

# Journal of Diversity in Higher Education

## Segregation, Innocence, and Protection: The Institutional Conditions That Maintain Whiteness in College Sports

Kirsten Hextrum

Online First Publication, September 2, 2019. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000140>

### CITATION

Hextrum, K. (2019, September 2). Segregation, Innocence, and Protection: The Institutional Conditions That Maintain Whiteness in College Sports. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000140>

# Segregation, Innocence, and Protection: The Institutional Conditions That Maintain Whiteness in College Sports

Kirsten Hextrum  
University of Oklahoma

Research into racism and college sports largely explores how universities profit off the undercompensated labor of predominately Black men in Division I football and basketball. This research frames college sports as an institution that dehumanizes, marginalizes, and exploits athletes of color (Beamon, 2014; Eitzen, 2016; Hawkins, 2010; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Yet to truly understand the bounds of systemic racism in college sports, studies must also interrogate how white people are elevated, centered, and rewarded at the expense of people of color. Drawing upon critical whiteness studies (Cabrera, 2012; DiAngelo, 2011; Leonardo, 2009), I analyzed 47 college athlete narratives and identified 3 interrelated themes—racial segregation, racial innocence, and racial protection—within higher education that protect whiteness. Findings outline how colleges recruit white athletes from predominately white communities who, as a result of their segregated environments, adopted underdeveloped notions of race and racism. Rather than reeducating athletes upon arrival, institutions further racial segregation, innocence, and protection. Ultimately, these processes have allowed white athletes to dodge their role in racism and avoid racial justice responsibilities.


*Keywords:* critical whiteness studies, college sports, white fragility, life-history interviews

Racism is the systemic and widespread social, cultural, and economic domination that white<sup>1</sup> people hold over people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Leonardo, 2004, 2009, 2015). Racism structures and informs all corners of private and public life, including sports and education (King, 2005; Leonardo, 2009). Research into racism and college sport often explores how low-income men of color in the Division I revenue generating sports men's football and basketball are most harmed by the institution (Beamon, 2014; Bimper, 2015; Carrington, 2013; Clotfelter, 2011; Cooper, 2012; Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017; Hawkins, 2010; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Black men are over-represented in these sports and face greater educational costs (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013). They are targeted for remedial programs, are slotted into less rigorous majors, and are often perceived as educationally disengaged and entitled than white athletes (Bimper, 2015; Cooper, 2012; Cooper et al., 2017). Yet white people are the majority of college sports administrators, as all football bowl series commissioners and all but two conferences commissioners are white, and 86.5% of Division I coaches, 86.1% of athletic directors, and 89.2% university presidents are white (Lapchick, 2018). These white administrators set and enforce the regulations that restrict compensation for revenue athletes and permit revenue accumulation for colleges (Beamon, 2014; Coakley, 2015; Hawkins, 2010; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). These findings portray college sports as a racially exploitative

institution that inadequately compensates Black men for their athletic labor (Beamon, 2014; Eitzen, 2016; Hawkins, 2010). Yet exploitation exists as a dialectic in that one group reaps the benefits of another's harm (Fields, 2001; Leonardo, 2009, 2015). Thus, to understand systemic racism in college sports, we must also interrogate how white people are both protected from and receive the benefits of racial exploitation.

Alongside amassing revenue from men's football and basketball, the college sports governing body, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), promotes and protects the educational and athletic opportunities for predominately white middle-class athletes. The vast majority of college athletes play in lower ranked divisions and on non-revenue-generating teams (Lapchick, 2018). The NCAA sponsors 40 sports and supports over 490,000 athletes across all divisions and institution types, yet only four are concentrated with people of color: track, baseball, basketball, and football (Lapchick, 2018; NCAA, 2018a). White women occupy 71.7% and white men occupy 63.7% of the NCAA's roster spots (Lapchick, 2018). Hextrum (2018a) found that these demographic trends reflect how the NCAA and colleges design athletic recruitment and admission criteria to favor those from white middle-class

<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association (2019) suggests that authors capitalize the racial descriptors "Black" and "White," as they signify racial/ethnic groups and are proper nouns. This stylistic suggestion wrongly places Black and White as equally positioned racial groups deserving equal treatment in writing. In reality, the white racial/ethnic group has no inherent claim to identity and culture outside of the subordination and domination of racialized minorities (DiAngelo, 2011; Leonardo, 2009). I chose to uncapitalize "white" throughout the manuscript in an attempt to differently position racial groups and, in doing so, remove some of the implicit legitimacy whiteness cultivates for white identities, white groups, and white power.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to  Kirsten Hextrum, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of Oklahoma, 820 Van Vleet Oval, Room 210, Collings Hall, Norman, OK 73019-2041. E-mail: [hextrum@ou.edu](mailto:hextrum@ou.edu)

communities. Universities redistribute monies from football and basketball to support nonrevenue, predominately white sports (Eitzen, 2016; Hawkins, 2010). For instance, the NCAA football subdivision schools spend \$109,459 for each nonfootball athlete compared with \$15,780 for each full-time nonathlete student (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2019).

Despite several calls for additional research into how race structures greater opportunities for nonrevenue college athletes (King, 2005; Lawrence, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2016), few studies have yet to examine as much. The literature that does so focuses on the privileges and identities that whites incur (Gill, 2007; Vadeboncoeur & Bopp, 2019) rather than how white athletes actively participate in reproducing the means and conditions of the oppression of people of color. This article uses a critical whiteness studies (CWS) approach to map how racial power structures greater institutional protections for white athletes. To do so, I conducted life-history interviews with 47 nonrevenue Division I college athletes. I selected Division I nonrevenue sports because this division hosts the largest and most competitive athletic programs; hosts the majority of Black revenue-generating athletes; and wields the most influence over sports governance (Hawkins, 2010; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). In turn, Division I nonrevenue white athletes have numerous opportunities to (re)create and benefit from institutional racism. Interviews revealed three interrelated themes—racial segregation, racial innocence, and racial protection—that support whiteness in higher education. Findings outline how colleges recruit white athletes from predominately white communities who, as a result of their segregated environments, adopted underdeveloped notions of race and racism. Rather than reeducating athletes upon arrival, institutions further racial segregation, innocence, and protection. Ultimately, these processes have allowed white athletes to dodge their role in racism and avoid racial justice responsibilities.

### Whiteness in College Sports

Racism is not a bigoted belief held by certain individuals. Racism is a pervasive relationship of domination (DiAngelo, 2011; Leonardo, 2004, 2009, 2015). Domination refers to how one group actively removes rights from and in turn dehumanizes another (Leonardo, 2015). Under racism, white individuals and white-led institutions deny people of color rights to full civic participation (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Leonardo, 2004, 2009, 2015; Omi & Winant, 2014). In contrast, white people retain the full markers of humanity and are rehumanized in their daily interactions with institutions (DiAngelo, 2011; Fields, 2001; Leonardo, 2004, 2009, 2015). This system of domination is not new or episodic and instead is “historic, traditional, normalized, and deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 56). In the post-civil-rights era, racism persists in part by disguising—particularly for white people—how they benefit from an entrenched racial order (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Therefore, an important objective of whiteness studies is to examine the myriad ways that racism enfranchises, centers, and elevates whites at the expense of people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Cabrera, 2012; Gillborn, 2005).

