

Exploitation in the American Academy: College Athletes and Self-perceptions of Value

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Abstract: The exploitation of college athletes, particularly Black revenue athletes, has been a persistent topic of controversy within American higher education for the past half century. Strikingly absent in this literature are the college athletes themselves. This research study of 581 NCAA Division I college athletes examines these participants' perceptions of feeling exploited by the university for their athletic ability and potential. Comparative analyses are reported based upon gender, race, year-in-school and scholarship status. Differences between revenue, defined as football and men's basketball, and nonrevenue or Olympic sports (all other intercollegiate athletic teams) are reported. Findings demonstrate significant differences across several of these demographic and sport-specific categories. Findings also suggest that the perceived exploitation experienced by college athletes is more complicated than a simple financial or educational exchange. Several social and educational implications are discussed.

Keywords: American College Athletes, Black Revenue College Athletes, Exploitation, Self-perceptions of Institutional Value

THE EXPLOITATION OF college athletes, particularly Black college athletes, has been a persistent topic of controversy within American higher education for the past half a century. This controversy is punctuated each year by football and basketball championships, when the public appetite for parades, pageantry and an ever-increasing number of televised games has been described as inducing fever and madness. During these times in particular, exposés and editorials abound, decrying low graduation rates and the recruitment and commodification of young men and women solely for their athletic talent and potential. Edwards (1985) articulated the case well some 25 years ago when he wrote:

For decades, student athletes, usually 17-to-19 year-old freshmen, have informally agreed to a contract with the universities they attend: athletic performance in exchange for an education. The athletes have kept their part of the bargain; the universities have not. Universities and athletic departments have gained huge gate receipts, television revenues, national visibility, donors to university programs, and more as a result of the performances of gifted basketball and football players, of whom a disproportionate number of the most gifted and most exploited have been Black (p. 373).

As evidence that this controversy persists today, decades after Edwards first made these assertions, United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan refocused attention on this issue when he proposed that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) bar any team from participating in the post-season tournament if it fails to graduate at least 40% of its players. If the proposed rule had applied to the 2010 NCAA men's basketball tournament,

12 of the 65 teams would have been ineligible for post-season play. Duncan argued that, “If you can’t manage to graduate two out of five players, how serious are the institutions and the colleges about the players’ academic success?” A former college basketball player at Harvard University, Duncan noted, “My father taught me a long time ago that a university has a dual mission, to educate its students and to prepare them for life. If a college fails to educate all of its students, then that university has failed its mission. It’s time to start holding coaches and institutions more accountable for the academic outcomes of their athletes” (Blackburn, 2010, para. 8).

Since former executive director of the NCAA Walter Byers coined the term *student-athlete* in the 1950s (Sperber, 1999), scholars and educational administrators have weighed in on this controversy, fueling a debate over the commercialization of college sports and the commodification of young men and women (Byers & Hammer, 1995; Coakley, 2009; Eitzen, 2000; Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010; Rigauer, 1981; Sage, 1998; Zimbalist, 1999, 2001, 2006). Faculty and former university presidents (e.g., Bowen & Levin, 2003; Duderstadt, 2000; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Sperber, 1990, 2000) caution against the promotion of college sports at the expense of academic priorities and the mission of higher education. Most agree that the revenue-producing sports of football and basketball pose the greatest threat to institutional control and integrity. The college athletes recruited to compete in these sports pose an institutional dilemma, as they are often the most academically under-prepared relative to other students but admitted nonetheless. As evidence that signing a top athletic class is big business, nearly half of NCAA Division I athletics departments doubled their recruiting budgets from 1997 to 2007 (Sanders, 2008). Perhaps as a result of this trend, recruiting violations account for over two-thirds of the total major violations in the NCAA since 1987 and have increased markedly since the inception of the BCS computer model for determining the national championship game (Clark & Batista, 2009; Van Rheenen, 2010).

