

Should College Athletes Be Allowed to Be Paid? A Public Opinion Analysis

Chris Knoester B. David Ridpath
Ohio State University Ohio University

Traditionally, public opinions have largely opposed further compensation for U.S. college athletes, beyond the costs of going to school. This study uses new data from the National Sports and Society Survey ($N=3,993$) to assess recent public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid more than it costs them to go to school. The authors found that a majority of U.S. adults now support, rather than oppose, allowing college athletes to be paid. Also, the authors found that White adults are especially unlikely, and Black adults are especially likely, to support allowing payment. Furthermore, recognition of racial/ethnic discrimination is positively, and indicators of traditionalism are negatively, associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid.

The compensation of U.S. college athletes, beyond educationally tethered compensation such as scholarships, has been the subject of significant concern and empirical inquiry for decades (Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Mondello et al., 2013; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Many college sports programs generate massive amounts of revenue, specifically in the highest competitive division (i.e., Division I) of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The sports of football and men's basketball hold special distinction and generate billions of dollars of annual revenue—much more than other college sports combined (Branch, 2011; Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Sanderson & Siegfried, 2015).

Notably, these two sports are disproportionately played by Black males. Although Black males make up <5% of the undergraduate population in U.S. colleges and universities, they comprise 56% of the participants in NCAA Division I men's basketball and 55% of the participants in football. Conversely, athletic administrators and coaches are overwhelmingly White (Harper & Simmons, 2019; Lapchick, 2019). For example, 80% of men's basketball coaches and 86% of head football coaches are White, very much out of proportion to the percentage of racial/ethnic minority athletes that they coach. Furthermore, White males are disproportionately NCAA administrators, and over 90% of conference commissioners are White (Gore-Mann & Grace, 2020; Lapchick, 2019). Consequently, the leadership and policymakers in charge of college sports are overwhelmingly White, while the athletic revenue generators are disproportionately Black.

Also, the commercially popular college sport industry is replete with highly paid coaches, well-compensated administrators, multimillion-dollar facilities, and significant perquisites for college athletes beyond academic scholarships—but no payment in excess of the full cost of attendance has been allowed for the athletes (Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Ridpath, Rudd & Stokowski, 2019). Still, revenues in intercollegiate athletics have dramatically increased in the past 20 years. There is now a 14-year \$10.8 billion television contract with Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and Turner Sports for the rights to televise the NCAA men's basketball

tournament. Also, a \$7.3 billion television contract exists for the College Football Playoff and six associated football Bowl games (Berkowitz, Upton & Brady, 2013; Gore-Mann & Grace, 2020). Nevertheless, revenue increases have not resulted in much of an increase in compensation to the group that generates the money, the players (Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Sanderson & Siegfried, 2015).

Even with increased revenue streams and the ability to provide more compensation to athletes, the long-held concept of amateurism and the new public-relations-driven moniker of the “collegiate model” are presented by defenders as nondebatable ideals for the industry of intercollegiate athletics. It is argued that college athletes should not be paid a salary or direct remuneration for performance; otherwise, the popularity of the industry will suffer economic damage (Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Tatos, 2017). Consequently, college athletes are denied access to billions of the dollars that they generate, and adults in leadership positions defend the status quo, while disproportionately claiming the rewards. Yet, resistance to this arrangement has been clearly building (Branch, 2011; Hruby, 2016; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to analyze public opinions about college athletes being allowed to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school. Information from public opinion research is commonly used to help inform interested parties about the public's concern over key issues that can directly or indirectly affect them. It can also provide insight into the factors that predict public opinions, if variance in public opinion is analyzed comprehensively with appropriate theory and research methods (Price & Neijens, 1997; Winter, 2008). Specifically, we used information from a large, new, national sample of U.S. adults ($N=3,993$) to gauge public opinion support for allowing college athletes to be paid. Then, using regression analyses, we tested hypotheses about the significance of race/ethnicity, sports involvement, and traditionalism in shaping public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid. We built upon and extended previous research by (a) analyzing new public opinions about college athletes' basic economic rights; (b) contextualizing our research more fully within understandings of power, control, and exploitation processes—especially as informed by critical race theory (CRT); and (c) leveraging these unique data to more comprehensively analyze predictors of public opinion attitudes about compensation. Our

Knoester is with The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA. Ridpath is with the Department of Sports Administration, Ohio University, Athens, OH, USA. Knoester (knoester.1@osu.edu) is corresponding author.

main predictors include measures of sports fandom, racial/ethnic identities, recognition of racial/ethnic discrimination, conservatism, and two sets of demographic characteristics associated with race/ethnicity and traditionalism: age and urbanicity. Previous work on public opinions about college athlete compensation has focused on descriptive reports of opinions about paying college athletes, the implications of different anti-Black framings of the issue, and Black–White differences in public opinions about paying college athletes (Druckman, Howat, & Rodheim, 2016; Mondello et al., 2013; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019; Wallsten, Nteta, McCarthy, & Tarsi, 2017).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study draws upon CRT to help situate the history of amateurism in college sports, the increased commercialization of it, and an apparently emerging willingness to approve of higher levels of compensation for athletes to anticipate public opinion support for allowing college athletes to be paid. Critical analyses of race in society are central to the advent of sociology (e.g., W. E. B. Du Bois) and the sociology of sport (e.g., Harry Edwards), but the emergence of CRT in the 1970s from the work of legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Alan Freeman has become particularly influential in not only attempting to address racial/ethnic inequalities through the judicial system, but also in helping to better understand, and theorize about, race in society. Now integrated within the theory and practice of many different academic disciplines and applied to the study of countless fields of inquiry, CRT has become a prominent and instructive approach to understanding the history and the continuity of embedded racial/ethnic prejudice and discrimination—including within sports, education, and other parts of society (Cooper, 2012; 2019; Delgado & Stafancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Central to CRT is its recognition of the origin and maintenance of White property rights, control, and hegemony in society; these conditions are evident in the history and current application of amateurism in college sports as well (Cooper, 2012; 2019; Comeaux, 2010; Rankin-Wright, Hylton, & Norman, 2016; Shaw, Moiseichik, Blunt-Vinti, & Stokowski, 2019). CRT encourages us to understand that the logics, structures, practices, and opinions of compensation for college athletes are eminently, and even originally, racialized and social justice issues (Cooper, 2012, 2019; Hruby, 2016; Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Wallsten, et al., 2017).

Theorizing that has stemmed from CRT has included common principles that help to direct a rigorous awareness and redress of racial/ethnic inequalities; still, different authors and studies often adapt these principles in nuanced ways. Our study is informed by the following CRT tenets: (a) race is socially constructed (Delgado & Stafancic, 2001; Shaw et al., 2019); (b) racial/ethnic prejudice and discrimination are endemic to society (Bell, 1992; Shaw et al., 2019); (c) Whiteness as property norm (Cooper, 2019; Harris, 1993); (d) counter narratives, counter storytelling, and experiential knowledge, especially from voices of color, are neglected (Delgado & Stafancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001); (e) interest convergences enable changes in racial/ethnic inequalities (Bell, 1980, 1992; Shaw et al., 2019); and (f) challenges to dominant ideologies are necessary for social justice (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

In turn, these tenets note that race has been socially constructed in ways that are connected to and based upon false premises of racial/ethnic inequalities, such that notions of White supremacy

and justifications of racial/ethnic inequalities are perpetuated. Thus, corresponding racial/ethnic prejudices and discrimination are endemic to individuals' thoughts and experiences, as well as societal structures, cultures, and policies (Bell, 1992; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Comeaux, 2010). The Whiteness as property tenet recognizes that Whiteness carries with it identities, status, and a set of rights (e.g., rights of disposition, use and enjoyment, reputation and status, exclusion of others) that were originally connected to owning property, the ability of which has been facilitated by racially unjust means, but came to embody the characteristics of White privilege (i.e., Whiteness). Consequently, the statuses, privileges, and rights of Whiteness are normalized (Cooper, 2012, 2019; Harris, 1993). The voices-of-color tenet references the neglect, discounting, and need of counter narratives and perspectives based on experiential knowledge from people of color; oftentimes, CRT methodologies utilize storytelling and narrative approaches—although we did not employ these in the present study (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The interest convergences tenet observes that there has been little motivation or action among White individuals to reduce racial/ethnic inequalities in society; gains that have occurred have largely been facilitated by a convergence of antiracist interests with the self-interests of Whites (Bell, 1980, 1992; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Finally, CRT advocates for social justice outcomes, and this process is connected to the need to dismantle dominant ideologies that perpetuate racial/ethnic inequalities (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

In analyzing variance in public opinion support for allowing college athletes to be paid, besides being informed by these CRT tenets, we also recognize the usefulness of considering aracial (i.e., purported disregard of race/ethnicity) racism and an understanding of traditionalism as a propensity to be resistant to change (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Hochschild, 2016; Love & Hughey, 2015; Winter, 2008). Overall, due to racialized origins and practices of college sports that idealized amateurism but became particularly exploitative of commercialized college athletes, we expected that racial/ethnic identities and beliefs about racial/ethnic prejudices and discrimination were likely to shape public opinion support for allowing college athletes to be paid—despite the common understanding of one's own opinions, particularly in sports, as being based on an aracial approach to thinking about lofty ideals that involve assumptions about morality, responsibility, hard work, and integrity (Druckman et al., 2016; Mondello et al., 2013; Wallsten et al., 2017). Furthermore, indicators of traditionalism—such as those that can be tapped by age, urbanicity, and self-identified conservatism—are likely to lead to greater levels of resistance to changing rules about compensation to college athletes (Druckman et al., 2016; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019; Wallsten et al., 2017).

