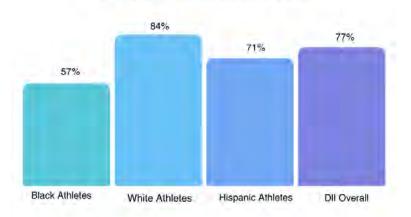


(NCAA, 2023c)

Division II

Although Division I is the most commercialized and publicly visible level of intercollegiate athletics in the U.S., the NCAA is also composed of two additional divisional classifications. Division II schools are required to sponsor a minimum of ten sports (four less than the Division I requirement) and they offer fewer athletic scholarships compared to Division I schools. The NCAA publishes academic data for each division in separate reports. One of the benefits of the current report is the inclusion of multi-divisional data within one report to allow for a more expansive analysis of trends across institutions with varying levels of athletic competition. A review of the Division II academic success rates (ASRs) among a four-year cohort between 2013-2016 revealed that Black athletes graduate at the lowest rates (57 percent) among all athlete sub-groups. Black athletes graduated at nearly 30 percentage points lower than their White athlete counterparts (84 percent), 14 percentage points lower than Hispanic athletes, and 20 percentage points lower than Division II athletes overall. These glaring graduation gaps illustrate the quality and nature of athletes' experiences at the Division II level is racialized whereby Black athletes are the most disadvantaged group in terms of receiving effective support for their matriculation towards graduation.

DII ACADEMIC SUCCESS RATES



(NCAA, 2023d)

Additional data indicated that Black men athletes graduate at the lowest rates (51 percent) compared to their non-Black athlete peers (NCAA, 2023d). When compared to the White men athlete counterparts (77 percent), Black men athletes' ASR was 26 percentage points lower (51 percent). Even among their Black women athlete peers, Black men athletes' ASR was 25 percentage points lower (76 percent). It is also no surprise that ASRs for football (67 percent) and men's basketball (56 percent) are among the lowest of the 12 sports included in the report. This latter data suggests Division II institutions, not unlike their Division I counterparts, primarily value Black men for their athletic prowess rather than being equally committed to their academic development and success. Collectively, these significant academic success gaps highlight how Black men athletes at this level experience these environments distinctively from their athlete peers. Racial gaps in ASRs were also present among women, but not as stark as for men. Black women athletes' ASR was the lowest among all women athletes (76 percent). Compared to their same gender peers, Black women athletes graduated at 14 percentage points lower than their White women athletes and four percentage points lower than their Hispanic women athlete counterparts (80 percent). The fact that a racial gap exists indicates there is a need for more research and data-driven interventions to improve academic performance outcomes among these groups.

A noteworthy finding outlined in the Division II report revealed that athletes at HBCUs graduated at higher rates than their athlete peers who attended non-HBCUs. For example, four-year ASR cohort data from 2016-2017 indicated that women HBCU athletes (78 percent) graduated at a rate three percentage points higher than women non-HBCU athletes (75 percent). Similarly, men HBCU athletes (55 percent) graduated at a rate five percentage points higher than men non-HBCU athletes (50 percent) (NCAA, 2023d). These notable differences based on institutional type corroborate previous research that highlighted how these institutions served as culturally affirming and educationally nurturing learning environments conducive to positive

Black athlete developmental outcomes (Charlton, 2011; Cooper & Cooper, 2015b; Hawkins et al., 2015). We refer to this phenomenon as the *HBCU educational effect*. Cooper and Comeaux (2017) highlighted best practices at these institutions that could be adapted at non-HBCUs including pre- and early college academic support programs, data-driven designed study halls, collaboration between athletic and academic support services, routine celebration of athletes' academic achievement, and culturally affirming campus cultures (e.g., artifacts, relationships, events, etc.).

Our analysis of these findings also suggests there is a need for the NCAA and all educational entities to consider creating different success metrics that account for the unique dynamics associated with varying institution types and the students they enroll. For example, research has highlighted that students including athletes who enroll at HBCUs are more likely to be first-generation, Pell Grant recipients, providing financial support to family members while in college, fulfilling employment responsibilities (either part-time or full-time) while working towards degree completion, and enrolling in postsecondary education following an extended period after they graduate high school (Lee & Keys, 2013). Taking these factors into account as well as other institutional variables (i.e., resource gaps between HBCUs and their more well endowed non-HBCU counterparts – see Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2015) for an extensive analysis of institutional distancing), we propose creating a six to ten year graduation metric instead of using the four-year graduation time frame, which the latter time frame was based traditional residential schools who enrolled students who recently graduated from high school. In other words, academic success for athletes (across all races) and non-athletes should account for the variance in institutional missions and student circumstances.

Compared to the general student population, the aggregate six-year federal graduation rate (FGR) for 2013-2016 for Division II Black athletes (44 percent) was slightly higher than their Black non-athlete student peers (37 percent), but noticeably lower than White athletes (65 percent) and Hispanic/Latino athletes (55 percent) and White non-athlete students (58 percent) and Hispanic/Latino non-athlete students (49 percent). These findings underscore how Division II athletic participation may yield positive academic matriculation outcomes for Black students when compared to their non-athlete peers, but both Black athletes and non-athletes experience less academic success at these institutions compared to their non-Black peers. Hence, the athletic academic matriculation advantage is present at both the Division I and II levels, but not without concern. When disaggregated by gender, Black men athletes graduate at the lowest rates among all athlete sub-groups at 38 percent (NCAA, 2023d). This rate is 21 percentage points lower than White men athletes (59 percent), 9 percentage points lower than Hispanic/Latino men athletes (48 percent), 20 percentage points lower than Black women athletes (58 percent), 24 percentage points lower than Hispanic/Latina women (62 percent), and 34 percentage points lower than White women (72 percent) (NCAA, 2023d). These noteworthy gaps in graduation rates among college athletes illustrates how Black men are uniquely underserved academically at these institutions. Although Division I programs receive the most public scrutiny and attention for

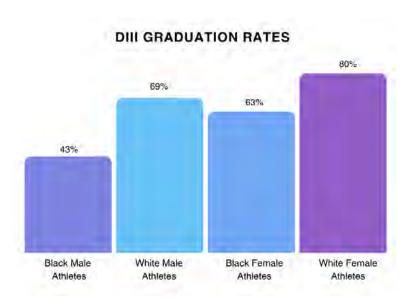
racial and gender graduation gaps, it is clear from this Division II data that this issue is not limited to one divisional classification. Thus, multi-divisional NCAA policy reforms are necessary to redress the prevalence of these inequities.

Division III

The Division III level is distinct from Divisions I and II in that these programs do not offer any athletic scholarships. Hence, athletic participation is viewed at these schools as an extension of the educational experience as a co-curricular activity albeit with high levels of competition, oversight by athletic departments, conference officials, and the NCAA, and financial allocations/subsidies from the host institutions. Since the programs at the Division III level are not as commercialized as their Division I counterparts and athletic scholarships are not offered, it can be presumed that an academic-athletic balance would be higher at these institutions. However, an examination of recent FGRs among Division III athletes reveals stark differences along racial and gender lines. For example, in 2022, the FGR for Black athletes (48 percent) was 26 percentage points lower than White athletes (74 percent) (NCAA, 2023e). In addition, Black athletes' FGR (48 percent) was also slightly lower than their Black non-athlete student peers (50 percent) in the general student body, which suggest athletic participation does not yield the same positive matriculation benefits for Black athletes at the Division III level as it does for those at the Division I and II levels. One of the aims of this report is to provide nuance to the analysis of the Black athletes' experiences and outcomes across various levels of sport. The data throughout the intercollegiate section illustrates how the level of competition along with other factors such as sport and institution type (and corresponding features such as culturally responsive supports) must be taken into account when determining what conditions and factors facilitate positive outcomes for this group.