Economists quantify the potential earnings of high-profile, blue-chip athletes for their college campuses, arguing that a college athlete who is eventually drafted in the National Football League (NFL) or National Basketball Association (NBA) will likely produce upwards of \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 in annual revenues for their college teams (Brown, 1993; Fish, 2009; Marshall, 1994; Zimbalist, 1999, 2001). In return, a signed National Letter of Intent, a promissory note of sorts for attending one particular institution over any other, secures merely a one-year financial commitment by the institution to pay the recruited athlete’s tuition, books, room and board and nominal monthly stipend. While this full athletics grant-in-aid, often called a “free ride,” may be significant, and recent NCAA legislation will now allow for multi-year athletic scholarships, the costs to the institution are often less than the revenues generated by such high-profile athletes. Of course, the majority of college athletes is neither high-profile nor engaged in the revenue-producing sports of men’s basketball and football. Thus, the majority of student athletes generate no revenue for their respective institutions but cost an enormous amount to sustain.

The financial imbalances between revenue athletes and their institutions have led critics to highlight the surplus value and financial gains expropriated by colleges and universities on the backs of these young men (Edwards, 1970; Sack 1979; Sailes, 1986; Scott, 1971) and the corresponding alienation, isolation and powerlessness experienced by college athletes (Coakley, 2009; Edwards, 1973; Eitzen, 1993; Lapchick, 2001; Rigauer, 1981; Sellers, 2000). The fact that a disproportionate number of recruited student athletes in the revenue-producing

sports of football and basketball are African American has further ignited charges of institutionalized racism, comparing the college and professional playing fields to the antebellum plantation and the historical legacy of American slavery (Deford, 2005; Eitzen, 2000; Hawkins, 2010; Mahiri & Van Rheenen, 2010; Rhoden, 2006). As such, these student athletes are cast in the press and literature as victims of an unfair exchange, promised a college degree as the educational outcome of their athletic labor.

While African American student athletes tend to graduate at higher rates than African American college students at non-historically Black schools generally (NCAA, 2010b), only 20 of the 50 flagship state (e.g., public) universities post a higher graduation rate for African American athletes relative to African American students generally. An editorial in the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2005) argues,

It appears that many of these flagship state universities are admitting Black students who are not academically qualified for even the moderately rigorous curricula at these schools. In many cases, these Black athletes are admitted solely for the purpose of their participation in intercollegiate athletics. The case is strong that these flagship universities are exploiting Blacks for their athletic talents while frequently ignoring their educational needs (p. 2).

Wertheimer (1996) further notes, “When critics claim that colleges exploit student athletes, they typically imply that when colleges provide genuine educational opportunities, they are not engaged in exploitation” (p. 89). But even when these students do graduate, there may be claims that the college athlete has been exploited, often citing a degree in a major or discipline with little value. As James Duderstadt (2000), former college football player and President of the University of Michigan notes, “Some universities take advantage of their student-athletes, exploiting their athletic talents for financial gain and public visibility, and tolerating low graduation rates and meaningless degrees in majors like general studies or recreational life” (p. 5–6).

These criticisms generally frame the relationship of the institution to their college athlete within a paternalistic structure, where colleges and universities bear primary, if not full, responsibility for the educational outcome of their students. In reality, of course, the promise is nothing more than an educational opportunity. Because students must act to realize their opportunity, it is problematic to speak of an institutional promise; however, as noted above, if the educational opportunity is unlikely to be realized based upon structural constraints and conflicts, and/or even with genuine effort expended on the part of the college athlete, the relationship may well be exploitive.