College sports are one such setting through which systemic racism is disguised as athletics are represented in film, media, and curriculums as a postracial terrain (Coakley, 2015; Eitzen, 2016; Mowatt, 2009). King and Springwood (2001) examined the NCAA

and college football halls of fame that celebrate individual athletic accomplishments of Black men but make no reference to sport’s long history of overt segregation. These narratives disguise how sports were some of the last areas to integrate (Martin, 2010; Mowatt, 2009). Although overt segregation no longer exists in sports, more covert tactics concurrently marginalize people of color and center white people. Media coverage, for example, differently frames the athletic feats of Black and white athletes, positioning white athletes as better leaders, workers, and thinkers, and therefore deserving of occupying certain sports or positions within sports (Beamon, 2014; Bimper, 2015; Carrington, 2013; Foster & Chaplin, 2017; Lawrence et al., 2016; Spracklen, 2008). Higher education supports the sports media by negotiating TV contracts, hosting their own networks, and creating marketing campaigns to enhance fan experience (Clotfelter, 2011; Eitzen, 2016). Some institutions enhance the fan experience by boasting symbols of white terror, colonialism, and cultural removal like confederate icons (Newman, 2007; Ternes, 2016) and indigenous mascots (King & Springwood, 2001).

Much of this research into racism and college sports examines how those with institutional authority, such as college administrators, coaches, and journalists, create policies and content that favors the existing racial order. Only a few studies have examined how whiteness impacts the experience of white athletes. Those that do position whiteness from McIntosh’s (1989) white privilege and identity frame (Gill, 2007; Lawrence et al., 2016; Vadeboncoeur & Bopp, 2019). Gill (2007) examined the Duke University lacrosse saga in which white men athletes hired Black women to perform a sex show at a party. Reports from the incident included an alleged sexual assault, underage drinking, and death threats against the women (Gill, 2007). Gill applied McIntosh’s notion of how white privilege affords an invisible and unearned set of benefits to whites who may or may not be aware of said privileges to examine public and university reaction to the saga. His article attempted to reveal these benefits by showing how the media coverage humanized the lacrosse players and the institutional response excused their behavior. Gill suggested these same accommodations have yet to be provided to men of color involved in similar incidents. Vadeboncoeur and Bopp (2019) conducted a review of literature, informed in part by McIntosh, to understand the identities that white athletes develop as part of the dominant racial group. They concluded that white athletes have a precarious identity, in that they are part of the dominant racial group yet rarely recognize themselves as much. This disassociation is problematic because they are unable to “understand why whiteness matters as an important component of their identity” (p. 16).

McIntosh’s (1989) framing of white privilege as an invisible knapsack filled with an unearned, unnoticed, and accumulating set of benefits became the dominant template for white researchers and educators to engage in antiracist discussions in their scholarship and classrooms (Leonardo, 2004, 2009, 2015). Yet antiracist scholars widely critique McIntosh. This account too often frames privilege as a passive process in which white people are relieved of any active action or responsibility for taking resources, rights, and humanness from people of color (Leonardo, 2004, 2009). Instead, Leonardo (2004) recommended that researchers frame acts of domination and provided a counterlist to McIntosh’s 29 acts of overt terror and violence that white people perpetuate against people of color to maintain the racial order. Gill’s (2007) study of

Duke University lacrosse reflects the limitation of the privilege approach to whiteness. By centering how the white men lacrosse players received benefits from the institution, Gill missed how the athletes enacted violence in the form of sexual degradation and death threats against Black women. Moreover, the white lacrosse players' dominant acts are more permissible under a system of white supremacy that constructs Black women as incompatible victims of violence and undeserving of proper justice and restitution from the state (Crenshaw, 1991). Additionally, Vadeboncoeur and Bopp's (2019) interest in white identity creates a false equivalency by positioning white people and people of color as equally racialized or both possessing racial identities (Fields, 2001). This false equivalency disguises how white identities are inherently built upon othering and oppressing people of color (Leonardo, 2009). Critical approaches to whiteness avoid these trappings by articulating questions of privilege/identity as always informed by power/ideology (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016; DiAngelo, 2011; Leonardo, 2004, 2009, 2015; Mowatt, 2009).

### Critical Whiteness Studies and the Institutional Conditions That Create White Fragility

CWS locates the outcomes of white privilege in relations of domination. Rather than defining whiteness as a set of invisible benefits, CWS defines whiteness as the historic, social, cultural, political, and economic processes that elevate and unify white people above all others (DiAngelo, 2011; Leonardo, 2009; Stewart, 2019). These processes encompass "basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences" that are supposedly granted to all people but "are actually only consistently afforded to white people" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 56). This system of domination manifests in racial stratification across all social levels, in that white people are advantaged and granted greater rights and benefits in social, cultural, political, economic, and other institutions (Fields, 2001; Leonardo, 2009). In part, racial domination is maintained through the socialization of whites to misunderstand how race and racism operates (DiAngelo, 2011; Fields, 2001; Leonardo, 2009; Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Leonardo and Manning (2017) used Vygotsky's zone of proximal development to situate racial learning as a community of practice. Throughout a lifetime in white-dominant society, white Americans learn inaccurate lessons as to how racism structures society and their role in maintaining inequality. Leonardo and Manning stated that this process creates "underdeveloped" notions of racism in white communities of practice (p. 10). Although they do not offer a benchmark of what a "developed" white racial consciousness would resemble, they do reiterate that whites must endeavor upon a "steep" learning curve that "ruptures" their knowledge of race (p. 13). This learning process must embrace antiracist teachings, or those geared at revealing the multileveled ideological and material manifestations of racial power.

DiAngelo's (2011) theory of "white fragility" identifies the social features that prevent whites from endeavoring upon the steep curve of antiracist learning. DiAngelo explained that racism enables white people to exist in an environment that "insulates them from race-based stress . . . [which] builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress" (p. 54). DiAngelo offered seven interrelated conditions that create white fragility and maintain racial stratifi-

cation: segregation, universalism and individualism, entitlement to racial comfort, overrepresentation, racial arrogance, racial belonging, and psychic freedom. Segregation enables white people to live within, enjoy, and benefit from white spaces. Segregation is maintained in part by discourses of universalism (the false equivalency that all people have full rights to humanity) and individualism (that whites are afforded the rights of individuals, are not a homogenized group, are not part of the racial project, and therefore cannot be accountable for segregation). Living segregated lives, whites are raised within racial comfort in that they are overrepresented in society and rarely encounter the material evidence of racism. Overrepresentation ensures that whites are more often associated with positive images like safety, success, and well-being. These positive associations feed a racial arrogance or how whites become confident spokespeople on race despite their racial ignorance—a precondition of whiteness. Overrepresentation also creates a racial sense of belonging, as whites see themselves everywhere and forge alliances across settings. Finally, whites have the psychic freedom to ignore race because they are not required to learn how to survive within racism.

DiAngelo's (2011) "white fragility" offers a template to examine the institutional features that socialize white people to protect, rather than disrupt, their position in the racial hierarchy. This study used white fragility alongside CWS to illuminate how higher education cultivates whiteness as a process of domination by supporting predominately white athletic programs. It offers new evidence into how white athletes are welcomed into, and offered protection within, higher education, a process that sustains rather than disrupts white supremacy.

### Method

Article findings emerged from a larger study that explored the question "In what ways do race, class, and gender shape one's path to and through college via sport?" For this article, I advanced the following interrelated research questions: (a) What are the institutional practices and policies that produce a greater representation of white athletes in nonrevenue sports?; (b) How do nonrevenue athletes understand and articulate their racial position within college sports?; (c) In what ways do white, nonrevenue athletes benefit from their overrepresentation in college sports?; and (d) How may white, nonrevenue athletes act to further protect and secure their overrepresentation and corresponding benefits? To address these questions, I designed a critical qualitative inquiry to examine how power relationships structure society, become hidden from public view, create unequal material realities, and are reproduced by ideologies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Throughout, I held a "critical constructivist" epistemology or view that power relations are "socially constructed rather than objectively defined" (Anderson & Barrera, 1995, p. 144). This epistemology assumes that people's narratives about their lived experiences within relations of power provide insight into mechanisms of reproduction (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Smith, 2012). I collected narratives from collegiate athletes using the life-history interview format. Life-history interviews allow interviewees to drive the interview process and to construct their own meaning of events and allow researchers to center people's stories to understand cultural and social contexts (Gouthro, 2014; Kenyon, 2017; Smith, 2012). Researchers use

life-history interviews to explore how individuals shape, encounter, and reenact forms of power (Kenyon, 2017; Lensmire, 2014).