Additional disaggregated Division III data revealed Black men graduate at lowest rates among all athlete sub-groups at 43 percent (NCAA, 2023e). The fact that Black men athletes persistently graduate at the lowest rates compared to their athlete peers across all divisional classifications indicates that this sub-group faces distinct macro-, meso-, and micro-level challenges that impede their progress towards degree completion. Compared to Black men athletes, White men athletes graduated at 26 percentage points higher (69 percent), Black women athletes graduated at 20 percentage points higher (63 percent), and White women graduated at 37 percentage points higher (80 percent) (NCAA, 2023e). This data highlights two major issues. One, the fact that less than half of all Black men athletes who enroll at Division III institutions graduate within six years is alarming. Independent of comparisons to their peers, the 43 percent FGR is unacceptable and data-driven interventions are needed to address this issue at the systemic level (as opposed to only at the meso-/institutional level). Two, when compared to their peers, it is clear that both Black men and women athletes, albeit to varying extents, are not experiencing the same positive academic outcomes as their non-Black athlete peers. This trend raises concerns about how these institutions are supporting Black athletes beyond recruiting them

for athletic participation. There is a need for a paradigm and structural shift towards a holistic development framework that changes institutional cultures whereby Black athletes begin to receive adequate and sustained support that contribute to positive developmental outcomes such as the elimination of the *racial graduation gap*.

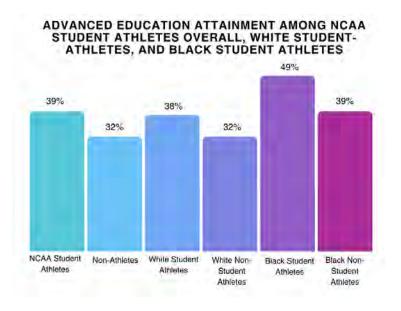


(NCAA, 2023e)

When disaggregated by sport, the data provides additional insight into racialized outcomes. The FGRs for White and Black football players was 60 and 37 percent, respectively (NCAA, 2023e). For basketball, the FGRs for White and Black men were 67 and 45 percent, respectively. For White and Black women basketball athletes, the FGRs were 78 and 57 percent, respectively. The persistent double digit graduation gaps along racial lines signifies Black athletes not only experience distinct challenges compared to their teammates and other non-Black athlete peers, but they also concurrently receive less than adequate support to navigate and outcome these challenges. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Black women athletes (63 percent) graduated at a higher rate than their Black women non-athlete student peers (54 percent), which suggest athletic participation does not contribute to positive educational outcomes for this subgroup. Notwithstanding, Black athletes and non-athletes (men and women) graduating at lower rates than their non-Black counterparts indicates that a race and gender conscious approaches are needed at these institutions to ensure this group experiences optimal educational and developmental success during and post-college.

More Than an Athlete: Black Former Athletes' Postbaccalaureate Pursuits

In 2020, the NCAA partnered with Gallup to publish a report titled, A Study of NCAA Student-Athletes: Undergraduate Experiences and Post-College Outcomes. The data was collected from a survey of former NCAA athletes (N = 4,889) and non-athletes (N = 69,012) who were enrolled at their respective schools between 1975 and 2019. Within this report, the researchers documented data on former college athletes' enrollment in post baccalaureate programs.



(Gallup, 2020)

A notable finding from this data revealed that Black former athletes were the most likely to earn an advanced degree (49%) compared to their non-Black counterparts, NCAA athletes overall, and non-athletes overall. This finding is particularly noteworthy given the data highlighted earlier in this section that indicated Black college athletes were among the least likely to earn a bachelor's degree within four years compared to their peers. The advanced education data for Black former college athletes illustrates what we call the educational opportunity optimization response (EOOR) phenomenon among this group. This phenomenon refers to the occurrence of a marginalized group exhibiting achievement outcomes when access barriers are reduced (as opposed to being eliminated) despite facing multiple unfavorable conditions embedded within ecological systems. This concept is akin to previous scholars' conception of stereotype reactance (Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001; Martin et al., 2010) in response to experiencing stereotype threat (Steele, 2010). However, the EOOR phenomenon differs from stereotype reactance because it does not inherently involve the recognition and responsiveness to a negative stereotype. In other words, the EOOR highlights how Black students who successfully navigate the college experience are more likely to pursue and capitalize on the benefits of advanced education compared to their non-Black peers. This point

suggests if the challenges facing Black college students (athletes and non-athletes) can be mitigated, then even more Black college graduates could pursue advanced degrees which could lead to increased career and financial mobility over their adulthood. This type of mobility should not be understated because increased upward occupational mobility also improves familial and community outcomes that were highlighted earlier in the report (i.e., reduced poverty rates, decreased health disparities, etc.).

Moreover, as with all research and data sources, the Gallup (2020) report does contain notable limitations. The lack of inclusion of data on students' pre-college backgrounds (e.g., social class, educational experiences and resources, etc.) and the lack of disaggregation of gender groups prevents more in-depth analyses of these results. For example, NCES (2024b) data reveals that women in general and Black women more specifically enroll in college at higher rates than men and Black men. For example, in 1976 and 2008, Black women accounted for 56 percent and 71 percent, respectively, of Black graduate student enrollment nationally (NCES, 2010). Thus, it is possible the Gallup (2020) report data is disproportionately attributed to Black women athletes enrolling in graduate schools at higher rates, but without disaggregated data this assertion cannot be confirmed. Another possible explanation for this trend that the current presentation of the data does not allow for exploration is the notion that Black graduate students are those who come from middle- and upper-class socioeconomic backgrounds and they are more likely to have parents with advanced education prior to college enrollment. In other words, research has shown that first-generation students (The Pell Institute, 2016) and Black college athletes (Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006) are more likely to enroll in college with less academic preparation compared to their peers (including Black) who have parents who graduated from college and who have higher household incomes. As a result, one recommendation we offer at the end of this report is the need for more robust data collection of sport participation, physical activity, educational, and occupational experiences and outcomes that is disaggregated by multiple social identity categories such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, and social class to name a few.

Additional data from the study indicated that Black athletes were the most likely to express agreement with the statement that their professors in college cared about me as a person (47 percent) compared to White athlete (34 percent), Hispanic athlete (38 percent), White non-athlete (28 percent), Black non-athlete (30 percent), and Hispanic non-athletes (29 percent) (Gallup, 2020). Black athletes were also slightly more likely to agree with the statement that they had at least one professor in college who made them excited about learning (69 percent) compared to their White athlete (67 percent), Hispanic athlete (62 percent), White non-athlete (65 percent), Black non-athlete (63 percent), and Hispanic non-athlete (68 percent) counterparts (Gallup, 2020). Similarly, Black athletes were slightly more likely to agree with the statement that they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams (32 percent) compared to White athlete (26 percent), Hispanic athlete (20 percent), White non-athlete (23 percent), Black non-athlete (26 percent), and Hispanic non-athlete (26 percent) peers (Gallup,

2020). Collectively, these findings along with the advanced educational pursuit data is important to highlight because it underscores the importance of positive faculty-student relationships on student engagement, persistence, and success particularly for Black students at different institution types (HBCUs and HWIs).

In addition to positive relationships with faculty, the Gallup (2020) report also included encouraging wellbeing data among Minority athletes who graduated from college. Regarding those who expressed agreement with the statement about thriving in purpose wellbeing, Minority athletes were slightly more likely to agree with this statement (55 percent) compared to White athletes (54 percent), White non-athletes (46 percent), and Minority non-athletes (48 percent) (Gallup, 2020). In terms of social wellbeing, 58 percent of Minority athlete graduates compared to 53 percent of White athlete graduates, 46 percent of White non-athlete graduates, and 48 percent of Minority non-athlete graduates expressed agreement with the statement that they were thriving with their social wellbeing (Gallup, 2020). Additional positive findings indicated that Minority athletes were slightly more likely to express agreement with the statement about thriving in terms of physical wellbeing (43 percent) compared to their White athlete (41 percent), White non-athlete (33 percent), and Minority non-athlete (28 percent) peers (Gallup, 2020).