CRT, College Sports, and Amateurism

The application of CRT tenets to better understand the issue of college athlete compensation leads to a number of observations. First, the social construction and endemic nature of race tenets direct us to observe that the creation and implementation of U.S. college sports has been done in a country with a sordid history of socially constructing race to justify and reify racial/ethnic inequalities and perpetuating, as well as institutionalizing, racial/ethnic inequalities; college sports, and public opinions about it, have been similarly shaped and influenced by constructions of race and perpetual and corresponding racial/ethnic prejudice and discrimination processes within structures, cultures, and policies—anti-Black racial/ethnic prejudice and discrimination have been

especially prominent (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Krysan & Moberg, 2016). Second, it is instructive to recognize that college sports, and the ideals and priorities of amateurism, were originally created by White individuals for White participants. Non-White voices were not seriously considered, and non-White experiences were not a priority; this dynamic has largely continued such that voices of color are not well represented and valued (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Hruby, 2016; Lapchick, 2019; Singer, 2019). Third, White control, and emerging profiteering, over college sports has ties to the origin of property rights, and Whiteness as property has been naturalized and viewed as normative. This is not unique to college sports (Cooper, 2012, 2019; Krysan, 2000; Krysan & Moberg, 2016; Lapchick, 2019). Fourth, interest convergences have occasionally led to increased opportunities for non-Whites, and especially Blacks, in college sports. Interest convergences have also led to shifting and flexible definitions of amateurism in attempts to regulate and control college sports and pursue commercial interests (Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). These modifications in college sports appear to mostly follow American practices of White Racism Capitalism rather than exemplify magnanimity and concern for (non-White) athletes. That is, increased opportunities for non-Whites in college sports and adjustments in the definition and application of amateurism have amplified the exploitation of non-White, and primarily Black, labor in efforts to pursue commercial interests and profits—which have been largely maintained by Whites (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2019; Hruby, 2016; Krysan, 2000). Finally, challenges to the dominant ideologies and practices of college sports are necessary for social justice (Cooper, 2019; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Southall, Eckard, Nagel, & Randall, 2015; Southall & Southall, 2018; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). Below, we have integrated these observations into a brief history of amateurism in college sports before focusing on public opinions about compensation for college athletes.

American intercollegiate athletics are structured as an amateur sport enterprise. Amateurism was developed as part of a White, Eurocentric, middle/upper class vision of sport for developmental and enjoyment purposes—for White males. By strict definition, an amateur athlete should not receive any remuneration for athletic performance; thus, amateurism ideals have also functioned as barriers for widespread sport participation for those with lesser means. Non-White individuals were not prominent in creating intercollegiate athletics, participating in them during much of their history, or creating or romanticizing amateurism. Although interest convergences have enabled many non-Whites to participate in collegiate athletics, and commercialized college sports are now largely associated with Black athletes and some Black adults in leadership positions, the ideologies and practices of amateurism have continued to disproportionately reflect the ideologies and experiences of White adults (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Edwards, 1969; Hruby, 2016; Lapchick, 2019; Singer, 2019). Furthermore, the increasing commercialization of college sports has exemplified what Cooper (2019) described as the American tradition of White Racism Capitalism. Centrally, White Racism Capitalism is the historical and continual exploitation of non-White and, especially, Black labor. In the process, non-Whites are frequently problematized, scapegoated, blamed for any relative lack of achievement, and dismissed as being unworthy of concern (Cooper, 2012, 2019; Leonard, 2017; Singer, 2019). Consequently, the issues that surround compensation for collegiate athletes are racialized in many ways. Thus, we expect that racial/ethnic identities, views about racial/ethnic discrimination, and even traditionalism reflect

this racialization of the notions and practices of amateurism—and U.S. adults' public opinions about whether college athletes should be allowed to be paid.

Relatedly, remarkable changes have occurred in who participates in college sports and how amateurism has been defined. Interest convergences led NCAA schools to increasingly integrate Black athletes into their athletic programs and modify their practices of amateurism during the middle of the 20th century. The NCAA moved away from a strict definition of amateurism in 1956 by offering a scholarship to pay for college expenses based on athletic ability. Thus, challenges to racial/ethnic inequalities and increased demands for athletic talent enabled more opportunities for Black men, especially, to attend predominantly White institutions, as athletes. Increasingly, also, Black and other non-White individuals were afforded athletic scholarships. Consequently, interest convergences have allowed for more racial/ethnic diversity among college athletes. Yet, disproportionate White control of predominantly White institutions and athletic programs has persisted (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2019; Edwards, 1969; Lapchick, 2019). Also, the presumptive overriding concerns for a student's personal development and educational enrichment while participating in college sports appear to have been taken over by concerns about winning, financial gains, and maintaining control over an increasingly lucrative and valuable college sports system (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2019; Singer, 2019; Southall et al., 2015; Southall & Southall, 2018; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013).

Indeed, the NCAA has leaned into its definition and mythologizing of amateurism over the past 75 years, especially (Branch, 2011; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). According to the NCAA Division I Manual, intercollegiate athletes “shall be amateurs in intercollegiate sport and their participation should be motivated primarily by education and the physical, mental and social benefits to be derived. Student participation in intercollegiate athletics is an avocation, and college athletes should be protected from exploitation by professional and commercial enterprises” (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2019, p. 4). Still, rule violations that have often included payments to players have remained common throughout the entire history of college sports. Also, the definition of amateurism has been fluid and flexibly applied (Branch, 2011; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020).

At least through 2015, any payment amount above the standard full-ride scholarship (tuition, room, board, course-related books, and course-related fees) could cause an athlete to lose their amateur status and result in further individual or team sanctions or penalties. This applied to any extra benefit from boosters; companies seeking endorsements; or licensors of an athlete's name, image, and likeness (NIL; Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2019). This even extended beyond payments to actions, such as signing a professional contract, entering a professional draft, or hiring an agent. All of these occurrences have been considered violations of amateurism and a form of payment that renders an athlete a professional and terminates eligibility for intercollegiate athletics (Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Ridpath, Kiger, Mak, Eagle, & Letter, 2007; Ridpath et al., 2019; Rudd & Ridpath, 2019).

However, in an attempt to provide greater flexibility in interpretation, the NCAA now consistently uses the term “collegiate model” instead of amateurism to describe the relationship between the organization of intercollegiate athletics and the participating athletes (Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). *The Collegiate Model*

of Athletics is essentially “a term of art” that was created by former NCAA President Myles Brand (Branch, 2011; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). It is used to refer to enrolled students who are not directly compensated by salary for competition, but can receive whatever the NCAA allows. After significant pressure and landmark rulings in the courts, and continued record-breaking salaries and revenues from the commercialization of college sports, the NCAA passed legislation to allow a cost-of-attendance stipend starting in 2015, which allows for compensation commensurate with the average estimate of a student’s educational expenses for the period of one full academic year (Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Nocera & Strauss, 2016).