Purpose of the Study

Only a few studies to date have specifically examined college athletes’ perceptions of feeling exploited or victimized by their educational institutions. One exception is Leonard’s (1986) article, “The Sports Experience of the Black College Athlete: Exploitation in the Academy,” in which he concludes that Black (and White) college basketball players do not feel categorically abused or exploited. In his article, Leonard defines exploitation as a multi-dimensional concept. His analysis includes several rubrics and a wide array of questions (he lists 23 questions as a *sample* of Likert items used) to assess whether these individuals feel exploited. While the author is correct to ask college athletes how *they* feel about their lived experiences,

Leonard's definition of exploitation is overly broad, drawing on multiple factors without any clear indication that these perceptions speak to these individuals' feelings of being exploited for their athletic talents.

In their rich ethnographic study of one men's Division I college basketball team, Adler and Adler (1991) found that these basketball college athletes increased their sense of exploitation as they matriculated from freshmen through their senior year. According to these authors, players developed their strongest feelings of exploitation during their senior year, "recasting their perception of their relationship to the University from one of exchange to one of exploitation" (p. 193). Like Leonard, Adler and Adler's study focuses solely on male basketball players, limiting the ability to contrast their perceptions with college athletes from other sports teams.

In a more recent qualitative study of former Division I college athletes, Beamon (2008) found that most of the respondents felt taken advantage of by their college or university, described by one informant as feeling like "used goods." While 17 of the 20 informants graduated from their respective institutions, the author reported that "90% noted that universities were reaping greater benefits, financial and otherwise, than student-athletes" (p. 362). While Beamon's study provides an in-depth ethnographic picture of athletic exploitation in the academy, her study, like Adler and Adler's qualitative study of a single men's basketball team, is limited to a small sample. Her findings are based upon interviews with 20 African American male college athletes who had previously played Division I football and basketball.

Despite their conflicting results, all of these studies focus solely on revenue college athletes, the population most often described as exploited in the literature and popular press. These studies, while important, do not allow for comparative analyses by type of sport (revenue vs. non-revenue), gender (male *and* female), race, year-in-school and scholarship status. The purpose of this study, then, is to examine student athlete perceptions of feeling exploited by the university. The research questions examine perceptions of institutional exploitation among a cross-section of all college athletes at a single university.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Subjects of this study were 581 Division I college student athletes participating in 17 sports enrolled at a large public institution on the west coast of the United States. Annual surveys were administered at the same institution between 2006 and 2009. The same survey items were used in three different rounds of data collection. The largest of the three surveys was conducted as part of an institutional certification process in 2006. The survey was administered on-line, of which 474 active college athletes completed the survey for an overall response rate of 64%. The response rate varied widely by sport from a low of 20% (women's basketball) to a high of 83% (men's rugby). This on-line survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The other two surveys were administered in the author's undergraduate course in 2008 and 2009, in which a large number of college athletes were enrolled. These paper and pencil surveys took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. Surveys were analyzed independently and as a larger data set.

Measures

Demographics. The survey included demographic questions which elicited respondents' (a) sport, (b) gender, (c) race/ethnicity, (d) year-in-school (freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior), and (e) scholarship status. The percentage of respondents within these demographic variables are outlined in Table 1.

Exploitation. Three items from Simons and Van Rheezen's (2000) scale were used to measure college athletes' perception of feeling exploited by their institution. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of these items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The three questions were: (a) "Sometimes I feel that I am being taken advantage of as an athlete," (b) "I give more to the university than it gives to me," and (c) "This university makes too much money off its athletes, who see very little of it." The internal reliability or Chronbach's alpha of the three-item scale was .80.

Table I: Demographic Variables (N=581)