However, two areas of wellbeing where Minority athletes lagged their peers in terms of agreement were financial and community. Compared to White athletes (43 percent) and White non-athletes (42 percent), Minority athlete graduates (36 percent) were less likely to report thriving financially and only slightly more likely than their Minority non-athlete peers (34 percent) (Gallup, 2020). In terms of thriving in community wellbeing, Minority athletes (48 percent) were less likely to agree with this statement compared to White athletes (50 percent) (Gallup, 2020). This slight difference may be due to the fact that White athletes are more likely to participate on teams and have non-athlete peers of the same racial and social class backgrounds as themselves at HWIs compared to Black athletes. Thus, after graduation, White athletes are more likely to be in occupational fields and graduate programs with those who share similar backgrounds as themselves compared to Black athlete graduates. It is noteworthy that Minority athletes (48 percent) and White athletes (50 percent) were more likely to report that they were thriving in community compared their Minority non-athlete (38 percent) and White non-athlete (45 percent) peers, which suggests athletic participation and the relationships and benefits therein can contribute to positive transitional outcomes post-graduation.

Notwithstanding the insightful aspects of this data, there are two areas of caution that must be noted when interpreting this data. One, the data does not exclusively focus on Black athletes and thus the term minority is inclusive of all non-White athletes. Hence, additional disaggregated data is needed to conclusively ascertain the nature and extent of Black athletes' well-being (purpose, social, financial, and physical). Two, the data only includes those who graduated from college. As noted earlier, across divisions anywhere between more than half to slightly less than half of all Black athletes who enrolled at NCAA institutions do not graduate

within six years. Thus, it is important to understand the nature and quality of all Black athletes' experiences at these institutions, not just those who persist through graduation.

Black College Athletes' Mental Health and Experiences with Racism and Racial Trauma

Discrimination and stereotypes about Black people in the mental health and medical fields more broadly have led to an over diagnosis of relatively rare mental health conditions such as Schizophrenia and personality disorders, as well as conduct related disruptive behavior disorders (Atkins-Loria et al., 2015; Fadus et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2023). Additionally, the discriminatory perception of Black individuals being less susceptible to pain has also led to an under-diagnosis of common mental health concerns and mood disorders such as anxiety and depression (Tran et al., 2023). Black college athletes face distinct and unique challenges to their mental health, which is connected to a history of systemic racism in the U.S. (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020). More germane to the current report, many college athletes of color report feeling judged, isolated, marginalized, exploited, and unsupported by administrators because of their racial identities (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020). Data from the 2019 Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Learning Experiences of Students (GOALS) study indicated that Black college athletes across all divisions were less likely to report feeling a sense of belonging at their institutions (NCAA, 2019), More specifically, Black men (70 percent) and Black women (65 percent) were less likely to report experiencing a sense of belonging compared to White men (81 percent), White women (83 percent), Latino men (74 percent), Latina women (71 percent), Other men (71 percent), and Other women (76 percent) (NCAA, 2019). Additional data from this report indicated across all divisions that Minority women were more likely to disagree with the statement about their coaches creating an inclusive environment for all members of the team. For example, 59 percent of Division I Minority women, 67 percent of Division II Minority women, and 69 percent of Division III Minority women compared to 65 percent of Division I White women, 71 percent of Division II White women, and 75 percent of Division III White women agreed that their coaches created an inclusive environment for all members of their team (NCAA, 2019). Despite a reportedly high mental health need within Minority athletes overall and Black athletes more specifically, research has consistently indicated these groups do not feel as comfortable engaging in traditional help-seeking behaviors with campus resources (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Helling & Chandler, 2021). A lack of psychological resources to address the unique challenges facing Black college athletes has been associated with chronic under-utilization of on-campus mental health resources (Helling & Chandler, 2021). Moreover, inadequate institutional support, color-blind racism embedded in institutional policies, and a lacking race-conscious and culturally responsive practices also contribute to these adverse outcomes for Black college athletes (Cooper et al., 2020).

According to the NCAA (2023f) report on student athlete mental health, 10% of Black student athletes reported that personal experiences of racism and/or racial trauma negatively impacted their mental health, which was higher than their non-Black peers. Comparatively, 6%

of Latinx and 7% of Other racial groups surveyed reported racism and/or racial trauma as negatively impacting their mental health. Similar to the broader society, anti-Black racism permeates sport environments which often serve as a microcosm for the greater society and leads to greater mental health consequences for these individuals.

	Factors Negatively Impacting Student-Athlete
	Mental Health in the Month Before the Survey
(Percentage	of Participants Who Responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" by <u>Racial Group</u>)

	Black	Latinx	Other	White
Planning for the future	36%	37%	38%	29%
Financial worries	35%	33%	30%	19%
Academic worries	35%	42%	41%	36%
Family worries	24%	24%	22%	13%
Playing time	21%	24%	22%	18%
Coach relationship	19%	18%	19%	15%
Team environment	17%	17%	17%	13%
Personal experiences of racism/racial trauma	10%	6%	7%	(22)
COVID-19 health concerns	7%	5%	4%	3%
Political disagreements with family/friends	6%	5%	5%	3%

Researchers have documented the distinct challenges facing Black college athletes at HWIs (Beamon, 2008, 2012; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Cooper, 2012; Howe, 2023; Hawkins, 2010b; Melendez, 2008; Singer, 2005, 2008). As members of groups who face intersectional marginalization and stigmatization, Black college athletes are often treated as both superhuman as athletes and subhuman or inferior as students and human beings (Cooper, 2019). As a result, the emotional issues this group experiences are often ignored or downplayed. The confluence of the *Black athletic overrepresentation* phenomenon, the persistent underrepresentation of Black faculty, coaches, and administrators, and lack of culturally responsive practices and practitioners who specialize in Black mental health result in negative personal and developmental outcomes for Black college athletes (and Black students more broadly) at HWIs (Bernhard, 2014; Bruening et al., 2005; Carter-Francique, 2013; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Hawkins, 2010b; McAulay, 2024; Melendez, 2008; Singer, 2020).

In a recent study on Black male college athletes, McAulay (2024) found participants' frequent encounters with anti-Black misandry contributed to adverse mental health outcomes including the development of what he described as an emotional callus. This maladaptive emotional response involves the psychological suppression or numbing of feelings as a result of experiencing various types of racial microaggressions (McAulay, 2024). Sue and colleagues (2007) defined microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward the target group or person" (p. 273). The three types of racial microaggressions are racial microassaults (overt acts of discrimination), racial microinsults (covert acts of stigmatization), and racial invalidations (overt acts of

marginalization). These harmful experiences are not isolated to Black male college athletes as research on Black women college athletes have found this group experiences similar and unique forms of stereotyping and mistreatment as result of their race, gender, athletic status, and additional identities such as social class and sexual identity (Bernhard, 2014; Bruening et al., 2005; Carter-Francique, 2017; Ferguson, 2024; Ofoegbu, 2023). As noted earlier in the Gallup (2020) study, Minority women across all three divisions were less likely to agree with the statement that "My coach has created an inclusive environment for all members of my team". For Division I, 59 percent of Minority women athletes compared to 65 percent of White women athletes agreed that their coaches created an inclusive environment for all team members (Gallup, 2020). For Divisions II and III, 67 percent and 69 percent of Minority women compared to 71 percent and 75 percent of White women, respectively, expressed the same sentiments. Hence, there is a need for major interventions that center the unique needs of and challenges facing Black college athletes across various sports and divisional classifications.