More recently, California passed SB 206, the Fair Play to Play Act, into law in 2019. This will allow college athletes in the state to hire agents and earn endorsement money relating to their own NIL. Since SB 206, over 30 states have passed similar legislation regarding NIL rights, with the state of Florida notably passing legislation that speeds up the timeline for NIL opportunities to emerge in 2021. The NCAA continues to strategize about how to respond, but has indicated they will likely capitulate to the pressures to uphold key aspects of the California law and similar efforts by other states’ legislatures (Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019). Although the NCAA and its members have continually resisted allowing college athletes to hire agents and earn endorsement money, they seem to be now signaling that interest convergences may once again shape changes in amateurism and their willingness to partially address racial/ethnic inequalities. That is, pressures to maintain control and financial rewards in an exploitative system may urge them to change the definition of amateurism yet again and allow for some basic economic rights for college athletes. Consequently, the disproportionate numbers of Black athletes in commercialized college sports appear likely to become the most common beneficiaries of new compensation from the use of their name, images, and likenesses—which is widely seen as some measure of social justice, by many (Branch, 2011; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Nocera & Strauss, 2016). Still, an actual pay-for-play salary has not been permissible, and it is still considered to be contrary to the promotion of the collegiate model (Rudd & Ridpath, 2019; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013).

Public Opinions About Allowing Athlete Compensation

Public opinion is expected to be mixed but increasingly supportive of allowing college athletes to be paid. There is increased recognition of the disparities in compensation between the adults in charge of organizing college sports and the players who are working hard and risking their health, in many cases, to compete in sports—in a hypercommercialized setting for men’s basketball and football, at least. Furthermore, basic human economic rights, to many, suggest that one should own, and be able to profit from, one’s own name recognition, images, and likenesses. Relatedly, court decisions and collective actions by athletes, activists, scholars, legislators, and attorneys are increasingly promoting and affecting changes in public opinions and policies (Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019). Still, the celebration and mythologizing of amateurism, concerns about disrupting the status quo of college sports, and opposition to modifying amateurism by institutionalized stakeholders continue to hold great sway (Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013; Wallsten et al., 2017).

Historically, in response to questions about paying college athletes and supporting college-athlete unionization movements, overall public opinion sentiment has been opposed to paying college athletes and treating them as workers (Druckman et al., 2016; Mondello et al., 2013; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019; Wallsten et al., 2017). However, public opinion appears to be shifting such that there is now initial evidence that it is supportive of college athletes being allowed to at least profit from the use of their NIL—still, a seemingly marked change over previous public opinion polls that consistently registered opposition to forms of compensation, beyond a college scholarship (Druckman et al., 2016; Mondello et al., 2013; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019; Wallsten et al., 2017). In fact, in an October 2019 poll of 714 U.S. adults, 60% responded that they believe that college athletes should be able to benefit from their NIL (Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019). In previous research, there is some evidence that sports fans are less supportive of allowing college athletes to be paid, but we suspect that this is also changing, as fans have become more comfortable with the Olympic model (i.e., sponsorship and endorsement opportunities), knowledgeable about athletic revenues, and mindful of addressing social justice concerns (Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019).

Race/Ethnicity and Public Opinions About Payment to College Athletes

We now turn to consider the explicit salience of racial/ethnic identities and beliefs about racial/ethnic discrimination. A CRT focus, as well as previous research and theorizing about amateurism, suggests that there are inextricable influences of racial/ethnic identities, prejudices, and knowledge of discrimination in shaping public opinions—including opinions about paying college athletes (Druckman et al., 2016; Hylton, 2010; Krysan & Moberg, 2016; Mondello et al., 2013; Wallsten et al., 2017).

Especially given that disproportionate percentages of athletes in the two main revenue-generating sports of football and men’s basketball are Black and disproportionate percentages of leaders in college sports organizations are White, one might expect that racial/ethnic identities and prejudices are likely to influence perceptions about whether college athletes should be allowed to be paid (Branch, 2011; Gore-Mann & Grace, 2020; Wallsten et al., 2017). For example, racial/ethnic in-group solidarities may shape perceptions. Blacks, Whites, Latinx individuals, and members of other racial/ethnic groups may simply want members of their own racial/ethnic group to succeed and to obtain a larger proportion of the revenue from college sports. In-group boundaries may also surround Whites and non-Whites, given the historical power imbalances in society and sports (Hylton, 2010; Kendi, 2016; Krysan, 2000; Lapchick, 2019; Wallsten et al., 2017).

Racial/ethnic identities may also be indicative of lived experiences that normalize, or attune one toward, the racialized power dynamics in sports and society (Kendi, 2016; Lapchick, 2019; Leonard, 2017). Indeed, the origin and history of college sports and the prioritization of amateurism are rooted in White experiences and hegemonic ideals. Also, due to the overrepresentation of White males in positions of power in sports and society, Whites may be less mindful or concerned about the racialized power imbalances in sports, compared with non-Whites—even when athletes in particular sports (e.g., basketball, football, pro baseball) are disproportionately non-White (Lapchick, 2019; Mondello et al., 2013; Wallsten et al., 2017).

Furthermore, there is reason to believe that racial/ethnic prejudices, especially anti-Black sentiments, and beliefs about the

existence and influence of racial/ethnic discrimination may shape public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid (Cooper, 2012, 2019; Druckman et al., 2016; Wallsten et al., 2017). Racial/ethnic prejudices, resentments, and discriminatory processes persist in society. Also, racial resentments, beliefs about the presence and influence of discrimination, and other forms of racial/ethnic prejudice often sway public policy attitudes (Krysan, 2000; Krysan & Moberg, 2016; Wallsten et al., 2017; Winter, 2008). Anti-Black sentiment, actions, and structures continue to be especially common and influential (Kendi, 2016; Krysan, 2000; Krysan & Moberg, 2016; Winter, 2008). Yet, many adults believe that racial/ethnic discrimination of non-Whites is not very prevalent or impactful (Krysan & Moberg, 2016; Public Religious Research Institute [PRRI], 2017).

As commercialized college athletes are commonly recognized as being disproportionately Black and likely beneficiaries of any additional compensation that may be given to college athletes, prejudices about the character, intellectual, and athletic capacities of Black college athletes, in particular, may influence perceptions on whether college athletes should be compensated with payment beyond the cost of going to school (Druckman et al., 2016; Mondello et al., 2013; Wallsten et al., 2017). There continue to be widespread beliefs that racial/ethnic minority, especially Black, athletes would not be in such a premier position in college sports with access to a university education, but for their athletic ability. Thus, they should be thankful for what they already receive for playing a game and should not expect or agitate for more (Branch, 2011; Druckman et al., 2016; Edwards, 1969; Wallsten et al., 2017).

In addition, recognizing institutionalized patterns of racial/ethnic inequalities in society may urge one to perceive the NCAA system of commercialized college sports as exploitative of Black males, especially—and advocate for changes in the status quo (Branch, 2011; Hylton, 2010; Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Van Rhee, 2012). Indeed, sociological perspectives and CRT tenets encourage the recognition of these patterns and pushes for social justice (Cooper, 2012, 2019; Edwards, 1969). In contrast, blaming non-Whites for not having the same levels of status attainment in society as Whites is thought to reflect symbolic racism, notions of White superiority, and a lack of a sociological imagination; thus, expressing such beliefs may reveal that one is less cognizant of racial/ethnic inequalities and maybe less motivated to advocate for eliminating them (Krysan, 2000; Krysan & Moberg, 2016; Winter, 2008; Wallsten et al., 2017).

Empirical evidence suggests that racial/ethnic identities influence public opinions about payment to college athletes. Mondello et al. (2013) analyzed 2009 national survey data from 400 households, sampled through random digit dialing, and found that Black respondents were more than three times as likely to support financial compensation for college athletes as Whites. In addition, even with age, education, gender, and employment status included as predictors, only race was found to be a statistically significant factor in shaping public opinion about paying college athletes. Similarly, Druckman et al. (2016) used national data from survey volunteers ($N = 1,500$) to assess both public opinion support for paying college athletes and allowing college athlete unionization. They also found that Blacks were especially likely to support more resources and rights for college athletes. Finally, Wallsten et al. (2017) focused on 674 White respondents to a 2014 online survey conducted by YouGov. Consistent with previous research, they found that nearly 60% of White respondents opposed paying college athletes a salary, beyond any scholarship money that they may receive. In sum, previous research suggests that Whites are especially opposed to paying college athletes and giving them

more rights, while Blacks are generally supportive of paying college athletes.