Sport	Participants	Gender		Race			Athletic Scholarship		Year in College			
		Male	Female	Black	White	Other	No	Yes	1	2	3	4
Baseball	31	31	0	1	27	3	10	21	5	9	14	3
Basketball	16	6	4	4	5	1	2	8	2	1	5	2
Crew	92	41	51	1	82	9	57	35	4	30	33	25
Field hockey	22	0	22	0	16	6	0	22	7	3	6	6
Football	59	59	0	22	30	7	20	39	13	23	18	5
Golf	19	14	5	0	12	7	8	11	2	9	5	3
Gymnastics	21	8	13	1	15	5	10	11	1	4	8	8
Lacrosse	15	0	15	0	15	0	2	13	2	2	7	4
Rugby	58	58	0	0	46	12	58	0	18	13	21	6
Soccer	39	15	24	2	27	10	0	39	13	11	11	4
Softball	15	0	15	4	7	4	0	15	8	1	4	2
Swimming/Diving	42	29	13	1	33	8	14	28	4	7	13	18
Tennis	14	8	6	0	10	4	5	9	2	2	7	3
Track & Field/Cross-country	70	36	34	25	38	7	16	54	19	15	27	9
Volleyball	10	0	10	1	6	3	2	8	3	3	2	2
Water Polo	64	30	34	0	56	8	36	28	14	22	19	9
Total (n)	581	335	246	62	425	94	240	341	117	155	200	109
%	100%	58%	42%	11%	73%	16%	41%	59%	20%	27%	34%	19%

Subgroup Differences

A primary objective of this study was to identify differences, if any, among subgroups of college athletes. Comparative analyses were conducted based upon self-reported gender, race, year-in-school, scholarship status, and sport. Differences between revenue, defined as football and men's basketball, and Olympic or non-revenue sports (all other intercollegiate athletic teams) were also reported.

Results

Pearson's chi-square tests of independence were calculated and logic regressions were run to test the joint probability of several binary random variables under study. The significance of these odds ratios (OR) were also reported. Table 2 illustrates the chi-square analyses and tested odds ratios for the entire sample of Division I college athletes.

Table 2: Chi-square Analyses and Odds Ratios of Perception of Exploitation among College Athletes (N=581)

	Exploited	Not exploited	Odds	Odds Ratio	Pearson Chi-2	Pr > Chi-2
Sport category						
Revenue	46	19	2.42	7.12	56.78	0.000***
Non-Revenue	130	386	0.34			
Gender						
Male	116	219	0.53	1.66	7.04	0.008**
Female	60	186	0.32			
Race (Black x White x Other)						
Black	39	23	1.70	--	35.58	0.000***
White	109	316	0.34			
Other	28	66	0.42			
Race (Black x Non-Black)						
Black	39	23	1.70	4.72	34.95	0.000***
Non-Black	137	382	0.36			
Year in college						
Freshman	37	80	0.46	--	7.85	0.049*
Sophomore	51	104	0.49			
Junior	67	133	0.50			
Senior	21	88	0.24			
Year in college (Senior x Non-Senior)						
Senior	21	88	0.24	0.49	7.73	0.005**
Non-Senior	155	317	0.49			
Scholarship status						
Scholarship	99	242	0.41	0.87	0.62	0.431
Non-Scholarship	77	163	0.47			

Overall Responses

Sport. In analyzing the student athletes by the type of sport in which they participate, 25% of student-athletes on non-revenue sports teams and 71% of student athletes on revenue sports teams tended to feel exploited by their university. This difference by revenue status is significant: $\chi^2(1, N = 581) = 56.78, p < 0.001$, as the odds are 7.12 (OR = 2.42/0.34) times greater that members of men's basketball and football programs tend to feel exploited compared to their peers who participate on non-revenue or Olympic sports teams.

Gender. Thirty-five percent of male student-athletes and 24% of female student-athletes tend to feel exploited by their university. This difference by gender is significant: $\chi^2(1, N = 581) = 7.04, p < 0.001$. Thus, male college athletes have 64% greater odds of feeling exploited than do female student-athletes.