The study occurred over 1 year at a Research 1, Tier 1, public, top-ranked university with 17% undergraduate acceptance and a big-time sports program (henceforth called “Coastal U”). I selected Coastal U as representative of an elite academic university with a competitive sports program. Coastal U is a member of the NCAA’s Division I, Power Five conference, placing it among the most high-profile college sports programs. Study recruitment was limited to any member of two nonrevenue sports at Coastal U, rowing and track and field, to represent demographic variability possible in college sports. Rowing historically emanates from white and elite communities and requires tremendous resources to participate, whereas track and field historical emanates from marginalized communities and requires fewer resources to participate (Coakley, 2015; Eitzen, 2016). These sports compromised about one quarter of the total Coastal U athlete population and provided a wide selection of possible participants.

I presented the research opportunity to possible participants at team meetings and disseminated flyers. In all communication with participants, including the consent process, I stated that I was interested in how race, class, and gender shaped their experiences to and through college as elite athletes. Recruitment yielded 47 participants, all of whom were included. The life-history interviews were 1 to 3 hr in length. Participants self-identified their race and gender positions. Demographics included 28 women, 19 men, 11 people of color, and 36 white people. Participants described their class status by discussing neighborhood and school characteristics, caregiver’s educational level, caregiver’s employment, and extracurricular activities. I compared their responses with U.S. Census Bureau (2016) data of their community characteristics to determine their class status. These measures determined that all but three participants were middle or upper-middle class. Participants selected their own pseudonyms, which are used throughout to protect their confidentiality.

### Empirical Difficulties and Promises

A challenge with life-history interviews is how to capture the individuality of one’s narrative *and* synthesize themes across 47 participants (Smith, 2012). I utilized several stages grounded in qualitative research credibility to minimize this tension and create themes (Lensmire, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2010). After each interview, I documented impressions of the participant’s narrative. During transcriptions, I updated my initial impressions with new insights. I then shared my impressions with the participant and incorporated their feedback. Throughout data collection, I documented emergent themes and developed a coding process (described determining findings) to build my findings. Once I completed data analysis, I shared my first research write-up with participants and with members of my community, including academic peers, former college athletes, current collegiate athletic staff, and faculty, to solicit their feedback to readjust initial findings.

Narrative researchers steeped in the critical tradition face an additional challenge: how to honor the research aims *and* the participant’s version of events when these two factors conflict (Lensmire, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Vaught, 2008). Studying race and whiteness presents particular challenges when centering

white participants. A feature of our current racial hierarchy is that white people do not identify as racist and escape blame from perpetuating racism, even when they say, do, and act in over racist ways (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Vaught (2008) explored these tensions in her ethnography into racist schooling that required that she rely upon accounts of mostly white women teachers. To honor the teachers account would be empirically inaccurate and invalidate Vaught’s aims as a social justice researcher. Vaught recommended that researchers be explicit about the tensions that arise in these projects and remain up front with their participants about their study aims. One route through this tension is to not scold participants’ views but instead present them as situated within the larger social, cultural, and historical forces that sustain oppression.

My methodology evoked the tensions present within narrative social justice research. I encouraged an open and wide-ranging interview style in which I invited participants to share their lived experiences with me (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Smith, 2012). As a white researcher, white participants may have felt even more comfortable telling their story. I was also a community insider—a former Division I DI athlete and employee in college athlete academic support. My personal attributes may have elicited a more casual and open conversation with participants. As a researcher, I chose to not interrupt their more candid accounts of racism. In coding and categorizing their insights, I held Vaught’s (2008) suggestions and tried to capture how their comments are representative of larger systems working both on and through them.

As a white person, I tread cautiously into the area of studying the impact of white supremacy within sports. White researchers have historically produced research to reinforce the racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Leonardo, 2009; Skiba, 2012). Yet when white researchers erase race from their projects, they also reinforce a colorblind or race-neutral discourse (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008). I have not reconciled the numerous challenges laid forth. Instead, I minimize them through transparency (Vaught, 2008), through centering research from scholars of color as the authorities on race and racism (Harper, 2012), and through sharing my writings with antiracist colleagues.

### Determining Findings

The coding process for life-history methods is inherently dependent upon one’s disciplinary leanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My training in cultural studies and sociology allowed me to analyze the narratives for their larger meaning and connection to social contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used both open and fixed coding to develop study themes related to how whiteness shapes athletes’ experience in higher education. In open coding, I read each interview, identifying any possible theme, repetition, or pattern. I began with descriptive language and stayed as close to the text as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After open coding, I used fixed coding to identify themes related to whiteness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These phases generated a lengthy initial list of codes. I then used axial coding to group the codes into categories (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). During this phase, I was the “primary instrument” of analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 261) as I reinterpreted passages of coded texts to refine the categories and identify higher order themes. The entire process was iterative, as insights deepened through a rereading and refinement (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The interviews consisted of 47 topics across two interviews. Of those topics, five explicitly asked participants to engage in discussion about race investigating their racial identity; their community, school, and sport demographics; their racial interactions within these settings; and their understanding of whether race served to advantage or disadvantage them. My original analysis led to large codes relating to race including racial identity, hometown characteristics, ideologies (colorblind, whiteness), and racialized interactions (slotting, tracking, racist terms). For this study, I recoded the five higher order themes related to racial identity, ideologies, racialized interactions, and institutional descriptions. I again used open and fixed coding methods, in which I examined excerpted bits of text for recurring patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Fixed codes were informed by DiAngelo's (2011) white fragility framework.

Through the reiterative secondary analysis of the original life-history interviews, I selected themes explored in the findings section. I selected quotes to illustrate findings that I believed readers could interpret beyond my analysis and that represent the multiple occurrences of phenomenon in the study (Jones et al., 2014). Across both sports, three institutional features protected white fragility: segregation, innocence, and protection.

### Racial Segregation

Developing athletic talent requires tremendous individual, familial, and community investment (Lee, Macdonald, & Wright, 2009; Stefansen, Smette, & Strandbu, 2018; Stirrup, Duncombe, & Sandford, 2015). Sport access is embedded within residential communities through recreational, club, or school leagues (Eitzen, 2016; Hextrum, 2018a; Messner, 2009). Although U.S. sport no longer supports de jure or overt segregation, study findings reflect how de facto residential and schooling segregation leads to racially segregated sporting experiences. Racial segregation of either form is the foundation of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011).

Nearly 87% of participants lived in predominately white communities, yet only 38% named their community as such. Instead, participants used pseudonyms for whiteness, like "suburb" (32%), "affluent" (25%), "wealthy" (23%), "nice-neighborhood" (13%), or "sheltered" (6%; Leonardo, 2009). Participants noted the benefits of their predominately white upbringing, citing their neighborhoods had "a good school district" (Sanya), "pretty calm, not a lot happening" (Boris), "very secluded" (Kayla), and "safe" (George). The benefits associated to white communities, such as safety and education, teaches white people that living in segregation benefits them (DiAngelo, 2011). In this study, participants also learned in their segregated communities that sport is a defining feature of suburban life and future success.

Brandon grew up in the midwestern United States and recalled how his community was organized around year-round sport participation that changed with the season:

[The] Park District ran these soccer leagues on Saturdays and basketball on Saturdays in the winter. It snowed a lot. And then baseball was like some sort of collective of local towns. . . . [My community was] suburban but very close to the city. A lot of money obviously. Lots of free time. So people were able to make their kids, you know, practice or get better, playing these summer travel teams. . . . [Sports] were really obvious—every Saturday morning if you had a kid aged four to ten then you're doing something on a Saturday morning. Your kid

does athletics.

