

Ethics Matter: Ethical Orientations and Disparate Racial Outcomes in Collegiate Athletics

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In this paper we explore the implications of a racially segregated youth sport system in America on Division I Collegiate Sport.

Based on current research in moral development we contend that black athletes' may experience anomie in the first year or two of college because they shift from one type of ethical orientation to another (Merton, 1938). Because the youth sport system (and religious institutions and schools) are highly segregated black and white youth are socialized differently (Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004). University athletic departments employing management practices reflecting the moral orientation typical of black communities and black youth sports will experience less performance disparity between white and black scholarship athletes. Where a department's ethical orientation is a more likely fit with Black athletes' personal ethical orientation we expect to see less racial disparity between white and black student athletes with regard to retention and academic success (Victor, B. & Cullen, J. B. (1988)).

We test this hypothesis with an exploratory empirical test. Using managerial responses to an initial positive drug test as a proxy for a department's ethical orientation we examine the association between ethical orientations and racial disparities in the graduation rates of scholarship athletes.

A typology of ethical orientations, based on three paradigms of moral development differently (Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004), is used to categorize 87 US collegiate Division I athletic departments. Performance outcomes are based on NCAA graduation success rate data for three years from the 87 schools. Findings support the hypothesis, indicating that seemingly "race neutral" ethical orientations are not equally effective across the short-term for whites and blacks. Schools with stated policies that reflect the ethical orientation of black communities racial disparities are ½ those at schools with policies reflecting more mainstream ethical orientations. Variances in disparities are statistically significant for comparisons between blacks and whites overall, black males and white males, but not for black females and white females.

If these findings hold up to further testing, they suggest collegiate sport managers need to develop a clear understanding of socialization and the development of moral reasoning within the black community to assist in transitioning black athletes socialized in predominately black organizations into Division I athletic departments.