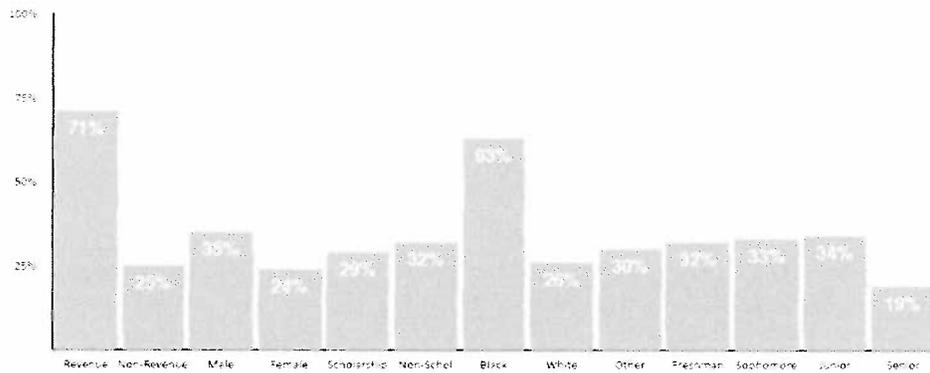


Figure 1: Percent of Division I College Athletes, by Various Demographic Groups, who Feel Exploited by their University (N = 581)

Race. Differences by race were even more pronounced. Sixty-three percent of Black student-athletes feel exploited by their university, though only 26% of White student-athletes and 30% of student-athletes of other racial groups feel this way. These differences by race are significant: $\chi^2 (2, N = 581) = 35.58, p < 0.001$. The odds of Black college athletes feeling exploited are nearly five (4.92) times as great as the odds of a White student-athlete feeling exploited, and 4.00 times as great as a college athlete who self-identified as Hispanic, Asian, Native American, or any other racial group feeling exploited.

Year in school. Thirty-two percent of first year student-athletes, 33% of second year student-athletes, 34% of third year student-athletes, and 19% of fourth year student-athletes feel exploited by their university. These differences by year in school are significant: $\chi^2 (3, N = 581) = 7.85, p < 0.05$. While there are no differences across the first three years of college, or even when analyzed as underclassmen versus upperclassmen, fourth year college athletes are roughly half as likely as student athletes in any other year of school to feel exploited. For revenue college athletes, however, seniors reported feeling more exploited than underclassmen on their teams.

Scholarship status. Somewhat surprisingly, there was little difference in college athletes' perceptions of feeling exploited based on their athletic scholarship status. Thirty-two percent of non-scholarship student-athletes and 29% of college athletes on athletic scholarships tend to feel exploited by their university. This difference by scholarship status is not significant.

Table 3: Chi-square Analyses and Odds Ratios of Perception of Exploitation among Non-revenue College Athletes (N=516)

	Exploited	Not exploited	Odds	Odds Ratio	Pearson Chi-2	Pr > Chi-2
Gender						
Male	70	200	0.35	1.09	0.16	0.688
Female	60	186	0.32			
Race (Black x White x Other)						
Black	19	20	0.95	--	12.69	0.002**
White	88	302	0.29			
Other	22	64	0.34			
Race (Black x Non-Black)						
Black	19	20	0.95	3.17	12.39	0.000***
Non-Black	111	366	0.30			
Year in college						
Freshman	26	76	0.34	--	6.77	0.080
Sophomore	36	95	0.38			
Junior	52	128	0.41			
Senior	16	87	0.18			
Year in college (Senior x Non-Senior)						
Senior	16	87	0.18	2.19	6.37	0.012*
Non-Senior	114	299	0.38			
Scholarship status						
Scholarship	69	229	0.30	0.77	1.56	0.212
Non-Scholarship	61	157	0.39			

Table 4: Chi-square Analyses and Odds Ratios of Perception of Exploitation among Revenue College Athletes (N=65)