Black College Athletes' Burden for Championing Racial Justice and Social Change

In 2021, the NCAA published a landmark report titled, *National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Student-Athlete Activism and Racial Justice Engagement Study.* The study included 24,974 student-athletes across all three divisional classifications. *The NCAA Student-Athlete Activism and Racial Justice Study* collected data from 24,974 student athletes including 9,572 Division I, 8,990 Division II, and 6,302 Division III student athletes, which reflected a 6% response rate among all NCAA student athletes (NCAA, 2021). Survey questions on civic engagement, athlete activism, and racial justice engagement were a subset of items within the *NCAA Student-Athlete Well-Being Survey* which was created by the NCAA Sport Science Institute and NCAA Student-Athlete Advisory Committees (SAAC) across all three divisions. The survey was disseminated through national, conference, and institutional level SAAC representatives between October 6-November 2, 2020. Attached below are selected findings from the study that highlight how Black college athletes were more likely to engage in social justice activism compared to their non-Black peers. Within this section, we briefly highlight some of the salient findings from this report.

Data from the NCAA (2021) study revealed that Black college athletes (77 percent) were more likely to publicly communicate their opinion about a cause on social media, email, or a petition than White college athletes (57 percent). More specific to social media, 83 percent of Black college athletes reported posting or sharing content on social networking sites about race or racial justice compared to 51 percent of White college athletes during the same time period. In addition, Black college athletes (53 percent) were also more likely to report participating in a boycott, rally, or protest compared to White college athletes (30 percent). In terms of donating money for a cause or campaign, Black college athletes (55 percent) were more likely to engage in this type of support compared to White college athletes (48 percent). The latter group was more likely to engage in volunteer work (82 percent) compared to 78 percent for Black athletes

and discuss politics with their social networks over the past six months (86 percent) compared to 79 percent for Black athletes. Interestingly, both Black (82 percent) and White (82 percent) college athletes expressed intentions in voting in the November 2020 election, which reflects both groups' desire to be civically engaged. Collectively, these findings illustrate what Cooper and colleagues (forthcoming) described as the *The Black college athletes' burden*, which refers to a phenomenon where a group that is the most disadvantaged within a context feels the most compelled to engage in transformative change actions compared to their non-Black counterparts who are unwilling and/or less likely to engage in similar behaviors at comparable levels.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE LAST YEAR (PERCENT OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ENDORSED "AGREE" OR "STRONGLY AGREE" BY RACIAL GROUP) (NCAA, 2021A)

	Black	Latinx	Other	White
It is important to me to be an active and engaged citizen	73%	74%	76%	77%
Student-athletes have a responsibility to participate in volunteer activities within the local community	65%	67%	65%	65%
I would be comfortable taking a public stance on a social issue	60%	49%	49%	41%
I keep up with current political and social issues	54%	48%	53%	51%

TABLE 2: PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES LAST YEAR (PERCENT OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ENDORSED "OCCASIONALLY" OR "FREQUENTLY" BY RACIAL GROUP) (NCAA, 2021A)

	Black	Latinx	Other	White
Discussed Politic	79%	74%	82%	86%
Performed Volunteer Work	78%	77%	79%	82%
Publicly Communicated my opinion about a cause (e.g., social media post, email, petition, etc.)	77 %	64%	69%	57%
Donated to or raised money for a cause or campaign	55%	52%	52%	48%
Demonstrated for a cause (e.g., boycott, rally, or protest)	53%	39%	44%	30%

TABLE 3: RACIAL JUSTICE ENGAGEMENT IN LAST SIX MONTHS BY RACE (PERCENT OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ENDORSED "OCCASIONALLY" OR "FREQUENTLY" BY RACIAL GROUP) (NCAA, 2021A)

	Black	Latinx	Other	White
Had conversations with family or friends focused on race or racial justice	94%	87%	91%	88%
Made an effort to learn more about race or racial justice on my own	89%	83%	86%	80%
Posted or shared content on social networking about race or racial justice	83%	67%	68%	51%
Had conversations with coaches focused on race or racial justice	67%	49%	56%	51%
Attended a protest or rally about racial justice	49%	29%	36%	23%
Contributed money to an organization focused on racial justice	49%	29%	36%	23%
Contacted a public official to express an opinion about racial justice	27%	19%	22%	16%

TABLE 4: TAKE STUDENT-ATHLETE VOICE INTO ACCOUNT IN RACIAL EFFORTS (PERCENT OF PARTICIPANTS WHO RESPONDED "AGREE" OR "STRONGLY AGREE" BY RACIAL GROUP) (NCAA, 2021A)

	Black	Latinx	Other	White
My Coach	69%	69%	68%	67%
My Athletics Department	60%	66%	62%	64%
My Institution	57%	66%	63%	64%
My Athletics Coaches	54%	63%	57%	59%
NCAA	53%	64%	57%	61%

TABLE 5: PARTICIPANTS' LEVEL OF COMFORT DISCUSSING ISSUES OF RACE ON CAMPUS (PERCENT OF PARTICIPANTS WHO RESPONDED "MOSTLY COMFORTABLE" OR "EXTREMELY COMFORTABLE" BY RACIAL GROUP) (NCAA, 2021A)

	Black	Latinx	Other	White
With Teammates	76%	69%	70%	65%
With Coaches	67%	61%	59%	57%
With Other Student-Athletes	65%	59%	55%	52%
With Non-athlete Students	55%	52%	50%	47%
With Campus Administrators	50%	49%	44%	44%

TABLE 6: 2020 ELECTION PARTICIPATION (PERCENT OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ENDORSED "AGREE" OR "STRONGLY AGREE" BY RACIAL GROUP) (NCAA 2021A)

	Black	Latinx	Other	White
I intend to vote in the November 2020 election	82%	66%	79%	82%
I have or intended to volunteer for this year's election (e.g., assist with voter registration work at the polls, etc.)	19%	15%	12%	10%

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

In this report, we have presented and analyzed nationwide engagement data of Black youth, adolescents, and intercollegiate students in sport and physical activity in connection to developmental outcomes. One aim of this report is to provide data-informed insights for current and future systems-level changes that improve outcomes for Black students across their educational pathways and throughout their lifespans. In alignment with our socio-ecological approach to data analysis, we offer multi-level recommendations for improving systems, policies, and practices in the effort to optimize holistic development outcomes from Black youth through adulthood.

Broader Systemic Recommendations for Policy and Practice Reform

U.S. Department of Sport, Recreation, and Physical Activity. The review of available resources regarding Black youth, adolescent, and intercollegiate student experiences and outcomes related to sport participation and physical activity highlighted one glaring issue, which is the need for more expansive and in-depth disaggregated data on this group as well as their non-Black peers across all levels and types of engagement. The Sport Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), The Aspen Institute, NCAA, U.S. State Department of Health and Human Services, and a select number of research outlets offer important data for understanding trends and conditions associated with Black students, but there remain significant gaps in data that can inform more comprehensive and effective intervention approaches. We recommend the U.S. Congress establish a Department of Sport, Recreation, and Physical Activity. Currently, the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and U.S. Census Bureau (among other Departments) collect meaningful data on Black citizens and communities, but none of these entities centralizes sport and physical activity. Given the widespread benefits associated with sport and physical activity across the lifespan, we believe it is important to have a department dedicated to conducting research, identifying and disseminating appropriate resources for specific areas (i.e., financial, facilities, staffing, etc.), and establishing standards and best practices for high quality sport and physical activity programming informed by experts and key stakeholders. Internationally, ministries of sport are a common feature of numerous governments (e.g., Canada, Australia, Kenya, Brazil, France, South Korea, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom to name a few). This department could coordinate to national, regional, state, and local efforts for developing impactful research, policies, programming, and funding for both school-based and community sport organizations where Black youth, adolescents, and young adults reside.