Noelle, growing up on the West Coast, also said that sports organized her community:

[I grew up] in a small town. . . . [like] a lot of small towns, people get into sports because there's not much to do. . . . I did a lot of sports. . . . Part of the advantage of growing up in a nicer area [is] you have those people who are pushing you. And they know what you need to do. . . . I definitely had a lot of support pointing me in the right direction.

Predominately white middle-class areas also have higher quality and lower cost athletics sponsored by schools and recreational leagues (Coakley, 2015; Eitzen, 2016; Hextrum, 2019; Wessells, 2011). These sport opportunities became a launching point for later access to college via athletic talent (Hextrum, 2018a, 2018b, 2019). Of study participants, 94% joined low-cost sports by kindergarten. The types of sport opportunities offered in these communities aligned with the types of sports offered across American colleges, including baseball, basketball, beach and court volleyball, cheerleading, cross country running, downhill and cross-country ski racing, golf, gymnastics, football, hockey, rowing, swimming, track, tennis, and water polo. These sports also followed patterns of de facto segregation.

Participants knew their athletic experiences were predominately white. Noelle and Morgan, both white women growing up on opposite U.S. coasts, also said they played "white" sports. Noelle described her athletic history as "playing white sports like swimming, water polo, rowing. All very European dominated sports." Morgan agreed, stating that "rowing is such as white-washed sport. Our entire [college] team [is white] . . . we're also 75% Blonde." The Physicist correctly identified his white suburb as the root of his majority-white sport and school:

There were a lot of white kids on my track team, and in my high school, it was primarily a white high school because the make-up of the surrounding area was mostly white. . . . It was definitely more of a white community, or upper-middle class to upper-class individuals and families that were more well off.

Although white athletes recalled racially segregated upbringings, they did not see how they participated in and benefited from segregation. A lifetime of living in segregated environments insulates white people from interracial interactions and reinforcing racial comfort (DiAngelo, 2011). This insulation creates differentially racialized subjectivities that enable white people to misname and misrecognize their role in the racial order (Leonardo & Manning, 2017).

Study participants accessed resources to develop their athletic talent—which later served as driver for college access—through predominately white communities (Hextrum, 2018a, 2019). Community-organized sports are a setting to achieve the intergenerational transfer of particular values associated to whiteness, including effort, goal setting, and achievement (DeLuca & Andrews, 2016). In Noelle's case, her community offered her a sense of purpose and pointed her in "the right direction," which she went on to say was a path to college. Colleges participate in this process by recruiting athletes and sponsoring sports from predominately white communities. As the next sections show, colleges also do

little to disrupt the intergenerational transfer of whiteness that has occurred.

### Racial Innocence

Amanda, a white woman, grew up in a community over 77% white. Her first athletic activity was community-sponsored soccer. She recalled joining the team because “everyone in my kindergarten class was play[ing] soccer.” Amanda believed her taller-than-average height made her an awkward athlete and relegated her to the goalie position. She learned to love this aspect of the sport and developed strong connections with her teammates. Still, she knew she had no chance of success beyond the recreational level. In seventh grade, while watching TV, Amanda saw a character attend Stanford University on a rowing scholarship. That episode spawned her to research rowing clubs in her community and eventually convince her parents to fund her rowing career. When asked about the racial demographics of her sporting experiences, Amanda replied,

[Race had] never really been on my radar until we [had] one Black girl on the [club] team. . . . [In college] I remember [during one regatta] looking over at the start line and, and there was like a Black girl. . . . racing against us. And I was like, “Whoa.” It was surprising to me. And then I was mad at myself that that was surprising. That shouldn’t be surprising but it is in this sport. . . . And it was something of note.

She went on to explore how her race has impacted her own sport experience: “There’s no diversity at all. I think we have one non-white girl on the team. And she’s injured. I don’t think it’s been to my advantage, but it’s definitely been something I’ve noticed.” Amanda’s recollection of when and how race shaped her athletic trajectory obscures how predominately white communities are also the outcomes of racial processes. In this section, I combine three of DiAngelo’s (2011) conditions of white fragility—(a) universalism and individualism, (b) psychic freedom, and (c) entitlement to racial comfort—to describe how white athletes retained a general *innocence* related to race despite their active role in maintaining segregated spaces.

Amanda’s underdeveloped racial consciousness is framed through messages of universalism and individualism that are endemic in sport. The sense of universalism, or that all people are endowed with basic human rights and freedoms and have an equal chance at life (Leonardo, 2009), was celebrated in sport. As part of the intergenerational transfer of whiteness, white athletes learned through sport that they are judged on ability and merit, not race. Cooper epitomized the concept of universalism in reflecting upon her sport experience: “[The town] I’m from is very much just white people. But it’s never been a problem for me, I don’t have a problem with anything. People are people are people.” The notion that “people are just people” minimizes the structural realities that create different opportunities based upon one’s location within a matrix of power systems (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Cooper had access to a low-cost rowing club in her majority white community, access not afforded to those in a neighboring majority–minority area. Amanda also stated that her race did not advantage her. For both women, their race had everything to do with their athletic participation, as they could access a nearly exclusively white sport, in their nearly exclusively white communities.

Along with universalism, white athletes recounted a form of individualism or that they were above the racialization process. Goose, a white rower, also believed an all-white environment did not impact his college experience:

The rowing community is not very diverse—the overwhelming ethnicity is white. It hasn’t affected me in any way. . . . hanging out with tall, white guys my whole [college career]. It’s never going to change. It will probably be the same in 10 years. It has not really affected me, athletically.

Savannah recounted how her race was not a *disadvantage* and she hoped others felt similarly:

I do not really think that I’ve been disadvantaged at all. I hope that other people, of other races, aren’t disadvantaged here. I feel like at [Coastal U] of all places, that would be really unfortunate. I know people are racist—it’s crazy to me that people are racist here. But I do not think that it’s really affected me in any significant way.

The notion that white people are free from disadvantage disguises how white people participate in and reap the benefits of the racial power structure (Cabrera, 2012; Fields, 2001; Leonardo, 2009). White athletes’ underdeveloped understanding of racism is fostered through their segregated sporting experiences. Athletes have had the psychic freedom to not think about race. This freedom also placed them above the social construction of race.

When I asked participants to define their racial identity, people of color spoke definitively and in nuanced terms. Sometimes they contextualized their answer, explaining to me why they identified in one category over the other. For instance, Vera initially answered “mixed race” because her mother is a Black Haitian immigrant to Germany who married her white German father. Vera went on to state, in 2,319 words, how her racial identity has changed over time depending upon the neighborhood, school, athletic environment, and nation she lived within. Contrastingly, white athletes spoke tentatively about their racial identity. Many answered with a question mark and expressed confusion about the question or their answer:

Victoria: Victoria: White? [Pause] Canadian?

Iceman: Caucasian? Right?

Reggie: I’m Caucasian? Anglo-Saxon? Which one? Caucasian. Do not know.

Sanya: I hate this—like, I guess, White. Is that a race?

Casey expressed the most frustration of any white participant with this question:

I am told that I am white, but I identify as European American . . . I’m Swedish American. . . . I do not speak Swedish [but] I do not feel like I’m white. I just do not feel right saying that. And every time I have to check the box, I’m like, “Dude, come on.” . . . white is just, so generic. There’re so many different kinds of white. There’s off-white. There’s super-super-white, bleached-white, and then there’s wedding-dress white. Everyone else gets a special term. I want a special term. I’m a special person, I deserve a special term. . . . You can put me down as white.

Her response illustrates one of the tensions within whiteness and individualism. Casey believes identifying as white denies her individualism—she wants her racial category to make her feel

“special.” What she does not see is that her racial category does make her special—she has universal access to American social life, which is systemically denied to most people of color.