	Exploited	Not exploited	Odds	Odds Ratio	Pearson Chi-2	Pr > Chi-2
Race (Black x White x Other)						
Black	20	3	6.67	--	5.33	0.070
White	20	14	1.43			
Other	6	2	3.00			
Race (Black x Non-Black)						
Black	20	3	6.67	4.09	4.51	0.034*
Non-Black	26	16	1.63			
Year in college						
Freshman	11	4	2.75	--	1.47	0.639
Sophomore	15	9	1.67			
Junior	15	5	3.00			
Senior	5	1	5.00			
Year in college (Senior x Non-Senior)						
Senior	5	1	5.00	2.19	0.50	0.478
Non-Senior	41	18	2.28			
Scholarship status						
Scholarship	30	13	2.31	0.87	0.06	0.804
Non-Scholarship	16	6	2.67			

Comparative Responses from Non-revenue and Revenue College Athletes

Table 3 and Table 4 illustrate chi-square and odds ratio analyses for revenue and non-revenue college athletes, respectively.

Gender. There were no significant differences between male and female non-revenue college athletes. Within a sub-sample of non-revenue college athletes ($n = 516$), 26% of male non-revenue college athletes and 24% of female non-revenue student athletes tend to feel exploited by their university. All revenue college athletes were male.

Race. Forty-nine percent of Black non-revenue college athletes (NRCA), 23% of White NRCA, and 26% of NRCA of other minority groups tend to feel exploited by their university. Black non-revenue college athletes are 3.23 times more likely to feel exploited than their White peers, and 2.76 times more likely to feel exploited than members of other racial categories. Differences between Black and non-Black non-revenue college athletes are significant ($\chi^2 = 12.39, p < 0.001$).

Similarly, within a sub-sample of revenue student athletes ($n = 65$), 87% of Blacks, 59% of Whites, and 75% of participants of other racial groups tend to feel exploited by their university. Black revenue college athletes are 4.67 times more likely to feel exploited than their White peers, and 2.2 times more likely to feel exploited than members of other racial categories. Differences between Black and non-Black revenue student-athletes are significant ($\chi^2 = 4.51, p < 0.05$).

Year in school. Twenty-five percent of 1st year non-revenue college athletes (NRCA), 27% of 2nd year NRCA, 29% of 3rd year NRCA, and 16% of 4th year NRCA tend to feel exploited by their university. The only statistically significant difference is between non-revenue college athletes in their senior year and their younger peers (27% of whom on average felt exploited): $\chi^2 (2, N = 516) = 6.37, p < 0.05$. The odds are 1.89 greater that 1st year NRCA, 2.11 times greater that 2nd year NRCA, and 2.28 times greater that 3rd year NRCA feel exploited compared to 4th year non-revenue college athletes.

These findings were not found among revenue college athletes, where 83% of 4th year revenue college athletes reported feeling exploited by their university. By comparison, 73% of first year, 63% of second year, and 75% of third year revenue college athletes tend to feel exploited by their university. These differences by year in school among revenue college athletes are not significant.

Scholarship status. There were no significant differences between scholarship and non-scholarship non-revenue college athletes, although non-scholarship non-revenue college athletes reported slightly higher levels of feeling exploited for their athletic contribution to the university than their peers who were on some form of athletic aid. Despite a tremendous difference in the percentage of revenue college athletes who feel exploited relative to their non-revenue peers, similar findings were reported when comparing scholarship and non-scholarship revenue college athletes. Seventy-three percent of non-scholarship revenue student-athletes and 70% of scholarship revenue student-athletes tend to feel exploited by their university. This difference by scholarship status among revenue student-athletes is not significant. Thus, among all college athletes, whether revenue or non-revenue, the non-scholarship college athletes reported feeling slightly more exploited than their peers who received some form of athletic aid.

Discussion

While exposés and editorials abound concerning the exploitation of college athletes, particularly Black college athletes, few studies have measured the actual perception of the student athletes themselves. The primary purpose of this study was to measure the relative level of resentment by college athletes towards their university and their perception of being exploited for their athletic abilities and potential.