National Center for Black Sport Participation and Physical Activity. Related to the Department of Sport, Recreation, and Physical Activity recommendation, we recommend the establishment of a National Center for Black Sport Participation and Physical Activity. This center could work with various entities such as the NFHS, NCAA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Parks and Recreation Departments, and related entities collect expansive data that can be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and type of sport and physical activity involvement among other related variables. Current data sources are helpful, but there are gaps in knowledge regarding the interplay between various factors that prevent and facilitate Black youth, adolescent, and young adults from engaging in healthy and regular

physical activity (formal and informal activities). For example, at the high school and college level there is a dearth of data on Black students who are non-athletes and their physical activity behaviors. At the youth level, there is a lack of disaggregated sport participation and program involvement data to better understand what specific conditions contribute to positive outcomes for Black youth across geographical contexts. A center dedicated to answering these types of questions could advance our collective knowledge of these groups and ways to best support them. In addition to research, this center could coordinate consortiums, grants, programming, and partnerships centered on optimizing Black holistic development outcomes across their lifespan.

Systemic Data-Centered and Data-Informed Practices. Another recommendation we propose is the adoption of more data-centered and data-driven sport and physical activity programming in school and broader community settings. Currently, the NFHS and NCAA have standards for athlete eligibility that are designed to promote character development and academic achievement. However, there is a lack of systematic standards and approaches that account for diverse cultural groups. In concert with the recommendations outlined above, the creation of sport and physical activity cultures that value and incorporate data-informed approaches could lead to enhanced developmental and health outcomes for Black youth, adolescents, young adults, and adults. We believe data serves as an important checks and balances for sport and physical activity organizations to determine how they are contributing to positive and/or negative outcomes for certain groups and under what conditions. We envision a sports and physical activity culture nationally where data is used to inform policies and practices such as resource allocation and program development. Currently, it is common for elite sport organizations to rely on performance analytics to inform training and coaching strategies, but this sample level of attentiveness to data on Black youth, adolescent, and young adults' perceptions of and experiences in sport and physical activity settings is scarce. We believe changing this reality is essential for improving health outcomes for this population. It is also imperative that robust data approaches allow for the disaggregation of participants with unique and adaptive abilities (also commonly referred to as disabilities) to ensure these groups are supported and not overlooked. Additional identity categories that could be focal areas of analysis along with race, gender, age, and social class are sexual identity, religion, and geographical location to name a few.

Direct Impact Stakeholder Leadership. We also recommend all sport and physical activity organizations adopt what we call a Direct Impact Stakeholder Leadership (DISL) approach. Concepts such as Community-Centered Leadership, Assets-Based/Strengths-Based/Anti-Deficit approaches, and Equitable Partnerships are all in alignment with Direct Impact Stakeholder Leadership. This approach involves soliciting and prioritizing the perspectives of the groups most directly impacted specific conditions and programming efforts. As opposed to reproducing top-down approaches that marginalize the insights of those most directly impacted by targeted efforts, DISL views the latter group as the source of essential knowledge and co-creators of solutions-based approaches.

Lifetime Excellence Through Sport - Growth and Optimism (LET'S GO) Framework. Data analysis within this report signifies the need for a paradigm shift in sport participation and physical activity across all levels. We surmise that currently sport participation and physical activity in the U.S. is viewed in a problematic dichotomous manner. One on end, competition and performance are overemphasized, which is reflected in the win-at-all costs and pay-for-play

trend nationwide. This approach inherently creates a culture of exclusivity whereby everyone is not expected or allowed to engage particularly over their lifespan. On the other hand, physical activity is viewed as an optional leisure activity that is suggested, but not normalized for all. The de-emphasis on physical education in traditional schooling spaces across the K-20 pathway is an example of this anti-essential approach to physical activity. As a result, we call for a paradigm shift that normalizes sport participation and/or physical activity as essential for health and wellness across the lifespan. This paradigm shift is conceptualized as the *Lifetime Excellence Through Sport - Growth and Optimism* (LET'S GO) framework. Rather than positioning sport participation as a privilege, we believe these activities are not only a human right, but a necessity for developing healthy people, families, communities, and societies. The LET'S GO framework consists of the following components: a) *access* to safe and quality physical activity, recreation, and sport spaces, b) *education* on healthy ways to engage in routine moderate to vigorous physical activities/exercises and sports, c) *personal development* with progress towards health goals, self-efficacy, and social wellness, d) *culturally relevant and affirming* spaces and activities, and e) *lifetime engagement and commitment*.

Increased Private and Public Partnerships Centered on Black Youth Sport Involvement and Positive Developmental Outcomes. Recently, there has been a surge in the sponsorship of youth sports equity coalitions through organizations such as the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) (https://positivecoach.org/) as well as through the transformative philanthropic efforts of companies such as New Balance (https://www.newbalance.com/newbalance-foundation/about-us.html). We call for more widespread investment in the adoption of similar efforts across the U.S. Using data from this report as well as studies that examine specific neighborhoods and cities would reflect a commitment to data driven interventions. Increased public and private partnerships centered on eliminating the sport participation and physical activity gaps and related health disparities is a primary recommendation from the analysis of the data in this report.

Culturally Respectful and Expansive Mass Media Coverage of Healthy Lifestyles. We also call for media outlets particularly those centered on sport and fitness to promote the normalization and popularization of healthy lifestyles among Black people beyond elite athletes. As noted earlier, Black youth and adolescents are bombarded with images of elite athletes who share similar racial and ethnic backgrounds as them. The problem with the propensity of this type of exposure is that it signals to the youth and adolescents that sport involvement is reserved for those who are competitive and highly skilled. Consequently, a vast majority of those who do not identify with these characteristics are socialized to devalue healthy physical activity and dietary lifestyles. Another common, yet different, trend in mainstream media is the proliferation of images of Black people consuming unhealthy foods or engaging in risky lifestyles. The outcome of this propaganda is the synonymous association of Blackness with unhealthy lifestyles. As a result, in conjunction (not in isolation) with broader structural reforms that improve access to high quality and safe physical activity spaces and affordable nutritional foods and beverages, we propose a commitment by all major media outlets that claim to be socially responsible to consult with Black sport based youth development organizations such as the Black Women in Sport Foundation (BWSF) and other Black organizations (e.g., faith-based, political, professional, and social) for ideas on how to promote a range of positive images and narratives of Black people of all ages and backgrounds engaging in healthy lifestyles.

Youth Level Recommendations

Ecological Systems Approach to Solutions. In order to redress the youth sports racial opportunity gap, we call for the creation of multi-level consortiums (national, regional, state, and local) of Black youth sports participation and physical activity. These gatherings can bring together funders, researchers, practitioners, and community leaders to share insights about existing conditions, identify and promote healthy interventions, and allocate funds to support programs that are effective at improving health, social, and educational outcomes for Black youth. Any serious issues in a given society are best addressed through organizational efforts. The development of central space where data, funding, knowledge, and networks can be shared and expanded is recommended. Focal points of interventions could involve eliminating the pay for play barriers for Black youth who live in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods using the U.S. Health and Human Services (2019) and CDC (2021) reports on structural barriers facing this group. Any resolutions should incorporate interconnected ecological systems approaches and we recommended a review of the frameworks presented in this report (Cooper, 2019; Raymore, 2002; Ogunrinde, 2023; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). For example, any serious effort must address the factors that create sport deserts and related factors impacting Black youth and adolescents (e.g., mass incarceration rates, economic deprivation, health disparities, etc.) (Cooper, 2012, 2019; Martin, 2024; OJJDP, 2023).

K-12 Teacher Certification Reforms Focused on the Inclusion of Culturally Connective Sport and Physical Activity Pedagogical Practices and Physical Literacy.