White athletes struggled to name their racial identity and privilege because segregated sport experiences provided them a racial psychic freedom. They did not view themselves as racialized or even consider race unless people of color were present. When I asked White people whether their race advantaged or disadvantaged them in sport, they often dodged the question, such as “I can’t really say anything because there’s not a lot of Black rowers, or any other ethnic rowers. I don’t know, no” (Capitan America), and “I mean, the racial profile of the men’s crew team is all white middle-class, Anglo-Saxon males. I don’t really, see it, at all, in rowers” (Iceman). Kalie and Sophia deflected, noting that race may be present in other sports but not rowing: “The sport of rowing is very white. I think that, other sports, it would probably be a problem. I bet in track and field, you’ll get interesting answers for that one” (Kalie); “Obviously there are certain sports that are more racially geared, like basketball is more African American. I can’t think of anyone on [my] team who isn’t white. Crew is very Caucasian-based. . . . [race] is not really something I’ve noticed” (Sophia). Victoria avoided responding by acknowledging her own racial ignorance:

I do not want to say because I do not have any experience of not being white. There probably is and again I’ve probably been naïve about it and not noticed. But I cannot say that there hasn’t because I do not know. I hope not.

Capitan America, Victoria, Iceman, Sophia, and Kalie all expressed that they did not think about race unless people of color were present. Therefore, in their predominately white space of rowing, they were provided the racial comfort to enjoy and thrive within their segregated setting. This line of responses also reflects how white people choose to sit on the sidelines when race is mentioned. Capitan America and Victoria described how they cannot speak about race because there are “not a lot of Black rowers” or because “I don’t have any experience of not being white.” By sponsoring white-majority sport settings, colleges enable racial innocence. White athletes did not confront their whiteness when they arrived in higher education. Instead, they learned that race and racism are only present if people of color are present. White college athletes are therefore relieved of their part in the racial order.

### Racial Protection

The previous sections indicated how white athletes are elevated above racial processes. In this final section, I describe how white athletes actively protected and defended predominately white athletic spaces. Here, the intergenerational transfer of whiteness appeared, as white athletes learned that biology, not society, caused segregated athletic events and teams. In reality, the positioning of certain bodies in certain sports and positions has more to do with social processes informed by racial (ill)logics than with any inherent racial abilities (Leonardo, 2009). White athletes defended their position in college sports by elevating predominately white sports like rowing and events like endurance running as *the* standard of athletic excellence.

Sport has taught participants that they have innate bodily differences that led to their athletic success in some physical areas over others. Thirty-two percent of participants explicitly attributed athletic success to “genetics” and another 57% attributed athletic success to a physical aspect of their body. Even though they did not use the heritable-specific language, the phrasing conjured a similar meaning. Comments like “my athleticism,” “my height,” “my speed,” or “my endurance” painted the body as a fixed entity, unchanging through the sports process. Beliefs in inherent physicality were overlaid on racial hierarchies. In the interracial context of track and field, athletes learned to see their particular sport as attached to inherent racial differences. A common reference point to link race to athletic ability became the starting line. London, a white heptathlete who competed in sprinting and endurance events, described how athletes assess one another—often in racialized terms—at the starting line:

If you go to a track meet and you just line up the people, you can tell by their body type and body structure what events they run. . . . from my observation, that generally, more Caucasian people are distance runners—is that a racist thing to say?

London’s comments (and confusion about whether they are “racist”) reflect the cultural process in sport, race-based slotting, or how athletes are assigned to certain sports or positions based upon their race (Carrington, 2013; Spracklen, 2008). Several white runners began as sprinters and later shifted to distance events. Seamus recalled the moment when his white mentor pulled him aside and told him to try distance running because, “You’re not Usain Bolt.” Seamus believed this advice was due to his racial identity:

I guess all the sprinters were Black and I was white, and all the distance runners were white. So that [my race] was identifying where should I be as a runner. I definitely used that I was skinny and white and short [to determine my sport].

Like Seamus, 22 participants recalled a coach shifting their event or role based upon their body.

The clustering of different races in different track events was justified through using biological terms. Participants spoke about muscularity, physical features, and body size as the reasons for racial segregation in sport. In track, athletes recalled that inherent differences in muscle fibers dictated one’s athletic event. Taylor described how her coach would try athletes out in both short- and long-distance running. Her coach explained to the team that one’s success in this initial tryout was determined by inherent physical differences:

Some people have naturally fast-twitch [muscle] fibers. A lot of sprinters will just naturally be super good at sprinting. And some people have slow-twitch fibers, like a marathoner. Those are two completely different athletes. They’re just born with these twitch fibers—he’d always explain this to us—you just cannot change the amount of fast-twitch fibers you have. . . . there’s just—people have different abilities.

The science regarding fast- and slow-twitch muscles emerged during the 1920s, a time when track and field was one of the only racially integrated sports (Walton & Butryn, 2006). This science was used to justify intersquad segregation, as white runners were labeled as having slow-twitch fibers (priming them for success in



long-distance running) and Black runners were labeled as having fast-twitch muscles (priming them for success in short-distance running; Walton & Butryn, 2006). Despite the fact that the science behind inherent racial differences has been disproven (Leonardo, 2009; Miller, 1998; Skiba, 2012), the racialized beliefs live on in cultural beliefs and practices in sport. Positioning race as natural rather than the result of social processes helps support the “natural” rule of white people over all other races (Omi & Winant, 2014; Skiba, 2012). But white athletes in this section also learned another tactic to protect their position in the racial hierarchy: denigrating and erasing the labor and effort that Black people place in their sport.

The rhetoric of natural ability also elevated white athletes. White athletes described sprinting and jumping as more-physical events requiring natural ability. In contrast, they described distance running as an effort-based event requiring consistent practice, struggle, and discipline. Although Taylor’s coach taught her that she cannot change her muscle fibers, he did tell her that athletes can “develop” and improve their “endurance” and their physical-fitness base. In other words, athletes in endurance events can improve their ability through effort, whereas athletes in sprinting events are limited to their inherent physicality. Taylor’s understanding of the differences between endurance and sprinting events were reiterated by her white teammates.

The Physicist, a white long-distance runner, described endurance athletes as those who “enjoy making it hurt and we enjoy the grueling struggle throughout. Just day after day of running mile after mile. Working hard, getting dirty, sweating, bleeding.” He felt that endurance athletes struggle to see “eye-to-eye” with other athletes when “talking about your training”:

I know there are some of the sprinters, they do not really enjoy their training that much. . . . They’re just like, “Oh, I’ve got weights at 6 am. Or I have an extra workout today.” . . . I’m like, “Why do not you live for that stuff?”

Here, the Physicist distances himself from his own teammates, who he believes lack motivation in their sport. Sanya, also a white distance runner, lamented that the jumpers and sprinters can treat their bodies and their sport differently:

Jumpers and sprinters, those girls eat like shit. They’re very unhealthy. It’s amazing what they eat before races in the locker room. All of us distance runners are like, “I haven’t eaten that since—” It’s insane what they do. But their [event] is a power movement [and] the way [jumping and sprinting] uses energy in your body helps you burn fat more.

Narratives from Sanya’s teammates contradicted her insights. When I spoke with jumpers and sprinters, they, too, worried about their weight and what they ate. Imani, Chantae, Brittany, and Vera—all of whom are Black women in jumping or sprinting events—engaged in weight-loss routines to improve their athletic performance.

The elevation of white endurance events may have emerged in reaction to Black athletic success in track and field. Andrew, one of two white sprinters on his track team, described how even though he was one of the fastest people on a relay team, a Black sprinter replaced him.

Andrew: I was a pretty key part of the four-by-four [relay squad] that ran the fastest time. And I was replaced on that four-by-four for [Conference championships]. Everyone on the [new relay] team, was [of] African American origin. So I was replaced by a Black athlete. And there were some grumblings to me about that. . . . They also did really poorly, which I try not to be too happy about. I think there’s always some stigma about being a white sprinter. . . . There’s another white sprinter [on the team] and he always talks about like, “Yeah, I beat a Black guy.” And I was like, “OK. I do not normally look at the color of my competition.” I guess other people do. Because it is so prevalent. And there’s a negative or stigma about being a white sprinter.