Also, there is evidence that beliefs about racial/ethnic discrimination, and particularly anti-Black resentments, shape attitudes about college athlete compensation. Druckman et al. (2016) found that support for affirmative action policies, designed to account for Black–White differences in educational and job opportunities, was positively associated with support for paying college athletes and allowing them to unionize. Also, racial/ethnic prejudices that reflected anti-Black racial resentments were negatively associated with support for paying college athletes and allowing them to unionize. Similarly, Wallsten et al. (2017) found that higher levels of racial resentment were positively associated with opposing salaries for college athletes. Furthermore, in innovative experimental procedures, they found that the presentations of pictures and names of Black athletes hardened responses in opposition to supporting greater compensation for college athletes among racially resentful Whites.

Still, many individuals who do not express racial/ethnic resentments or prejudices, and are mindful of racial/ethnic discrimination patterns, appear to support college sports as a way to improve diversity and social mobility for racial/ethnic minorities—ostensibly under the belief that many could not attend college otherwise—but that support does not extend to advocating for more compensation for college athletic participation (Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Van Rhee, 2012). A college education is extremely valuable, but CRT theorists and many other scholars note that even the primary college athletic scholarship benefit of greater access to a quality higher education is not being adequately delivered for Black athletes, especially, particularly in football and basketball (Benson, 2000; Beamon, 2008; Hawkins, 2010; Southall et al., 2015; Southall & Southall, 2018).

Alongside CRT, the concept of aracial racism is often used to inform understandings of racialized issues (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Love & Hughey, 2015). Aracial racism refers to the use of purportedly noble principles, and “aracial” structures and criteria for decision making, that nonetheless often have unequal racial/ethnic effects (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Kendi, 2016; Rankin-Wright et al., 2016). White individuals, especially, are prone to deny the influence of race/ethnicity on their behaviors, beliefs, and advocacies—and become appalled and often resentful when they believe that they are being accused of being racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Cramer, 2016; Kendi, 2016). Yet, the origins of amateurism, the dismissal of the voice and interests of commercialized sport athletes—who are disproportionately Black— notions about racial/ethnic abilities and who is deserving of rewards, and the perpetuation of the control and disproportionate profiteering from college sports by Whites, make the issue of compensation for college athletes an eminently and inescapably racialized issue (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Hruby, 2016). Still, opinions about the ideals of “amateurism,” “student-athletes,” and even the capabilities of White and Black athletes are often viewed as aracial understandings and are connected to major issues in college sports (Druckman et al., 2016; Rankin-Wright et al., 2016; Wallsten et al., 2017). Indeed, sports-related interactions and understandings are rife with aracial racism (Leonard, 2017; Love & Hughey, 2015; Rankin-Wright et al., 2016).

Traditionalism and Payment to College Athletes

Thus, we also drew upon understandings of traditionalism in anticipating public opinions about whether college athletes should be allowed to be paid. In this sense, traditionalism is tied up with a resistance to change and nostalgia for the past. Traditionalism is

also frequently reactive to perceived threats to established ways of doing things (Johnson & Tamney, 2001; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Wallsten et al., 2017; Winter, 2008). Indeed, changes to amateurism can be seen as destroying the student-athlete ideal and threatening the uniqueness of college sports. Furthermore, traditionalism is also associated with discomfort with changes that are designed to address racial/ethnic inequalities, as well (Jost et al., 2003; Wallsten et al., 2017). For example, among conservatives, affirmative action is often viewed as “reverse racism” and eliminating racially insensitive terms and images is derided as “political correctness.” Consequently, traditionalism is commonly indicative of at least aracial racism, too (Hochschild, 2016; Kendi, 2016; Wallsten et al., 2017).

Traditionalism, often supported by older, White, more rural, and more conservative individuals, has led to an array of defenses of the NCAA’s definition of amateurism and resistance to allowing college athletes to be paid (Branch, 2011; Cramer, 2016; Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Wallsten et al., 2017). Foremost among these is a concern that allowing college athletes to be paid could irrevocably damage the sanctity of traditional principles that are connected to intercollegiate athletics, such as amateurism and students only playing sports for the love of the game and their institutions (Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Tatos, 2017). There is also a fear that allowing college athletes to be paid would result in the uniqueness of college sports being destroyed, with the marketing and allure of them then becoming diminished (Druckman et al., 2016; Wallsten et al., 2017). Thus, backed by previous research findings about, particularly, age differences and political identities in supporting payment for college athletes, we anticipated that traditionalism would be associated with a resistance to allowing college athletes to be paid (Druckman et al., 2016; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019; Wallsten et al., 2017).

In fact, one of the main public relations strategies of the NCAA is to portray intercollegiate athletics as an extracurricular activity played by students and then to argue that its product would not be as popular with the public, and procompetitive with other options for consumers, if its athletes were paid a salary for performance. Then, the NCAA cites and uses public opinion as a reason to maintain a tradition of not allowing college athletes to be paid (Southall & Staurowsky, 2013; Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020). Yet, the NCAA defined and continues to employ the “student-athlete” moniker in order to minimize the appearance of college sports operating as a business, with employers (i.e., adults in charge) and employees (i.e., college athletes). This public relations strategy has helped to uphold the myth of amateurism and the support for its ideals, especially among traditionalists (Druckman et al., 2016; Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Van Rhee, 2012).

Other Factors

Other factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, family structures, and regional contexts may confound our understandings of the associations between race/ethnicity, traditionalism, and public opinion support for allowing college athletes to be paid. Gender may matter in that men may be more supportive of male athletes benefitting from the revenue that is produced through their labor; similarly, women may be especially concerned about the Title IX and gender equity implications of allowing college athletes to be paid (Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Sanderson & Siegfried, 2015; Staurowsky, 2018). Socioeconomic status may also shape one’s resistance to changing the status quo, with more privileged individuals likely being less amenable to change (Druckman et al.,

2016; Van Rhee, 2012). Family structures may influence perceptions as well, as intimate partners and kin may shape one’s opinions. Finally, geographic region may correlate with public opinions, especially since the landmark passage of the California law that allows for endorsement opportunities, with persons from the West potentially being more supportive of allowing college athletes to be paid, compared with others (Gore-Mann & Grace, 2020; Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019).

Hypotheses

Overall, the conceptual framework for this study and previous research leads to four main hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There will be substantial, but mixed, support for allowing college athletes to be paid. Yet, adults’ sports involvement will be positively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid.

Hypothesis 2: Racial/ethnic identities will be predictive of support for allowing college athletes to be paid. White identities will be negatively, and Black identities will be positively, associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid.

Hypothesis 3: Recognition of racial/ethnic discrimination will be positively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid.

Hypothesis 4: Traditionalism will be negatively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid. That is, older, less urban, and more conservative individuals will be less supportive of allowing college athletes to be paid.

Method

We used data from the National Sports and Society Survey (NSASS), a landmark new survey that offers a wealth of information about sports and society issues from a large sample of U.S. adults ($N=3,993$). The NSASS was explicitly created to enable comprehensive and wide-ranging social science research projects on sports and society issues. Thus, it is well suited for our focus on public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid. The sample for the NSASS was drawn from participants in the American Population Panel, a panel of over 20,000 volunteers who have signed up to be invited to participate in social science research surveys. The American Population Panel was created by the Center for Human Resource Research, a longstanding and respected survey research organization, which also collaborated in the design and data collection of the NSASS.

The NSASS was designed as a quota sample of $N=4,000$ to maximize its sample size within a fixed budget that demanded timely and economically efficient data collection. Between the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019, American Population Panel members who reported years of birth that were 21–65 years ago were sent invitations to take the NSASS. The survey was offered online, and respondents were given \$35 for their participation. The respondents represented all 50 states and Washington, DC, but were disproportionately

female, White, and Midwestern (Knoester & Cooksey, 2020). Still, the large sample of the NSASS offers unique information across many different subgroups. Furthermore, the data were being weighted to offer more representative descriptive statistics about U.S. adults.

In the present study, we initially utilized a sample that consists of the 3,868 NSASS respondents who answered ($N=125$ of the total 3,993 NSASS respondents refused to answer) a survey question about allowing college athletes to be paid, in order to report estimates of U.S. adult public opinions about the issue of college athlete compensation. That is, we first considered the responses from the participants who indicated some level of (dis)agreement about allowing college athletes to be paid—or that they “Don’t Know.” Then, for our regression analyses, we employed a primary sample ($N=3,519$) that further removed the 349 respondents who replied with “Don’t Know.” The decision to eliminate “Don’t Know” responses from our main analysis follows previous research (Mondello et al., 2013). Missing data for our predictor variables were addressed with the use of multiple imputations with chained equations, a preferred approach for dealing with missing data. Nonetheless, our results are robust to the use of listwise deletion of missing data, as well. Sensitivity analyses that considered Don’t Know responses as a middle response category and others that coded support for allowing college athletes to be paid as a binary variable produced results that are consistent with what is reported in the present study.