Promoting the development of teacher certification programs that require Culturally Connective Sport and Physical Activity Pedagogical Practices and Physical Literacy is a major recommendation from our analysis of the data in this report. Over the past two decades, innovative teaching approaches centered on improving educational outcomes for Black students such as culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), hip-hop pedagogy (Emdin & Adjapong, 2018), abolitionist pedagogy (Love, 2019), and African-centered pedagogy (Murrell, Jr., 2002) has been championed. Each of these approaches incorporate culturally grounded strategies for engaging Black youth and adolescents whereby the content taught and learned is intentionally connected to students' backgrounds, identities, and communities. Building on these approaches, we recommended the adoption of what we call culturally connective sport and physical activity pedagogy and physical literacy. Within this approach, kinesthetic activities are infused in a range of courses in a culturally relevant and sustainable manner. Thus, as opposed to physical activity being relegated to either one course (i.e., physical education) or a co-curricular activity (i.e., after school sponsored sports), sport and physical activity are embedded in multiple courses to stimulate student learning and cultivate a lifelong affinity for healthy lifestyles. We believe this transformative paradigmatic shift in K-12 educational approaches would not only enhance positive social relationships, identity affirmation, self-efficacy, and health outcomes, but also enhance academic engagement, performance, and persistence. This recommendation could be adopted in conjunction with the broader systemic recommendations outlined earlier in this section. Diversifying educators and athletic practitioners across all levels is also recommended and the proposed certification reforms could serve as a recruitment tool for this population.

Increased Emphasis on Sport and Physical Activity with Existing Promise Zones. In 2013, President Barack Obama established an initiative focused on redressing systemic issues

impacting select economically disadvantaged neighborhoods across the U.S. These designated Promise Zones received concerted resources to improve economic, educational, and health outcomes (U.S. State Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2024). Along the same lines, organizations such as the William Julius Wilson Institute (WJWI) have engaged in transformative interventions in similar areas that focus on providing 360 degree intergenerational support for students and their families (WJWI, 2024). In conjunction with these efforts, we recommended the inclusion of more sport and physical activity centric strategies that include specific benchmarks for health and educational improvements. Stated differently, we believe sport and physical activity is not only essential for improving health outcomes for Black youth and adolescents, but also a vital means for fostering the transmission of resources related to economic empowerment, educational attainment, and civic engagement. These efforts can complement existing Promise Zones focused on educational and economic empowerment. The lack of physical activity and corresponding educational attainment is part and parcel of the cycle of economic development (i.e., dearth of wealth accumulation) among Black people in the U.S. Thus, the recommendations in this section are intended to use physical activity in conjunction with strategic ecological interventions to improve quality of life outcomes for this population.

Increased Culturally Affirming Gender Specific and Co-Ed Programming with School and Community Programs. The data from the report highlights how Black youth and adolescent sport participation varies based on gender. More specifically, Black girls are less likely to be physically active and participate in organized sports compared to Black boys. As a result, we echo Ogurundine's (2023) recommendation for creating more purposefully designed spaces for Black girls. The BWSF is an example of this type of intervention and these types of organizations and programs could be expanded to ensure more Black girls from an early age through young adulthood engage in physical activity on a consistent basis to facilitate healthy lifestyles in adulthood. Currently, many affordable and public sport programs and spaces privilege boys. Hence, Black girls are more likely to be viewed as outsiders and perceive these spaces to be antithetical to their intersecting identities, namely their femininity. The funding and creation of programs by and for Black girls and women would increase the likelihood that these spaces account for the impact of experiences with intersectionality among other unique challenges facing Black girls and women. For example, Carter-Francique (2011, 2017) recommended the infusion of Womanist theory, Black Feminism, Critical Race Feminism, and Hip-Hop Feminism as empowering frameworks for physical activity programs centered on Black girls and adolescents. We support this recommendation and advocate for the adoption of recommendations by sport education scholars who study Black youth, adolescents, and young adults who have been cited throughout the report.

In addition to culturally affirming gender specific spaces, we also recommend the development of recreational co-ed physical activities and sport opportunities. Typically, co-ed programs are relegated to the youth level, but at the adolescent level these programs cease. We recommend that schools and community programs offer opportunities that align with the interests of the youth and adolescents in specific areas. For example, adult co-ed softball is popular in many communities across the U.S. We believe the promotion of similar co-ed opportunities across the youth and adolescent level would foster healthy relationships and lifestyles among these groups and contribute to more lifelong engagement in physical activity

and sport. Relatedly, we propose more accessible summer opportunities for youth and adolescents so their physical activity engagement does not decline in between school years.

Revise the Structure of Existing Community Youth Partnerships with Professional Sport Organizations. Currently, professional sport organizations offer a range of clinics for youth to attend. However, many of these efforts lack a level of deep investment in specific areas where transformative change is needed the most. Thus, similar to our recommendation about infusion of more sport and physical activity content into Promise Zones, we propose all major sport organizations revitalize their sport-centric community outreach programming to demonstrate a more extensive commitment to frequent engagement with youth and adolescents who live in economically underserved communities. Funding new facilities and adequate staffing and equipment in conjunction with consistent wide range sport programming and connections to community empowerment resources (e.g., educational, economic, health care, etc.) could yield more substantive impacts. Since these leagues are driven by competition, there could be an intraand inter-league competition to see which teams and leagues contribute to the most positive social wellness outcomes for identified communities. Consistent with our ecological systems approach, we posit that these investments must involve strategic partnerships that can provide support for redressing issues directly and indirectly associated with physical activity engagement.

The Adoption of Data-Driven Race-Conscious Socialization Models. Within this report, we shared multiple socialization models that are grounded in research on Black youth, adolescents, and young adults. These socialization models and frameworks provide useful information for participants, parents, coaches, teachers, administrators, and community members more broadly. Currently, concepts such as teamwork, character development, discipline, and leadership are commonplace when discussing youth sports participation. However, these aspirational values and characteristics are contingent upon the conditions, relationships, and expectations associated with a specific environment (Cooper, 2016). As a result, we recommend the adoption of the holistic (under)development through sport and (mis)education framework, which includes the following socialization models: a) illusion of singular success model (ISSM), b) elite athlete lottery model (EALM), c) transition recovery model (TRM), d) purposeful participation for expansive personal growth model (P²EPGM), and e) holistic empowerment model (HEM) (Cooper, 2019). Specific examples of each model can be presented and discussed among participants to assist them with crafting an action plan to guide their intentions and efforts centered on holistic development in and through sport participation, physical activity, and educational spaces. Exposing all stakeholders to a common set of concepts (i.e., processes antecedents, catalysts, and results) so a shared understanding of how and when different holistic outcomes can be manifested could enable more aligned systemic efforts for improving positive development. Along the same lines, we recommend the review and adoption of similar ecological systems frameworks for relevant groups (Dawkins et al., 2008; Raymore, 2002; Ogunrinde, 2023; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Normalizing the recognition of key contributors and detriments for holistic development in and through sport and physical activity across different lifespan junctures is essential for reversing negative trends identified in this report.

Interscholastic Level Recommendations

Expand the Robust Data Collection of Interscholastic Athletes Across Diverse Environments: Prerequisite for Data-Driven/Informed Policies and Practices. Currently, there is a dearth of publicly available data on interscholastic high school athletes' experiences and developmental outcomes. Comparatively, there have been numerous reports and studies published on college athletes, which enables policy makers at the postsecondary level to make data-informed decisions. As a result, we recommend the NFHS partner with sport education scholars, the NCAA, U.S. Department of Education, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to create, adopt, adapt, and administer survey instruments to interscholastic athletes both during and after their athletic eligibility. Key areas of exploration can include the relationship between academic, athletic, social, personal, career, and health experiences and outcomes. Disaggregating data is paramount so differences between and within groups can be examined and addressed. Differences along the lines of race, gender, academic classification, sport, and school type among other areas are important to understand what types of interventions would be the most appropriate for specific sub-groups. In addition to quantitative data, comprehensive qualitative analyses should be pursued particularly among populations who have experienced negative outcomes such as lower graduation rates and poorer health outcomes to name a few.