Hextrum: What’s the stigma around it?

Andrew: There’s some good white sprinters. [But] there’s generally the thought that white sprinting is not as fast.

Andrew became a symbol for other white grievances of Black athletic success. He unwittingly became part of a white coalition in the squad, rooting for his athletic dominance over his own Black teammates. Andrew’s removal from the relay led to “grumblings” from white athletes across the team, further reflecting that racial alliances superseded one’s athletic event.

Seamus openly described the threat to white sport success in long-distance running. A strong high school athlete who reached state-level competition, Seamus realized in college he would be unable to maintain his athletic dominance:

Seamus: The NCAA’s really good. It makes me feel little and small. Running is much harder at the NCAA level. It’s really competitive. . . . Another word to describe it [the NCAA] I think is “African.” When you get to the NCAA, you have a lot more Africans and they’re way better at running than Americans.

Hextrum: International students?

Seamus: Yeah, from Africa. . . . and they’re extremely good. And you do not have them in high school. They’re 19. They all have the same birthday, and they’re all the same age. . . . And they’re all extremely good. You do not have them in high school.

Hextrum: There’s a different running community in Africa?

Seamus: Or they’re genetically better. They just destroy it. If you watch any Olympics or marathon, the Africans destroy. NCAA is the first level of running where you start to toe the line with them and they’re good at running.

Seamus’s explanation of Black (African) success in distance running encapsulated white protectionism. He describes an inherent entitlement to success and achievement—a manifestation of white people’s overrepresentation and often attribution to positive social

outcomes (DiAngelo, 2011). The entitlement to sport success also reflects the shifting definitions of whiteness. A paradox of whiteness is its ability to be both ever present and invisible (Leonardo, 2009, 2015). Throughout this section, white athletes offered new ways of defining sport success (through effort rather than inherent physicality) to defend their threatened status in sport. Seamus learned to discredit the success of Black distance runners, going so far as accusing them of fraud. This paranoia showcases the fragility of whiteness and its precarious position as a power structure. One of the ways whiteness combats the threat to its rule is through creating new definitions, extending into new territories, and establishing new norms of being white. In doing so, whiteness becomes impossible to pin down (Leonardo, 2009; Leonardo & Manning, 2017). In the face of Black athletic success, white preeminence is maintained by expressing a sense of moral superiority through hard work and a purity of athletic participation.

### Discussion

King's (2005) polemic stated that whiteness studies has "all but ignored athletes and athletics" in their inquiries. This absence is striking, as sports, particularly those hosted by colleges and universities, are central cultural sites to normalize white power (King, 2005). In the intervening years, the few studies that filled this void (e.g., Gill, 2007; Lawrence et al., 2016; Vadeboncoeur & Bopp, 2019) used a privilege rather than domination frame to interrogate whiteness in college sports. For instance, Vadeboncoeur and Bopp's (2019) review of literature on whiteness and sport, guided by McIntosh's (1989) white privilege framework, concluded that the pressing task for practitioners and researchers is to help whites "first understand themselves as racial beings beholden to a racialized knowledge" (p. 17). Approaching whiteness as a form of privilege or identity minimizes how whites *become* racial beings and *enact* white supremacy. As Leonardo (2004, 2009) cautioned, centering conversations of privilege and identity teaches whites to misrecognize how they retain the benefits of white racial membership. Instead, I argue that the pressing task for higher education is to disrupt the processes that center, normalize, and elevate white people always at the expense and harm of people of color.

Interview themes uncovered three mechanisms present within nonrevenue sports—racial segregation, racial innocence, and racial protection—that maintain rather than disrupt whiteness. Using CWS, I explored how the transmission and maintenance of racial privilege is not a passive process of identity formation but instead requires active efforts that enable white athletes to secure and maintain their racial benefits. Findings illustrated how universities recruit athletes from white-majority environments. During college, white athletes' notions of racism remained underdeveloped (Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Rather than encountering antiracist programming, higher education permitted white athletes to reenact white supremacy through accruing, retaining, and defending the benefits of whiteness.

Participants grew up in suburban, predominately white communities and had a myriad of opportunities to develop athletic talent. Sociologists position youth sports as a defining feature of suburban communities in which white parents organize sports to transfer capitalist and whiteness values (Andrews, 1999; Coakley, 2015; DeLuca & Andrews, 2016; Messner, 2009; Stefansen et al., 2018; StIRRup et al., 2015). DeLuca and Andrews's (2016) study of

private swim clubs described how membership in these sport organizations conferred social recognition as belonging to an exclusive group: white and upper-middle class. Similarly, Harrison (2013) linked the rise of private ski clubs in the 1970s to white flight. Alpine skiing provided whites a retreat from the increasing diversity and brewing racial tensions in cities. Hextrum (2018a, 2018b, 2019) implicated higher education in validating these class and race reproduction mechanisms by sanctioning recruitment and admission tactics that favor individuals from these exclusive clubs. In this study, I name the consequences of the practices that favor white middle-class athletes.

Education researchers have documented how racially segregated environments, such as white suburbs, transmit inaccurate knowledge of race and racism (DiAngelo, 2011; Jayakumar, 2015; Leonardo, 2009, 2015). Jayakumar's (2015) decade-long study into residential segregation pre-, during, and postcollege found that whites living in majority white environments were more likely to adopt colorblind notions of race and less likely to engage in social justice efforts than whites living in racially diverse environments. All but three white athletes in my study grew up in white-majority areas. The three that did not—Stella, Sophia, and Seamus—joined white-majority sports: rowing and cross country. Within these white-majority settings, participants learned that their worth ethic, not their race or class, shaped their athletic access. These meritocratic ideals disguised how racially segregated environments provided material, social, and cultural benefits that more often nurtured athletic talent and college-going opportunities for white people.

Importantly, Jayakumar (2015) found that repeated exposure to white-majority settings increased one's chances of misrecognizing how racism operates. Findings from this study showed how once in college, athletes were resegregated into white-majority teams or positions on a team. When confronted with questions about race, white participants could name their respective sport's racial demographics and, in some instances, acknowledge the broad social disadvantages people of color face. Yet white athletes did not name their racial *advantage*. Instead, they articulated their whiteness as free from *disadvantage*. This semantic ploy represents the defensiveness built within whiteness. Through her antiracist workshops, DiAngelo (2011) discovered that white people can admit that people of color face racism so long as they remain above or unimplicated in the racist acts. Cabrera's (2014) study of how white college men understand racism noticed that whites can admit racism exists but only in individualized and externalized frames. Cabrera's participants cited extreme examples of racial hatred, such as the Ku Klux Klan, of which they were not members, to provide evidence of racism and position themselves as "not racist because they did not hate people of color" (p. 20). Defining racism only as individualized acts of violence or hatred disguises the dialectical nature of systematic oppression. As a result, white people skirt culpability. When I asked participants to explore how their race may benefit them in college sports, white athletes dodged this line of inquiry, stating they cannot speak about race. White athletes located themselves as neither perpetrators nor victims of individualized acts of racial violence. In doing so, they removed themselves from commenting on race, denying they had any knowledge of the subject. This defensive tactic epitomizes DiAngelo's notion of white fragility or how white people learn

strategies to avoid, rather than confront, their position in the racial order.

Further, higher education's athletic settings offered no opportunities to counter the white athletes' underdeveloped racial understandings. Cabrera et al. (2016) found that higher education adopts curricular and programming practices that place "too high a premium" on white "social comfort during the undergraduate experience" (p. 119). As a result, white college students remain in "perpetual states of racial arrested development" that leave them uninterested in pursuing racial justice movements (p. 119). Findings suggest that school-sponsored sports may also provide spaces of racial comfort that allow white athletes to deny their racial realities. Equally significant, athletes did not recall any examples of university athletic officials engaging them in conversations about race and racism.