Dependent and Independent Variables

The dependent variable for this study indicates support for allowing college athletes to be paid. It is an ordinal variable that represents responses ($1 = \textit{strongly disagree}$, $2 = \textit{somewhat disagree}$, $3 = \textit{somewhat agree}$, and $4 = \textit{strongly agree}$) to the statement “College athletes should be allowed to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school.”

The primary independent variables include measures of adults’ racial/ethnic identities, beliefs about racial/ethnic discrimination, traditionalism, and sports involvement. Racial/ethnic identities were coded with mutually exclusive dummy variables that indicate whether one self-identified as only White (used as the reference category), (any) Black, (non-Black) Latinx, or another racial/ethnic identity. Recognition of racial/ethnic discrimination is a variable that was formed from responses ($1 = \textit{strongly disagree}$, $2 = \textit{somewhat disagree}$, $3 = \textit{somewhat agree}$, and $4 = \textit{strongly agree}$) to the following statement: “On average, non-whites have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are . . . mainly due to discrimination?”

Indicators of traditionalism include measures of adults’ age, urbanicity, and self-reported conservatism. Age was coded with dummy variables for being (a) ≤ 30 years old (used as the reference category), (b) 31–40, (c) 41–50, or (d) 51 or above. Similarly, urbanicity was coded with mutually exclusive dummy variables that indicate self-reports of living in a (a) large city, (b) suburb near a large city, (c) small city or town, or (d) rural area. Conservatism was created based on responses to the question “In terms of politics, do you consider yourself . . . ?” The response options range from $1 = \textit{Very liberal}$ to $5 = \textit{Very conservative}$.

Adults’ sports involvement includes reports of sports fandom, sports participation, and whether one was ever an athlete on a college team. Sports fandom was formed from responses ($0 = \textit{Not at all}$; $4 = \textit{Very much so}$) to the question: “Are you a sports fan?” Sports participation indicates whether the adults reported ($1 = \textit{yes}$)

playing a sport(s) regularly (i.e., more than occasionally), over the past year. Finally, college athlete status indicates whether the adults reported ($1 = \textit{yes}$) playing on a college team in their responses to either of two questions. Specifically, the respondents were asked a series of questions about the sport that they played the most while growing up (i.e., through age 18). One question asked them to identify all of the levels (e.g., youth recreational, high school varsity, college team, etc.) at which they played this sport while growing up. Later, the respondents were asked to identify all of the levels at which they played this sport since the age of 19 years.

Control Variables

Finally, background characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status, family structure, and geographic region served as control variables for our analyses. Gender was based on reports of identifying as female ($1 = \textit{yes}$). Educational attainment variables, which were drawn from reports of the respondents’ highest level of education, consisted of mutually exclusive dummy variables that indicated whether the respondents attained a (a) college (used as the reference category), (b) some college, or (c) high school or less education. Household income (in \$10,000s, up to 15+) and working in paid labor ($1 = \textit{yes}$) were reported by the respondents and were also used as socioeconomic status indicators. Family structure measures were created from reports of marital status (i.e., married, cohabiting, or single [used as the reference category]) and the number of one’s own minor children or one’s partner’s minor children who were living in the household. Finally, census regions were coded as proxies for geographical contexts (i.e., West [used as the reference category], Midwest, Northeast, and South).

Results

To analyze public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid, we first examined the distribution of responses about allowing college athletes to be paid. Then, we proceeded to predicting public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid in a series of nested, ordinal logistic regression models.

Consistent with our first hypothesis, there is mixed but substantial support for allowing college athletes to be paid. Specifically, 25% of the NSASS respondents strongly disagreed, 19% somewhat disagreed, 25% somewhat agreed, and 23% strongly agreed with allowing college athletes to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school; 9% of the NSASS respondents indicated that they didn’t know. Thus, overall, a plurality of the NSASS respondents endorses allowing college athletes to be paid. As shown in Table 1, among the adults who provided a response that indicated support or opposition (i.e., after removing the “Don’t Know” responses for our main regression analyses), over half of the NSASS respondents reported agreement with allowing college athletes to be paid.

Next, to better estimate public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid among all U.S. adults, we used poststratification weighting based on the 2018 American Community Survey demographic characteristics. This procedure generates more accurate estimates of U.S. adults’ public opinions, because the American Community Survey is a preeminent compilation of yearly population estimates, based on millions of households that are surveyed by the U.S. Census Bureau, whereas, the NSASS respondents are disproportionately female, White, and Midwestern, for example. These weighted NSASS estimates are displayed in Figure 1 and indicate greater support for allowing college athletes to be paid, as

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for All Variables Used in the Regression Analyses

Variables	M/%	SD
Dependent variable		
Support for allowing college athlete payment ^a	2.50	1.14
Strongly disagree	27%	—
Somewhat disagree	21%	—
Somewhat agree	27%	—
Strongly agree	25%	—
Independent variables		
White	73%	—
Black	10%	—
Latinx	9%	—
Other race/ethnicity	8%	—
Age ≤ 30	25%	—
Age 31–40	28%	—
Age 41–50	21%	—
Age 51+	26%	—
Large city	26%	—
Suburban	32%	—
Town or small city	28%	—
Rural	14%	—
Conservatism	2.44	1.17
Discrimination recognized	2.99	1.00
Sports fan	2.24	1.28
Sports participant	60%	—
College athlete	4%	—
Control variables		
Female	70%	—
High school or less	12%	—
Some college	40%	—
College	48%	—
Household income	5.33	4.04
Works in paid labor	67%	—
Married	38%	—
Cohabiting	16%	—
Single	46%	—
Number of children	0.54	0.99
Midwest	36%	—
Northeast	14%	—
South	34%	—
West	16%	—

Note. $N = 3,519$.

^aThe response options that are used for descriptive analyses of public opinions include the following: (a) strongly disagree, (b) somewhat disagree, (c) somewhat agree, (d) strongly agree, and (e) don't know.

compared with the unweighted estimates. As shown in Figure 1, the weighted estimates of support for allowing college athletes to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school suggest that 51% of U.S. adults ages 20–64 support allowing college athletes to

be paid, 41% of adults do not support allowing college athletes to be paid, and 8% of adults do not know.

We now turn to predicting public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid in ordinal logistic regression models. These results are shown in Table 2. We first focused on racial/ethnic identities and other common demographic characteristics; to do so, we initially emphasized White/non-White differences and then used White as a reference category. As displayed in Model 1, and anticipated by our second hypothesis, the individuals who identified as White (only) were 36% less likely than non-Whites to strongly agree that college athletes should be allowed to be paid, as opposed to another response option ($b = -0.44$, $p < .001$, odds ratio [OR] = 0.64). Also, as predicted in our fourth hypothesis, there is evidence that older generations of adults are less likely to support allowing college athletes to be paid. Compared with adults ages 30 years or younger, adults ages 41–50 ($b = -0.37$, $p < .001$, OR = 0.69) and ages 51+ ($b = -0.64$, $p < .001$, OR = 0.53) are markedly less likely to support allowing college athletes to be paid. Although gender is not a focus of this study, it is also striking that women ($b = -0.51$, $p < .001$, OR = 0.60) are much less likely than men to support allowing college athletes to be paid. One interpretation of this finding is that women may be disproportionately concerned about the implications that allowing college athletes to be paid may have on gender equity in college sports.

As shown in Model 2 of Table 2, and anticipated by our second hypothesis, Black adults ($b = 0.91$, $p < .001$, OR = 2.50) were especially supportive of allowing college athletes to be paid. In fact, they were 2.5 times as likely as Whites to strongly agree that college athletes should be allowed to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school. Latinx adults ($b = 0.23$, $p < .05$, OR = 1.26) were also more likely than Whites to support allowing college athletes to be paid. Thus, moving forward, based on our conceptual framework, these empirical results, and our indicator of recognizing White/non-White discrimination, we only include a White/non-White racial/ethnic indicator in our models.

Model 3 includes the addition of adult sports involvement indicators. Consistent with our first hypothesis, we found that sports fandom is positively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid ($b = 0.16$, $p < .001$, OR = 1.17). Little else changes in Model 3 when compared with previous models, as expected.