The initial finding in this study of Division I college athletes was that nearly one-third of all participants reported feeling exploited by their institution. While the revenue sport athletes who participated in football and men's basketball were seven times more likely to feel taken advantage of by their institution than their non-revenue peers, a full one quarter of these Olympic or non-revenue college athletes also felt exploited.

This finding is striking, given that only football and men's basketball generate any revenue for their institution's athletic department. While non-revenue college athletes may believe that their sports generate surplus revenues for their institutions, it is perhaps more likely that these participants feel taken advantage of for reasons others than those directly related to money. Their sense of resentment complicates a purely economic understanding of exploitation in college sports; these college athletes may believe their athletic participation generates other kinds of value or social capital for the university, such as institutional and community pride or prestige. Non-revenue college athletes may also be aware of less direct financial rewards associated with their athletic participation, such as donations to the university. Current and potential donors may have emotional connections to sports teams other than football and basketball, as demonstrated by gifts and endowments to both athletic and nonathletic areas of campus.

This sense of exploitation among non-revenue college athletes might likewise be based on their perceived understanding of an unfair educational exchange, whereby their commitment in time towards their sport has limited these students' ability to take full advantage of their educational opportunities. This reported resentment may be more complex than simply whether or not these students graduate from the institution. For example, these college students may have been unable to enroll in certain courses, pursue possible majors or study abroad due to their athletic commitments. These students might also have been able to graduate earlier were they not expected to compete in a final season or year.

Because male college athletes, particularly in the sports of football and basketball, participated on teams which earned revenue and had greater professional athletic opportunities beyond college, it was hypothesized that males would feel more exploited by their institution than females. This hypothesis was confirmed. It is worth noting that female college athletes also outperform their male counterparts in the classroom and graduate at higher rates than male college athletes, though it is unclear whether the relative academic underperformance of male student athletes is related to higher levels of perceived institutional exploitation. It is possible that these young men feel that the university has broken its promise of providing a genuine educational opportunity in exchange for their athletic participation.

However, it was found that male and female non-revenue college athletes were strikingly similar in their relative sense of feeling exploited. Thus, the gender differences evident in this study are primarily a reflection of the type of sport played and whether college athletes participated on revenue or non-revenue teams.

Like gender, dramatic differences by race were found. These differences were confounded by type of sport, as nearly half of the revenue college athletes in this study were African American. Unlike gender, however, African Americans felt significantly more exploited than their non-Black peers across every category of college athlete. These racial differences were found for both revenue and non-revenue college athletes, suggesting that African American college athletes were far more resentful of their physical commodification in sport, even when participating on intercollegiate athletic teams which earned no revenue for their university's athletic department. These findings suggest the pervasive place of race in American college sports, particularly on college campuses where African American athletes comprise a significant percentage of the entire Black student population.

The only significant difference between college athletes by year in school was that seniors on non-revenue intercollegiate athletic teams were *less likely* than all other years to feel exploited, perhaps because these college athletes were now close to earning their degrees and believed that a fair educational exchange had taken place. Unlike their non-revenue peers, seniors on the revenue-producing sports of football and men's basketball were *more likely* to feel exploited than underclassmen on their respective teams. This finding, which supports Adler and Adler's ethnographic results, could suggest that these college athletes had made less degree progress than their non-revenue peers, remaining athletically eligible but further from an actual degree, despite NCAA efforts to increase minimum progress-toward-degree standards. As Beamon's qualitative study demonstrates, however, revenue college athletes may feel exploited whether or not they graduate from their institution, suggesting that the educational exchange is more complicated than receiving a degree and perhaps only one facet of these individuals' sense of resentment.

For example, these college athletes' sense of feeling exploited may have as much to do with their athletic aspirations as it does with their academic goals. Senior revenue college athletes are more likely to be confronted with the reality that they will never play professionally in their respective sport. Many of these young men and women have been encouraged and motivated by this professional athletic goal all of their lives, a perceived path even more pronounced among African American males (Edwards, 1985; Eitzen, 1999, 2000; Hoberman, 1997; Majors & Billson, 1992; Rhoden, 2006). These young men are likely to feel resentful when they realize that this goal will not be realized after all.