Finally, this study examined how white athletes react when confronted with meritorious achievement by athletes of color. Due to structural barriers in rowing (Hextrum, 2019; Wessells, 2011) rowers rarely encountered athletes of color and field did have athletes of color, though they were not equally represented across events. Predominately white events like long-distance running became sites to actively defend and protect against encroaching athletes of color and their athletic achievements. Study findings resonated with DiAngelo's (2011) notion that white people use various rhetorical tactics when their overrepresentation is challenged. In this study, the rhetoric of "natural" racial abilities supported race-based segregation, racial slotting, and the defense of predominately white sports. Despite voluminous research refuting biological connections between race and ability, the notions of innate physical differences remain entrenched in American life (Leonardo, 2009; Omi & Winant, 2014; Skiba, 2012). Athletes internalized racial slotting as evidence for inherent racial differences. They relied upon inaccurate, racist sciences such as different musculatures to justify why Black people were overrepresented and successful in certain track and field events. White athletes also defended their athletic performance against threats by Black athletes by offering shifting definitions of success. Because white people retain control over the racial order, they wield outsized influence in defining and extending definitions of race into new terrains (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Fields, 2001; Leonardo, 2009). By offering new articulations of whiteness, white people participate in the reproduction of white supremacy by creating ever-complicated and changing terrains of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

### Implications

In the 20th century, when universities expanded their athletic programs, schools selected sports with historic and overt race- and class-based barriers to access (Cheslock, 2008; Hattery, 2012). These overt barriers still inform the current demographics of college sports. In alignment with Hextrum's (2018a, 2018b, 2019) studies into nonrevenue athlete recruitment, the findings here confirm that public elite institutions have athletic admissions policies that favor white middle- and upper-middle-class athletes. These institutions may violate their public mandate to serve and represent their state demographics by creating and supporting racially and economically exclusive athletic programs. Data that show that white athletes are overrepresented in nonrevenue sports

(i.e., Hextrum, 2019; Lapchick, 2018) might *underestimate* their demographic counts. These authors rely upon the publicly available NCAA data, which only reports the race (but not the class) of scholarship athletes. Forty-one percent of all Division I athletes (including in revenue sports) do not receive a scholarship and are not captured in this data set (NCAA, 2018b). I recommend that the NCAA publish class and race measures for *all* participants. These data should also reflect the race/class backgrounds of athletes within positions to help address questions of racial stacking and underrepresentation across the subspecialties of a team. It is necessary to procure this data so as to accurately scope the extent to which race structures athletic opportunities and to develop goals for greater racial representation.

Findings also suggest opportunities to hold college sports to account for their nonprofit mandate. Colleges skirt true compensation for revenue-generating athletes by stating that sports are amateur and education, not professional and money, driven (Eitzen, 2016; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). The NCAA's mission also states that issues of equity and inclusion should guide their work across all levels of the organization (NCAA, n.d.). Findings suggest that sports settings do not achieve this mandate and instead remain silent about racial equity. This silence removes white athletes from the racialization process and denies their role in race-based athletic outcomes. Advocates can use this disconnect between institutional mandate and operational practice to argue for explicit tactics and programming for more diverse and inclusive sports.

Creating more diverse and inclusive sports and higher education environments requires a multilayered approach with mandatory participation across all facets of the institution. Gusa (2010) recommended one such initiative that has yet to be implemented in all universities and/or within college sports. Gusa stated that colleges must work toward "numerical representation" or true demographic diversity across student, staff, and administrator positions (p. 480); must create programs that address how racial power shapes people's daily lives, units, and institutions; and must create greater opportunities for intermixing of diverse groups of students rather than segregating student groups.

CWS scholars also study the effectiveness of programs and initiatives designed to disrupt racism. Ineffective approaches often provide whites with accurate knowledge of structural, historic, and institutionalized racism in an attempt to reeducate them (e.g., Cabrera, 2012; DiAngelo, 2011; Leonardo, 2009). DiAngelo's (2011) experience with leading antiracist workshops with majority-white participants led her to conclude that trainings that initiate racial justice conversations at too high a level can trigger white fragility, and white participants will disengage. In these situations, the institutional conditions of white fragility lead whites to display a range of "defensive moves" that "reinstate white racial equilibrium" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54). These defensive moves have a multitude of consequences, in that they allow white people to retreat to their spaces of racial comfort, they silence and minimize people of colors' discussions of race and racism, and they overall limit opportunities for racial consciousness raising (DiAngelo, 2011). Instead, DiAngelo recommended initiating conversations at the individual level, such as centering people of color's narratives with interpersonal racism, and then transitioning up to the social and institutional levels to build understanding of systematic oppression. Study findings offer a few initial talking points

that could frame discussions of whiteness in college sports. Participants could dialogue around the study's mechanisms—segregation, innocence, and protection—exploring to what extent these topics resonate with their own personal experiences. A facilitator could then redirect these interpersonal explorations to interrogate how institutions of learning utilize these mechanisms to center and elevate white people in ways that maintain rather than minimize racial stratification.