Finally, in Model 4, we showed the results after including additional indicators of traditionalism and discrimination into the previous model. As anticipated by our third hypothesis, a greater recognition of the influence of racial/ethnic discrimination was positively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid ($b = 0.25$, $p < .001$, OR = 1.28). Also, consistent with our fourth hypothesis, urbanicity and conservatism were associated with support for paying college athletes, in expected directions. That is, conservatism was negatively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid. Also, compared with living in a large city, living in a suburb ($b = -0.20$, $p < .05$, OR = 0.82), a town or small city ($b = -0.35$, $p < .001$, OR = 0.70), or in a rural area ($b = -0.32$, $p < .001$, OR = 0.72) was negatively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid.

Discussion

The present study sought to advance research by analyzing the patterns and predictors of public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school. This research is particularly important because there are

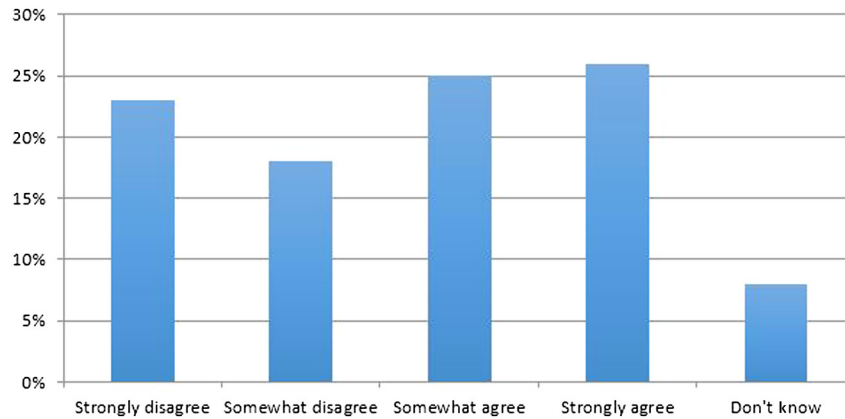


Figure 1 — Weighted comparison estimates of public opinion support for allowing college athletes to be paid, among U.S. Adults. *Note.* These NSASS estimates are weighted according to 2018 American Community Survey demographics for U.S. adults aged 20–64, based on age, gender, race, education, work status, marital status, income, and region. NSASS = National Sports and Society Survey.

vast and longstanding racial/ethnic inequalities in the production and receipt of revenue that is tied to college sports (Branch, 2011; Nocera & Strauss, 2016, Smith, 2009). Furthermore, the recent passage of The Fair Pay to Play Act, and related legislation efforts, has challenged the status quo of defining amateurism (Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Nocera & Strauss, 2016). As the NCAA and member schools continue to negotiate a strategic response to this new challenge, they have argued and cited that college sports are unique, and celebrated, because the athletes are not allowed to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school (Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013).

The present study offers valuable new insights into the extent to which public opinions are aligned with these traditional NCAA defenses of their view of amateurism. We went beyond previous research by assessing responses to a recent survey question from new landmark data that gets to the heart of the current debate about amateurism. In asking about support for allowing college athletes to be paid, rather than asking about whether or not they should be paid or opinions about the precise mechanisms and amounts of payment, the question focuses on support for college athletes' basic economic rights. We uniquely utilized a series of multiple regressions to assess the extent to which various factors, including indicators of racial/ethnic identities, beliefs about racial/ethnic discrimination, and traditionalism, predict public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid. Finally, we advanced a conceptual framework for understanding public opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid that emphasized CRT tenets and the roles of both race/ethnicity and traditionalism in shaping public opinions. Below, we review the support that emerged for these hypotheses and further contextualize our findings.

Our first hypothesis anticipated that there would be substantial, but mixed, public opinion support for allowing college athletes to be paid. It also anticipated that adults' sports involvement would be positively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid. In fact, we did find support for these expectations. Both weighted and unweighted data indicate that U.S. adults are now prone to support allowing college athletes to be paid. Nonetheless, over 40% of U.S. and NSASS adults seem to still disagree that college athletes should be allowed to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school. This finding is consistent with recent research from a Seton Hall Sports Poll ($N = 714$) that found that

60% of U.S. adults endorsed college athletes being able to profit from the use of their name, image, or likeness (Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019). We also found evidence that sports fandom is positively associated with support for college athletes being allowed to be paid, in our regression models. Thus, in contrast with the fears of the NCAA and its member schools, it appears that sports fans are now especially likely to endorse allowing college athletes to be paid. Overall, it seems that most U.S. adults support changes in the notions of amateurism in college sports, notions that were born from White privilege and that have served as flexible, lucrative, and exploitative ideals (Branch, 2011; Hruby, 2016; Smith, 2009; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). Indeed, CRT suggests that Black male athletes are particularly exploited and that changes in the ideologies and practices of amateurism in college sports are necessary for social justice (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Singer, 2019; Southall et al., 2015; Southall & Southall, 2018).

Our second and third hypotheses looked at the salience of race/ethnicity, through racial/ethnic identities and beliefs about racial/ethnic discrimination, in predicting support for allowing college athletes to be paid. First, we anticipated that identifying as White would be especially likely to be negatively, and identifying as Black positively, associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid. Indeed, our regression results indicated that White adults were consistently less likely than non-White adults, and especially Black adults, to endorse allowing college athletes to be paid. This finding is consistent with previous research that notes Black–White differences in adults' views about paying college athletes, but also extends the analyses and findings to other non-White racial/ethnic groups (Branch, 2011; Mondello et al., 2013; Wallsten et al., 2017). As part of this pattern, and informed by CRT, it seems probable that in-group loyalties, unique lived experiences, and patterned perspectives about the promises and deliveries of amateur ideals are at work, especially in the case of Black adults wanting to see the labor of young Black athletes being appropriately rewarded—in a society that has perpetually exploited non-White and particularly Black labor (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Krysan, 2000; Mondello et al., 2013; Smith, 2009; Wallsten et al., 2017).

Second, we expected to find that recognition of racial/ethnic discrimination would be positively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid. Indeed, this is what we found.

Table 2 Results From Ordinal Logistic Regressions Predicting Public Opinion Support for Allowing College Athletes to Be Paid

Variables	<i>b</i>	(1) <i>SE</i>	OR	<i>b</i>	(2) <i>SE</i>	OR	<i>b</i>	(3) <i>SE</i>	OR	<i>b</i>	(4) <i>SE</i>	OR
White	-0.44	0.07	0.64***				-0.39	0.07	0.68***	-0.30	0.07	0.74***
Black				0.91	0.11	2.50***						
Latinx				0.23	0.11	1.26*						
Other race/ethnicity				0.06	0.12	1.06						
Age 31–40	-0.07	0.09	0.93	-0.09	0.09	0.91	-0.12	0.09	0.93	-0.07	0.09	0.93
Age 41–50	-0.37	0.09	0.69***	-0.40	0.09	0.67***	-0.44	0.09	0.69***	-0.35	0.10	0.71***
Age 51+	-0.64	0.09	0.53***	-0.67	0.09	0.51***	-0.71	0.09	0.53***	-0.58	0.09	0.56***
Female	-0.51	0.07	0.60***	-0.53	0.07	0.59***	-0.46	0.07	0.63***	-0.45	0.07	0.64***
High school or less	-0.06	0.10	0.95	-0.10	0.10	0.91	-0.07	0.10	0.93	0.09	0.10	1.09
Some college	-0.06	0.07	0.94	-0.08	0.07	0.92	-0.05	0.07	0.95	0.06	0.07	1.06
Household income	0.01	0.01	1.01	0.00	0.01	1.00	0.00	0.01	1.00	0.00	0.01	1.00
Works in paid labor	-0.02	0.07	0.98	-0.01	0.07	0.99	-0.02	0.07	0.98	-0.03	0.07	0.97
Married	-0.04	0.08	0.96	0.00	0.08	1.00	-0.03	0.08	0.97	0.04	0.08	1.04
Cohabiting	0.09	0.09	1.09	0.10	0.09	1.11	0.09	0.09	1.10	0.08	0.09	1.09
Number of children	0.06	0.04	1.06	0.06	0.04	1.06	0.03	0.04	1.03	0.06	0.04	1.06
Midwest	-0.08	0.09	0.93	-0.13	0.09	0.88	-0.11	0.09	0.90	-0.07	0.09	0.93
Northeast	-0.03	0.11	0.97	-0.07	0.11	0.93	-0.05	0.11	0.95	-0.03	0.11	0.97
South	-0.07	0.09	0.93	-0.12	0.09	0.88	-0.10	0.09	0.90	-0.02	0.09	0.98
Sports involvement												
Sports fan							0.16	0.03	1.17***	0.19	0.03	1.21***
Sports participant							0.07	0.07	1.08	0.09	0.07	1.09
College athlete							-0.19	0.16	0.83	-0.11	0.16	0.89
Traditionalism and discrimination												
Suburban										-0.20	0.08	0.82*
Town or small city										-0.35	0.09	0.70***
Rural										-0.32	0.11	0.72**
Conservatism										-0.11	0.03	0.90***
Discrimination recognized										0.25	0.04	1.28***