One of the most interesting findings of this study was that non-scholarship college athletes reported feeling as exploited as college athletes on athletic scholarship. It had been hypothesized that scholarship athletes would have reported higher levels of feeling exploited, based upon the formalized economic relationship between the institution and Division I college athletes. This relationship often begins with the National Letter of Intent (NLI), a college athlete's contractual agreement to attend and participate in their respective sport for a particular university in exchange for an athletic scholarship. It was surmised that this explicit financial exchange would make college athletes more conscious of their athletic value to the campus, highlighting their athletic commodification while devaluing their academic ability and potential. Additionally, if these students felt their athletic talent was the primary reason for being recruited and subsequently admitted to attend the university, there might be reason to believe these scholarship athletes would harbor a greater potential resentment towards the institution than non-scholarship college athletes who were less heavily recruited.

While a significant number of scholarship student athletes did in fact feel exploited by their institution, particularly from the revenue sports of football and men's basketball, the

relatively large number of non-scholarship athletes who also felt exploited suggests that financial compensation is only one factor in the potential exchange between an institution and its college athletes.

Limitations, Implications and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the study is limited in its sample, as it only examined the comparative sense of exploitation among college students at one Division I institution. While the size of the sample is large, we cannot assume that the phenomena expressed at a single school are indicative of a larger trend. Similarly, because this study was conducted at a large public university, results may not generalize to other educational institutions, such as small private colleges. For example, colleges and universities that compete at the Division III level do not award athletic scholarships. The surprising finding that there were no differences between Division I scholarship and non-scholarship college athletes in their sense of resentment warrants further research. It would be interesting to see if the results are replicated at other Division I institutions, as well as those colleges and universities competing at the Division II and III levels.

It is important to note that the results of this study do not indicate whether or not colleges or universities actually exploit their student athletes. Rather, the findings demonstrate that a number of college athletes at this particular institution feel exploited. But given the large number of college football and basketball players who report feeling taken advantage of by their institution, future analyses should address the underlying factors contributing to this perceived exploitation among revenue college athletes.

This study seems to suggest that the perceived exploitation experienced among college athletes is more complicated than a simple financial or educational exchange. In short, earning a degree may not negate feelings of resentment towards the university and a sense of feeling exploited by the institution. That non-revenue college athletes also feel taken advantage of by their institution demonstrates that this sense of resentment is not only financial: many young men and women are on full athletic scholarships and on teams which earn no surplus revenue for the school still feel exploited.

While the results of the study suggest that the perceived exploitation of college athletes is complex, the dynamics at play are still unclear. It is possible that the resentment experienced by college athletes is as much about the quality of the educational experience as it is about the ultimate outcome of their undergraduate careers. The role of intercollegiate athletics on a given campus, and how college athletes perceive their value to the institution, will certainly impact their relative sense of resentment. Similarly, when college athletes report feeling exploited, it is unclear whether this resentment towards the university refers to their coach specifically, the athletic department more broadly or the institution at large.

Where college athletes are not valued as students on their college or university campus, it is difficult to expect that these young people will develop a healthy academic identity. These students, who may already question their academic potential based upon their recruitment and admission to the university, reaffirm their primary value to the institution through their athletic performance. In turn, these college athletes come to feel commodified and celebrated as athletes, while they feel invisible and/or demeaned as students. These experiences are often exaggerated for African American college athletes on predominantly White institutions. As such, many college athletes feel resentful towards their institution, exploited

for their athletic talents and abilities. The outcome is problematic for the institution, as it leads to a combination of resentment by some faculty, staff and students in response to the university's investment in college sports and a corresponding resentment from college athletes who feel valued as gifted athletes but not as promising students. Their sense of exploitation undermines these college students' perceived promise of a meaningful education.

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