Increased Funding for Large Public Urban Schools Sport Offerings. Data highlighted in this report revealed a notable gap in the resources offered at large public suburban and rural high schools compared to large public urban high schools. As a result, we call for an equity minded approach to addressing this school sports structural resource gap. One recommendation is for states, districts, and cities to adopt an equal sports offering policy whereby each school is required to offer the same number of sport opportunities. The type of sports can vary based on interest, but if all schools offer the same number of sports opportunities, then this reflects an earnest attempt to level the playing field. Hence, if certain school districts offer fewer sports compared to others within proximity, then funding interventions can be employed. To account for differences in population sizes of urban, suburban, and rural school districts, there can be statistical measures incorporated to ensure equity is achieved. We surmise a goal of these efforts to eliminate the systemic deprivation facing students who attend large public urban high schools. These students deserve comparable sport participation opportunities as their peers who attend suburban and rural high schools. We posit that for systematic change to occur it must be grounded in data-driven interventions with policies and practices.

Excellence Beyond Athletics Framework: Holistic Development Programming and Principles. In concert with our previous recommendation in the youth section, we recommend interscholastic high school athletic programs adopt holistic development principles (HDPs). Currently, athletic programs promote character development, citizenship, leadership, and academic eligibility. However, we posit that a more explicit recognition of distinct challenges facing Black adolescents and corresponding supports that use sport and physical activity as catalysts for positive development are needed. Cooper (2016) proposed six HDPs within the Excellence Beyond Athletics (EBA) framework: a) self-identity awareness, b) positive social engagement, c) active mentorship, d) academic achievement, e) career aspirations, and f) balanced time management. The EBA framework could be adopted by districts, schools, and conferences that celebrate not only high levels of achievement, but also improvement

demonstrated by specific teams. Relatedly, this EBA framework explicitly positions athletic identity foreclosure as a primary risk outcome for Black interscholastic athletes. Thus, the recognition of and concerted responsiveness to this risk can contribute to more positive outcomes for this population. Furthermore, the EBA can also be promoted to students who are non-athletes.

Prioritization of Routine Physical Activity in Interscholastic Curriculum. As an extension of the recommendation in the youth section, we recommend that pre-service high school teachers be trained in physical literacy and incorporate more physical activity across all courses. In addition, mandatory physical activity courses that include a culturally responsive curriculum are also recommended. This recommendation is designed to focus on a broader range of students beyond those who participate in school-sponsored sports. We recommend the adoption of various physical activities such as dance, fitness training, yoga, and walking. Traditional sports and adapted forms of the activities are also recommended, but the primary aim is focused on movement, stimulation, stress reduction, and learning rather than competition and performance. Redefining the role of sport and physical activity in traditional educational spaces is one of the overarching themes of our report recommendations.

Revise Teacher and Coach Evaluations to Prioritize Holistic Development. Consistent with our ecological systems framework suggestions, we posit that any sustained impact for Black adolescents must be facilitated by key socialization agents in their lives. At the high school level, two prominent socialization agents for this group are teachers and coaches. Currently, teachers and coaches have evaluations that focus on students' performance on standardized tests or their success in athletic settings. However, we posit that changing existing trends in terms of Black high school students' holistic health and educational outcomes requires a revision to existing evaluation criteria. If the EBA HDPs and related measures of Black students' holistic health and development are incorporated in teacher and coach evaluations, then it sends a clear message to them what is valued and how they should channel their focus, time, and efforts. The adoption of this recommendation in concert with updating teacher certification requirements to prioritize both culturally responsive pedagogy and physical literacy could lead to positive changes in Black adolescents' holistic development outcomes.

Intercollegiate Recommendations

Normalize and Strengthen Culturally Responsive Supports. In 2014, at the University of Connecticut, I (the first author of this report) along with a group of Black male college athletes created an organization called Collective Uplift (CU) (Cooper et al., 2019). The purpose of the organization is to empower, educate, support, and inspire participants to maximize their full potential as holistic individuals both within and beyond athletic contexts. The organization met weekly for our "Real Talk Sessions (RTS)", which provided a safe space for participants to express their feelings and thoughts about their own lives and the world around them. As high-profile athletes at a Division I institution, participants expressed how there were few spaces on campus where they could experience stress relief from the daily pressures associated with their athletic, academic, and personal responsibilities. CU's core values are holistic development, engaged mentorship, cultural empowerment, enhanced campus experiences, and community outreach. The CU mottos are "Together We Rise!!!" and "Creating Positive Change Through Empowerment". In addition to weekly RTS, CU engaged in professional development activities,

collaborative social events, socially conscious panels, community outreach engagement, and a brother to brother mentor program. Research on the impact of CU revealed that participants experienced positive development outcomes ranging from mental to social to academic to career support (Cooper et al., 2019). The following themes identified from the study illuminated the benefits experienced by the participants: a) "I Needed Something Else Other Than Football", b) "It Actually Showed Me I Had Multiple Identities", c) "We Bonded Over Something More Than Sports", d) "This Group Gave Me a Great Sense of Empowerment", and e) "I Didn't Feel Like I Was Out of Place or Behind the 8-Ball" (Cooper et al., 2019). The development of CU was grounded in research on Black male college athletes and informed by theories derived from their direct experiences. By 2016, CU was a co-ed group and elected a Black woman athlete president who served consecutive terms. CU is one example of the benefit of data-driven/informed culturally responsive support efforts.

Black women college athletes have also experienced similar outcomes in organizations such as the *Sista to Sista* organization created by Dr. Akilah Carter-Francique and Dr. Deniece Dortch at the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University (TAMU) in 2012 (Carter-Francique, 2013; Carter-Francique, Dortch, & Carter-Phiri, 2017). Key findings from the research on this culturally responsive organization was that participants benefited from being in a safe cultural space where they could discuss and reflect upon power dynamics in their lives and society and receive affirmations for their intersecting identities among a group of peers and mentors who shared similar backgrounds. Participants were able to discuss their experiences with intersectionality, beauty and body image challenges, language dynamics being members of a marginalized group on campus, and effective navigational strategies (Carter-Francique, 2013). This organization further elucidates the importance of developing data-driven/informed programming that reflects the perspectives of the group being served.

In 2015, a group of Black male faculty at the University of Texas at Austin (Dr. Leonard Moore, Dr. Louis Harrison, Jr., Dr. James Brown, and Dr. Darren Kelley) organized *The Black* Student Athlete Summit (BSAS), which brought together various stakeholders to share best practices for improving Black student athletes' experiences and outcomes at the college level (BSAS, 2024). The BSAS has relocated to the University of Southern California (USC) and annually attracts hundreds of attendees including a majority of student athletes. The topics covered at the summit include post-athletic career transitions, mental health, financial literacy, relationships, international exposure, leadership, academic achievement, entrepreneurship, and socio-political consciousness to name a few. Collectively, these pre-2020 efforts (CU, Sista to Sista, and BSAS among others) created a momentum that catalyzed the proliferation of Black student athlete support groups at campuses across the U.S. During the summer of 2020, the international unrest in response to the unjust killing of George Floyd motivated numerous groups including Black college athletes to leverage their platforms to champion for racial justice on their campuses and in society more broadly. Our recommendation here proposes increased support for these types of organizations at all schools where Black college athletes are enrolled. Although these groups are composed of those who participate in intercollegiate athletics, we recommend consistent interaction and collaboration with cultural affinity and related groups on campus and in the broader community to offset athletic identity foreclosure and social isolation.