Note. $N = 3,519$. OR = odds ratio.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Consistent with previous theorizing and research, this result suggests that CRT and sociological perspectives, which emphasize and criticize the prevalence and effects of racial/ethnic inequalities, encourage one to make connections between general patterns of racial/ethnic discrimination and the exploitative nature of commercialized college sports (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Krysan, 2000; Krysan & Moberg, 2016). Furthermore, our finding corresponds with previous research on how racial/ethnic prejudices and resentments, sometimes indicated by a lack of awareness of systematic racial/ethnic discrimination, shape attitudes about college athletes being paid (Cooper, 2012; Krysan & Moberg, 2016; Mondello et al., 2013; Wallsten et al., 2017). Specifically, as Afro-Pessimist scholars emphasize, anti-Black sentiments and practices are particularly prevalent and influential (Cooper, 2019; Kendi, 2016; Krysan & Moberg, 2016; Olaloku-Teriba, 2018; Sexton, 2016; Wallsten et al., 2017), although, in the present study, we focused on racial/ethnic prejudices and beliefs about discrimination that affect non-Whites. Beliefs and practices that adversely affect non-Whites, as opposed to just Blacks, are also common and have been largely neglected in public

opinion research (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Krysan, 2000; Krysan & Moberg, 2016; Public Religious Research Institute [PRRI], 2017).

Finally, our final hypothesis anticipated that indicators of traditionalism would be negatively associated with support for allowing college athletes to be paid. We viewed traditionalism as emblematic of a resistance to change the status quo; in this case, the status quo refers to the tradition of NCAA-defined amateurism in college sports. Yet, our indicators of traditionalism—age, urbanicity, and conservatism—are also commonly associated with racial/ethnic prejudice (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Crowder & Krysan, 2016; Winter, 2008). Furthermore, as our conceptual framework and CRT observations highlight, the history of amateurism in college sports in America is born out of, and continually infused with, racial/ethnic prejudices, inequalities, and exploitation. Thus, it was not surprising to find that older generations, adults who did not live in large cities, and self-identified conservatives were less likely to advocate for allowing college athletes to be paid. In fact, the processes that encourage a resistance to change the status quo in collegiate athletics may be akin to the processes of encouraging resistance to modifying other policies (e.g., affirmative action,

criminal justice reform, welfare policies) in ways that are expected to alleviate racial/ethnic inequalities, injustices, and sufferings for social justice (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Cramer, 2016; Druckman et al., 2016; Kendi, 2016; Winter, 2008).

Overall, the results of the present study bring to light evidence of majority support for allowing college athletes to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school. In fact, this support appears to be highest among passionate sports fans. Yet, we find that Whiteness and a lack of recognition of racial/ethnic discrimination are significant predictors of believing that college athletes should not be allowed to be paid. Although expected, this is concerning, due to the historic and continual racial/ethnic discrimination that has led to, defended, and prioritized White voices, experiences, statuses, and control in society, including in the realm of sports (Branch, 2011; Kendi, 2016; Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Lapchick, 2019). Notions of White supremacy in abilities and character and a comfort with exploiting non-White and especially Black labor are endemic to this history (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Branch, 2011; Kendi, 2016). Indeed, the results of our study and previous work suggest that norms of White power and control, notions of White supremacy, and, especially, anti-Blackness are linked to attitudes about allowing college athletes to be paid, although this issue is commonly seen as “aracial.” In society, traditionalism frequently acts to resist and obstruct attempts at addressing racial/ethnic inequalities, including in sports (Kendi, 2016; Lapchick, 2019; Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Winter, 2008). Consequently, it is notable that, in this study, traditionalism seemed to generate opposition to allowing college athletes to be paid, too. A sociological perspective, CRT tenets, and an antiracist approach, defined as working to enact racial/ethnic equalities, suggest that changes in the ideologies, practices, and policies of college sports are needed (Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012, 2019; Huma & Staurowsky, 2011; Kendi, 2016; Singer, 2019).

There are limitations to note this study. For example, the NSASS respondents were survey volunteers and not randomly selected. Thus, their responses may not accurately reflect the characteristics and beliefs of the general U.S. adult population—even after introducing statistical controls. In addition, we relied on closed-ended survey question responses in analyzing the factors that lead adults to formulate their opinions about allowing college athletes to be paid. Future work may complement this focus by further investigating how people view this issue, in their own words and in greater detail. Finally, comprehensive analyses in future research are needed to consider how intersectionality considerations, particularly between race/ethnicity and gender, may better inform our understandings of college athlete experiences and U.S. adults’ public opinions about the structures and practices of college sports.

Nonetheless, this study improves our understanding of the extent to which U.S. adults support allowing college athletes the right to be paid as athletes. It offers new information that suggests that most adults now support this right. In fact, our findings fit nicely into the recognition of an upward trend over recent years in support for allowing college athletes to be paid (Seton Hall Sports Poll, 2019). Currently, sports fans appear mostly in favor of allowing college athletes the right to be paid. Yet, beliefs about payment to college athletes are integrally intertwined with race/ethnicity and traditionalism. White adults are especially likely to oppose payment to college athletes, Black adults are particularly likely to endorse payment, and the recognition of racial/ethnic discrimination appears to encourage support for allowing college

athletes to be paid, as athletes, more than it costs them to go to school. Finally, indicators of traditionalism, such as old age, residence outside of large cities, and conservatism, seem to galvanize levels of resistance to allowing college athletes to be paid. Yet, although previous research and a CRT interpretation of these findings point to continued challenges, and defenses, of the status quo in college sports, they also suggest another likely set of interest convergences is ahead (Druckman et al., 2016; Hylton, 2010; Lapchick, 2019; Leonard, 2017; Wallsten et al., 2017). Apparently, increasing public opinion support for allowing college athletes to be paid and market pressures from The Fair Pay to Play Act and other related legislation seem to be pushing the NCAA and its member schools to enact more socially just policies and practices (Meyer & Zimbalist, 2020; National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2020). Future research should seek to extend this work and continue to explore public opinions about the structure and historic ideals of college sports—and their links to race/ethnicity and traditionalism.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments. The NSASS was generously funded and supported by the College of Arts & Sciences, the Sports and Society Initiative, and CHRR at The Ohio State University.