## References

- American Psychological Association. (2019). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington DC: Author.
- Anderson, G. L., & Barrera, I. (1995). Critical constructivist research and special education: Expanding our lens on social reality and exceptionality. *Remedial and Special Education, 16*, 142–149. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/074193259501600303>
- Andrews, D. L. (1999). Contextualizing suburban soccer: Consumer culture, lifestyle differentiation and suburban America. *Culture, Sport, Society, 2*, 31–53. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14610989908721846>
- Beamon, K. (2014). Racism and stereotyping on campus: Experiences of African American male student-athletes. *Journal of Negro Education, 83*, 121–134. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.83.2.0121>
- Bimper, A. Y., Jr. (2015). Lifting the veil: Exploring colorblind racism in Black student athlete experiences. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 39*, 225–243. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0193723513520013>
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States* (5th ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bonilla-Silva, E., & Zuberi, T. (2008). Toward a definition of white logic and white methods. In T. Zuberi & E. Bonilla-Silva (Eds.), *White logic, white methods: Racism and methodology* (pp. 3–27). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Cabrera, N. L. (2012). Working through whiteness: White, male college students challenging racism. *Review of Higher Education: Journal of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, 35*, 375–401. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2012.0020>
- Cabrera, N. L. (2014). Exposing whiteness in higher education: White male college students minimizing racism, claiming victimization, and recreating white supremacy. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 17*, 30–55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.725040>
- Cabrera, N. L., Watson, J. S., & Franklin, J. D. (2016). Racial arrested development: A critical whiteness analysis of the campus ecology. *Journal of College Student Development, 57*, 119–134. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0014>
- Carrington, B. (2013). The critical sociology of race and sport: The first fifty years. *Annual Review of Sociology, 39*, 379–398. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145528>
- Cheslock, J. (2008). *Who's playing college sports? Money, race and gender*. Washington, DC: Women's Sports Foundation. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539973.pdf>
- Clotfelter, C. T. (2011). *Big-time sports in American universities*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511976902>
- Coakley, J. (2015). *Sport in society: Issues and controversies* (11th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Cooper, J. N. (2012). Personal troubles and public issues: A sociological imagination of Black athletes' experiences at predominately white institutions in the United States. *Sociology Mind, 2*, 261–271. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/sm.2012.23035>
- Cooper, J. N., Nwadike, A., & Macaulay, C. (2017). A critical race theory analysis of big-time college sports: Implications for culturally responsive and race-conscious sport leadership. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics, 10*, 204–233.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*, 1241–1299. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- DeLuca, J. R., & Andrews, D. L. (2016). Exercising privilege: The cyclical reproduction of capital through swim club membership. *Sociological Inquiry, 86*, 301–323. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/soin.12113>
- DiAngelo, R. (2011). White fragility. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 3*, 54–70.
- Eitzen, D. S. (2016). *Fair and foul: Beyond the myths and paradoxes of sport* (5th ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Fields, B. (2001). Whiteness, racism, and identity. *International Labor and Working Class History, 60*, 48–56.
- Foster, J. D., & Chaplin, K. S. (2017). Systemic racism in the media: Representations of Black athletes in sport magazines. In R. Thompson-Miller & K. Ducey (Eds.), *Systemic racism* (pp. 263–283). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59410-5\\_11](http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59410-5_11)
- Gill, E. (2007). The Duke lacrosse scandal: A case of White privilege in college sports. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education, 1*, 17–36. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/ssa.2007.1.1.17>
- Gillborn, D. (2005). Education policy as an act of white supremacy: Whiteness, critical race theory and education reform. *Journal of Education Policy, 20*, 485–505. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680930500132346>
- Gouthro, P. (2014). Stories of learning across the lifespan: Life-history and biographical research in adult education. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, 20*, 87–103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/JACE.20.1.6>
- Gusa, D. L. (2010). White institutional presence: The impact of whiteness on campus climate. *Harvard Educational Review, 80*, 464–490. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/haer.80.4.p5j483825u110002>
- Harper, S. R. (2012). Race without racism: How higher education researchers minimize racist institutional norms. *Review of Higher Education: Journal of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, 36*, 9–29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2012.0047>
- Harper, S. R., Williams, C. D., & Blackman, H. W. (2013). *Black male student-athletes and racial inequities in NCAA Division I college sports*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education.
- Harrison, A. K. (2013). Black skiing, everyday racism, and the racial spatiality of whiteness. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 37*, 315–339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0193723513498607>
- Hattery, A. (2012). They play like girls: Gender and race (in)equity in NCAA sports. *Wake Forest Journal of Law & Policy, 2*, 247–265.
- Hawkins, B. (2010). *The new plantation: Black athletes, college sports, and predominantly white institutions*. New York, NY: Palgrave-MacMillan. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230105539>
- Hextrum, K. (2018a). The hidden curriculum of college athletic recruitment. *Harvard Educational Review, 88*, 355–377. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-88.3.355>
- Hextrum, K. (2018b). Amateurism revisited: How U.S. college athletic recruitment favors middle-class athletes. *Sport Education and Society*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2018.1547962>
- Hextrum, K. (2019). Reproducing sports stars: How students become elite athletes. *Teachers College Record, 121*, 1–38.
- Jayakumar, U. M. (2015). The shaping of postcollege colorblind orientation among whites: Residential segregation and campus diversity experiences. *Harvard Educational Review, 85*, 609–645. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.4.609>
- Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2014). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Kenyon, E. A. (2017). Lived experience and the ideologies of preservice social studies teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 61*, 94–103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.10.006>
- King, C. R. (2005). Cautionary notes on whiteness and sport studies. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 22*, 397–408. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/ssj.22.3.397>
- King, C. R., & Springwood, C. F. (2001). *Beyond the cheers: Race as spectacle in college sport*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. (2019). *Academic spending per student and per non-football athlete at college football bowl series institutions*. Retrieved from <http://cafidatabase.knightcommission.org/reports>
- Lapchick, R. (2018). *2017 college sport racial & gender report card*. Orlando, FL: University of Central Florida, TIDES.
- Lawrence, S. M., Harrison, C. K., & Bukstein, S. (2016). What is this “white” in the white male student-athlete?: White students’ perceptions of academic and athletic success on campus. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 33*, 334–346. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2015-0139>
- Lee, J., Macdonald, D., & Wright, J. (2009). Young men’s physical activity choices: The impact of capital, masculinities, and location. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 33*, 59–77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0193723508328904>
- Lensmire, T. J. (2014). White men’s racial others. *Teachers College Record, 116*, 1–32.
- Leonardo, Z. (2004). The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of “white privilege.” *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 36*, 137–152. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2004.00057.x>
- Leonardo, Z. (2009). *Race, whiteness, and education*. New York, NY: Routledge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203880371>
- Leonardo, Z. (2015). Contracting race: Writing, racism, and education. *Critical Studies in Education, 56*, 86–98. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2015.981197>
- Leonardo, Z., & Manning, L. (2017). White historical activity theory: Toward a critical understanding of white zones of proximal development. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 20*, 15–29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2015.1100988>
- Martin, C. (2010). *Benching Jim Crow: The rise and fall of the color line in southern college sports 1890–1980*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- McIntosh, P. (1989, July/August). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom, 1989*, 10–12.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Messner, M. (2009). *It’s all for the kids: Gender, families, and youth sports*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Miller, P. B. (1998). The anatomy of scientific racism: Racist responses to Black athletic achievement. *Journal of Sport History, 25*, 119–151.
- Mowatt, R. A. (2009). Notes from a leisure son: Expanding an understanding of whiteness in leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research, 41*, 511–528. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2009.11950188>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2018a). *NCAA DI graduation report, 2017*. Indianapolis, IN: Author.
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2018b). *NCAA recruiting facts*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/recruiting>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (n.d.). *NCAA inclusion statement*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/inclusion/ncaa-inclusion-statement>
- Newman, J. (2007). Army of whiteness? Colonel Reb and the sporting south’s cultural and corporate symbolic. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 31*, 315–339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0193723507307814>
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2014). *Racial formation in the United States* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Sack, A., & Staurowsky, E. (1998). *College athletes for hire: The evolution and legacy of the NCAA’s amateur myth*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Skiba, R. (2012). “As nature has formed them”: The history and current status of racial difference research. *Teachers College Record, 114*, 1–49.
- Smith, J. M. (2012). Reflections on using life-history to investigate women teachers’ aspirations and career decisions. *Qualitative Research, 12*, 486–503. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1468794111433090>
- Southall, R. M., & Staurowsky, E. J. (2013). Cheering on the collegiate model: Creating, disseminating, and imbedding the NCAA’s redefinition of amateurism. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 37*, 403–429. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0193723513498606>
- Spracklen, K. (2008). The holy blood and the holy grail: Myths of scientific racism and the pursuit of excellence in sport. *Leisure Studies, 27*, 221–227. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02614360801902257>
- Stefansen, K., Smette, I., & Strandbu, A. (2018). Understanding the increase in parents’ involvement in organized youth sports. *Sport, Education and Society, 23*, 162–172. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2016.1150834>
- Stewart, D. L. (2019). Whiteness as collective memory in student publications at midwestern liberal arts colleges, 1945–1965. *American Educational Research Journal, 56*, 3–38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0002831218788326>
- Stirrup, J., Duncombe, R., & Sandford, R. (2015). “Intensive nothing” in the early years: The cultivation and consolidation of (physical) capital. *Sport, Education and Society, 20*, 89–106. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.941797>
- Ternes, N. (2016). The spirit of Aggieland: Neoliberalism, militarization, and football culture at Texas A&M. *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies, 38*, 276–293. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2016.1178543>
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*, 837–851. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). *Quickfacts, United States: Median household income (in 2015 dollars)*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/map/INC110214/00>
- Vadeboncoeur, J. D., & Bopp, T. (2019). Applying white dialectics: Exploring whiteness and racial identity among white college athletes. *Quest, 71*, 1–20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2018.1478737>
- Vaught, S. E. (2008). Writing against racism: Telling white lies and reclaiming culture. *Qualitative Inquiry, 14*, 566–589. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800408314355>
- Walton, T. A., & Butryn, T. M. (2006). Policing the race: U.S. men’s distance running and the crisis of whiteness. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 23*, 1–28. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/ssj.23.1.1>
- Wessells, A. T. (2011). The ultimate team sport? Urban waterways and youth rowing in Seattle. In S. Sutton & S. Kemp (Eds.), *The paradox of urban space* (pp. 53–71). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Received December 18, 2018

Revision received August 2, 2019

Accepted August 11, 2019 ■