Additional culturally responsive supports that we recommend are the infusion of mental health programming that accounts for the unique challenges facing Black people in the U.S. The

BSAS (2024) has brought together practitioners who specialize in supporting Black college athletes and we recommend the consultation of these experts. Dr. Angel Brutus of Synergistic Solutions, Dr. Aaron Goodson of Duke University Athletics, Dr. Marcus Dumas of Texas Tech University, Dr. Marcus Amos of Prevention Education for Athletes and Voorhees College, Dr. Emmett Gill of Athlete Talk and the University of Houston, and Dr. Tommy Shavers of NESTRE are recommended experts on athlete mental health and wellbeing. The development of culturally responsive mental health programs and partnerships both on and off campus that optimize Black college athletes' well-being is also recommended. The hiring, retention, and promotion of Black mental health professionals is another important intervention we recommend. We also recommend the creation and support of Black faculty and college athlete mentorship programs. Currently, it is not uncommon for athletic departments to connect college athletes with alumni who participated in athletics. Although the athletic alumni can provide helpful support for current athletes, we also have found in research on Black college athletes that positive relationships with at least one faculty member can yield notable impacts on student experiences. Thus, we recommend the establishment of a culturally responsive faculty mentor program. Working with organizations such as the Advancement of Blacks in Sport (ABIS), BSAS, and Black faculty who are a part of organizations such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA), North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS), National Association of Black Psychologists (NABP), and African American Intellectual History Society (AAIHS) are recommended for recruitment.

Equity Action Plans and Increased Investments in and Commitments to Black College Athlete Educational Attainment During and Post Athletic Eligibility. Several key findings from the Gallup (2020) report indicated that Black college athletes maximize their educational opportunities when they are able to persist through graduation. However, the NCAA graduation rates revealed many Black college athletes are not earning their bachelor's degrees within a sixyear period. Thus, we proposed the creation of equity action plans that could be incorporated in athletic department strategic plans. These equity action plans can use data-driven approaches to developing targeted supports to improve Black college athlete academic performance and postcollege career success including graduate school enrollment. These equity action plans can assess campus climate and culture from the perspectives of Black college athletes and use this data to inform their strategies. Consulting with scholars who specialize in this research to ensure third-party insights are involved in data collection and analysis is recommended. This idea is aligned with our National Center for Black Sport Participation and Physical Activity recommendation. We also recommend athletic departments develop fundraising campaigns that focus on eliminating the racial graduation gap. These resources can support student internships, study abroad opportunities, networking experiences, academic support, and mentoring programs to name a few. We acknowledge that the scope and structure of athletic department equity action plans will vary across and within divisional classifications, but the overarching aims, and centrality of Black college athletes' experiences should be a consistent feature of all these efforts. These equity action plans could also include the prioritization of cultural competency as a valued aspect of the hiring process of athletic administrators and coaches to increase the likelihood of creating diverse leadership staff (Cooper et al., 2017). Along the same lines, critically assessing to what extent leaders in athletic organizations are meaningfully contributing to the holistic development of Black college athletes is emphasized within this recommendation.

Race-Conscious Data Collection, Analyses, and Intervention Strategies. Consistent with our recommendations at the youth and interscholastic levels, we recommend intentional data collection, analyses, and interventions that account for the complex lived experiences of and challenges facing Black college athletes. More specifically, we recommended research methods should be developed to coincide with major socio-political events/issues, amidst NCAA policy legislation enactments, amidst coaching turnover, and amidst transfer windows and transitions. These macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors must be taken into account to ensure real time interventions are optimally effective. Relatedly, we propose the utilization of more qualitative research inquiries that center the familial and cultural upbringing of Black college athletes to dispel monolithic tropes of the "Black experience". Collecting and analyzing data across athletic teams and institutional types would provide nuanced insights into the heterogeneity within this population. More importantly, this data would inform targeted approaches to benefit sub-groups within this population in meaningful ways.

National Metric for Increasing Accountability for Eliminating the Black Athletic Overrepresentation Phenomenon and Racial Graduation Gaps. In addition to the finding of the racial graduation gaps across divisional classifications, another major and alarming finding from this report is the Black athletic overrepresentation phenomenon. The phenomenon refers to the trend among institutions that persistently enroll higher percentages of Black college athletes (as a percentage of total athletes) compared to Black students (as a percentage of total students). We view this trend as problematic and signals that Black students are primarily valued at these institutions when they possess valued athletic talents versus those who are talented in areas beyond athletics. This disproportionate representation contributes to adverse campus experiences for Black college athletes. As a result, we propose the creation of a metric and corresponding accountability policy adopted by the NCAA that incentivizes and penalizes member institutions who enroll a disproportionately higher percentage of Black college athletes compared Black student non-athletes. More specifically, we suggest schools be evaluated on the following criteria in a similar manner as the *Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972* prongs are utilized: 1) both Black student non-athlete and Black college athlete enrollment percentages should be equivalent or higher than the Black population percentage within the state the school is located and 2) the enrollment percentages of Black student non-athlete and Black college athletes must be within two percentage points on any given year to avoid penalization (i.e., postseason bans). The aim of this recommendation is to increase the Black student population at these institutions rather than reduce the number of Black college athletes. Organizations such as the KFF (2024) and World Population Review (2024) produce detailed reports that document the racial demographics across U.S. states. This recommendation acknowledges that certain states have more racial diversity compared to others and thus diversity aims should be reasonable based on these factors. This approach is not dissimilar from how The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) measures racial and gender diversity report card progress by national census data, but rather than using nationwide racial and gender demographics as the benchmark metric we propose state demographic data. Similar to TIDES report cards for racial and gender hiring practices, we also recommend the creation of a publicly accessible assessment tool that can be shared annually for schools that perpetuate the *Black athletic overrepresentation* phenomenon. Increasing Black student, faculty, staff, and administrator representation at HWIs could lead to

an improved sense of belonging at these institutions for all Black community members including college athletes.

Relatedly, we propose an accountability policy that penalizes schools that persistently produce racial graduation gaps that are larger than five percentage points. Coaches are routinely fired for not winning, but seldom are they held accountable for not supporting athletes through graduation (one notable exception was the postseason ban of the University of Connecticut men's basketball program in 2013 who did produce an APR that reflected that at least half of their active roster over a four-year period were progressing towards graduation). Thus, we believe if a policy that penalizes coaches and athletic departments (e.g., financial penalties, competition limits, etc.) for not creating conditions that eliminate the racial graduation gaps, then existing trends will change. Stated differently, the incentives and penalties reflect who and what is valued, and we posit it long overdue for Black college athletes' academic progress and holistic development to be prioritized in concrete ways via policy reforms and financial allocations.

Multi-Level Adoption of the Principles of Inclusive Excellence and Anti-Racism. As noted in this report, racism is endemic in U.S. society and sporting spaces are not immune to this reality. In many instances, sporting spaces reproduce and exacerbate broader racial injustices. As such, we call on all athletic stakeholders including the NCAA, its member institutions, and athletic departments to adopt clear principles of inclusive excellence and anti-racism whereby all forms of racial injustices are condemned (Cooper et al., 2020). When Black college athletes feel valued holistically in mission statements, policies, and practices, then they can truly experience optimal developmental outcomes within these settings.

Resources

Below are lists of organizations that can help with minority inclusion efforts. Each has a link to its Web site to find out more about the organization, including if there is a regional office in your area.

- Association of Black in Sports (ABIS) http://www.abis.org
- Black Coaches Association (BCA) https://www.bcaworldwide.com/
- National Coalition of Minority Football Coaches NCMFC) https://ncmfc.com/
- Black Student Athlete Summit (BSAS) https://bsasummit.org/
- San Jose State University Institute for the Study of Sport, Society, and Social Change (ISSSC) - https://www.sjsu.edu/wordstoaction/about/index.php
- Black Women in Sport Foundation (BWSF) https://www.blackwomeninsport.org/
- Sportsmen's Tennis & Enrichment Center (STEC) https://sportsmenstennis.org/#
- National Alliance for Social Workers in Sport (NASWIS) https://www.aswis.org/

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