References

- Beamon, K. (2008). Used goods: Former African American college student-athletes’ perception of exploitation by Division I universities. *Journal of Negro Education, 77*, 352–364.
- Bell, D. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bell, D.A. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review, 93*(3), 518–533. doi:10.2307/1340546
- Benson, K. (2000). Constructing academic inadequacy: African American athletes’ stories of schooling. *The Journal of Higher Education, 71*(2), 223–246.
- Berkowitz, S., Upton, J., & Brady, E. (2013). Most NCAA Division I athletic departments take subsidies. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/college/2013/05/07/ncaa-finance-subsidies/2142443>
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Branch, T. (2011). The shame of college sports. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/10/the-shame-of-college-sports/8643>
- Comeaux, E. (2010). Racial differences in faculty perceptions of collegiate student-athletes’ academic and post-undergraduate achievements. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 27*(4), 390–412. doi:10.1123/ssj.27.4.390
- Cooper, J.N. (2012). Personal troubles and public issues: A sociological imagination of Black athletes’ experiences at predominantly white institutions in the United States. *Sociology Mind, 2*(3), 261–271. doi:10.4236/sm.2012.23035
- Cooper, J.N. (2019). *From exploitation back to empowerment: Black male holistic (under)development through sport and (mis)education*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Cramer, K.J. (2016). *The politics of resentment: Rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Crowder, K., & Krysan, M. (2016). Moving beyond the big three: A call for new approaches to studying racial residential segregation. *City & Community*, 15(1), 18–22. doi:10.1111/cico.12148
- Delgado Bernal, D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 105–126. doi:10.1177/107780040200800107
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Druckman, J., Howat, A., & Rodheim, A. (2016) The influence of race on attitudes about college athletics. *Sport in Society*, 19(7), 1020–1039. doi:10.1080/17430437.2015.1096250
- Edwards, H. (1969). *Revolt of the black athlete*. New York: Free Press.
- Gore-Mann, D., & Grace, D. (2020, January 9). Pay for student-athletes is a racial justice issue. *SFChronicle.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Pay-for-student-athletes-is-a-racial-justice-issue-14960591.php>
- Harper, S.R., & Simmons, I. (2019). *Black students at public colleges and universities: A 50-state report card*. Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Race and Equity Center.
- Harris, C.I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707–1791. doi:10.2307/1341787
- Hawkins, B. (2010). *The new plantation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hochschild, A.R. (2016). *Strangers in their own land: Anger and mourning on the American right*. New York: New Press.
- Hruby, P. (2016). Four years a student-athlete: The racial injustice of big-time college sports. *Vice Sports*. Retrieved from https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ezexjp/four-years-a-student-athlete-the-racial-injustice-of-big-time-college-sports
- Huma, R., & Staurowsky, E. (2011). *The price of poverty in big time college sport*. National College Players Association. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpanow.org/research/body/The-Price-of-Poverty-in-Big-Time-College-Sport.pdf>
- Hylton, K. (2010). How a turn to critical race theory can contribute to our understanding of “race”, racism and anti-racism in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 45(3), 335–354. doi:10.1177/1012690210371045
- Johnson, S.D., & Tamney, J.B. (2001). Social traditionalism and economic conservatism: Two conservative political ideologies in the United States. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 141(2), 233–243. PubMed ID: 11372568 doi:10.1080/00224540109600549
- Jost, J.T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A.W., & Sulloway, F.J. (2003). Political conservatism as motivated social cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(3), 339–375. PubMed ID: 12784934 doi:10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339
- Kendi, I.X. (2016). *Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in America*. New York: Nation Books.
- Knoester, C., & Cooksey, E.C. (2020). The National Sports and Society Survey methodological summary. doi:10.31235/osf.io/mv76p
- Krysan, M. (2000). Prejudice, politics, and public opinion: Understanding the sources of racial policy attitudes. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 135–168. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.135
- Krysan, M., & Moberg, S. (2016). *Trends in racial attitudes*. University of Illinois Institute of Government and Public Affairs. Retrieved from <http://igpa.uillinois.edu/programs/racial-attitudes>
- Lapchick, R. (2019). *The 2018 racial and gender report card*. The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport. Retrieved from https://43530132-36e9-4f52-811a-182c7a91933b.filesusr.com/ugd/7d86e5_b9332a76bbf342c2b44d40cb47e09f79.pdf
- Leonard, D. (2017). *Playing while White: Privilege and power on and off the field*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Love, A., & Hughey, M. (2015). Out of bounds? Racial discourse on college basketball message boards. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(6), 877–893, doi:10.1080/01419870.2014.967257
- Meyer, J., & Zimbalist, A. (2020). A win win: College athletes get paid for their names, images, and likenesses and colleges maintain the primacy of academics. *Harvard Journal of Sports & Entertainment Law*, 11, 247–303. Retrieved from: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3590190>
- Mondello, M., Piquero, A., Leeper Piquero, N., Gertz, M., & Bratton, J. (2013) Public perceptions on paying student athletes. *Sport in Society*, 16(1), 106–119. doi:10.1080/17430437.2012.690408.
- National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA]. (2019). 2019–20 NCAA Division I Manual. Retrieved from <https://www.ncaa.com/publications/p-4577-2019-2020-ncaa-division-i-manual-august-version-available-for-presell-now.aspx>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA]. (2020). NCAA Board of Governors: Federal and state legislation working group. Final report and recommendations. Retrieved from https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/committees/ncaa/wrkgrps/fslwg/Apr2020FSLWG_Report.pdf
- Nocera, J., & Strauss, B. (2016). *Indentured: The inside story of the rebellion against the NCAA*. New York: Portfolio
- Olaloku-Teriba, A. (2018). Afro-pessimism and the (un)logic of anti-blackness. *Historical Materialism*, 26(2), 96–122. doi:10.1163/1569206X-00001650
- Price, V., & Neijens, P. (1997). Opinion quality in public opinion research. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 9(4), 336–360. doi:10.1093/ijpor/9.4.336
- Public Religious Research Institute [PRRI]. (2017). *Majority of Americans oppose transgender bathroom restrictions*. Retrieved from <http://www.prrri.org/research/lgbt-transgender-bathroom-discrimination-religious-liberty/>
- Rankin-Wright, A.J., Hylton, K., & Norman, L. (2016). Off-colour landscape: Framing race equality in sport coaching. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 33(4), 357–368. doi:10.1123/ssj.2015-0174
- Ridpath, B.D., Kiger, J., Mak, J., Eagle, T., & Letter, G. (2007). Factors that influence the academic performance of NCAA Division I athletes. *The SMART Journal*, 4(1), 59–83.
- Ridpath, B.D., Rudd, A., & Stokowski, S. (2019). Perceptions of European athletes that attend American colleges and universities for elite athletic development and higher education access. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 5(1), 34–61. doi:10.1080/24704067.2019.1636402
- Rudd, A., & Ridpath, B.D. (2019). Education versus athletics: What will Division I football and basketball players choose? *Journal of Amateur Sport*, 5(1), 76–95. doi:10.17161/jas.v5i1.7731
- Sack, A.L., & Staurowsky, E.J. (1998). *College athletes for hire*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Sanderson, A., & Siegfried, J. (2015). “The case for paying college athletes.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 29(1), 115–138. doi:10.1257/jep.29.1.115
- Seton Hall Sports Poll. (2019). American public supports college athletes receiving endorsement money, As approved in California this week. Retrieved from <https://www.shu.edu/sports-poll/upload/Oct-3-2019-Endorsement-money.pdf>
- Sexton, J. (2016). Afro-pessimism: The unclear ord. *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, 29. doi:10.20415/rhiz/029.e02
- Shaw, A.A., Moiseichik, M., Blunt-Vinti, H., & Stokowski, S. (2019). Measuring racial competence in athletic academic support staff members. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 36(2), 162–170. doi:10.1123/ssj.2018-0062

- Singer, J. (2019). *Race, sports and education: Improving opportunities and outcomes for Black male college athletes*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.
- Smith, E. (2009). *Race, sport, and the American dream*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Solorzano, D.G., & Yosso, T.J. (2001) Critical race and LatCrit theory and method: Counter-storytelling. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(4):471–495. doi:[10.1080/09518390110063365](https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390110063365)
- Southall, R.M., Eckard, W., Nagel, M., & Randall, M. (2015) Athletic success and NCAA profit-athletes' adjusted graduation gaps. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 32(4), 395–414. doi:[10.1123/ssj.2014-0156](https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2014-0156)
- Southall, R.M., & Southall, C.R. (2018). The National Collegiate Athletic Association's "Nothing short of remarkable" Rebranding of academic success. In R. King-White (Ed.), *Sport and the Neoliberal University: Profit, Politics, and Pedagogy* (pp. 131–152). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- 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 and Social Issues*, 37(4), 403–429. doi:[10.1177/0193723513498606](https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723513498606)
- Staurowsky, E.J. (2018). College athletes as employees and the politics of Title IX. In R. King-White (Ed.), *Sport and the Neoliberal University: Profit, politics, and pedagogy* (pp. 97–128). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Tatos, T. (2017). Deconstructing the NCAA's procompetitive justifications to demonstrate antitrust injury and calculate lost compensation: The evidence against NCAA amateurism. *The Antitrust Bulletin*, 62(1), 184–236. doi:[10.1177/0003603X16688968](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003603X16688968)
- Van Rheenen, D. (2012). Exploitation in college sports: Race, revenue, and educational reward. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48(5), 550–571. doi:[10.1177/1012690212450218](https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690212450218)
- Wallsten, K., Nteta, T.M., McCarthy, L.A., & Tarsi, M.R. (2017). Prejudice or principled conservatism? Racial resentment and white opinion toward paying college athletes. *Political Research Quarterly*, 70(1), 209–222. doi:[10.1177/1065912916685186](https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912916685186)
- Winter, N.J.G. (2008). *Dangerous frames: How ideas about race & gender shape public opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.