

The influence of race on attitudes about college athletics

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ABSTRACT

The questions of whether college student-athletes should be paid and/or allowed to unionize have generated a wide-ranging national debate. Public opinion on these issues is starkly divided along racial lines, with African-Americans dramatically more supportive than non-African-Americans. We posit that the race gap stems from fundamentally distinct mindsets. African-Americans view pay for play and unionization as mechanisms to enhance educational experiences and hence as a form of affirmative action. Non-African-Americans, in contrast, focus on the extent to which they enjoy the consumption value of college athletics. We present results from a nationally representative survey experiment that supports our expectations. We also find that non-African-Americans can be swayed to employ a more race-based lens on these issues, although this re-framing does not diminish the attitudinal race gap. We conclude with a discussion about race, sports and public opinion.

Should college athletes be paid, i.e. 'pay for play?' Should they be allowed to unionize, ensuring universities treat them as employees rather than students? These questions have generated a vigorous national debate about the role and rights of student-athletes.¹ While the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) recently expanded financial benefits for student-athletes, it continues to staunchly oppose extensive pay for play and unionization (Auerbach 2014; also see Armour 2013; Tarm 2014; Trahan 2014). This coheres with the fan base: public opinion polls show that only about 33% support paying college athletes and only 47% favour unionization (Prewitt 2014).² Underlying these numbers, however, is a perplexing racial divide such that non-whites exhibit substantially more support (with 51% supporting pay for play and 66% supporting unionization) (Prewitt 2014; also see Mondello et al. 2014).

What explains this racial divide? What role do racial considerations play in opinion formation processes about these issues? We address these questions by beginning with a discussion of public opinion on affirmative action and related policies – particularly focusing on the racial divide in opinions. We then describe extant research on the role of race

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in college athletics. We explain that one of the purported aims of athletic scholarships is to ensure students receive adequate educational opportunities; yet, there are rising concerns that many of these students have not, in fact, received adequate educational support and/or 'fair compensation' from their institutions. We further argue that African-Americans view pay for play and unionization as a mechanism for enhancing affirmative action (i.e. these policies would ensure student-athletes have the necessary resources to have a positive educational experience). In contrast, non-African-Americans do not view the issues through the lens of race but rather focus on the extent to which they enjoy the consumption value of college athletics. While a re-framing of the issues can sway non-African-Americans to alter the basis of their opinions, it does not reduce racial divisions. We provide supportive data from a nationally representative survey experiment and conclude with a discussion of race, education and public opinion.

Affirmative action and the racial opinion gap

Affirmative action in the US typically involves active efforts to improve employment or educational opportunities for members of minority groups and/or women.³ Over time, public support for affirmative action in the US has polarized along racial lines, with African-Americans significantly more supportive than whites (Steeh and Krysan 1996). For example, a Pew Research Center poll reported that 22% of white respondents agreed that 'we should make every effort to improve the position of blacks and minorities ...', compared to 58% of African-Americans who agreed (Pew Research Center 2009). While support overall rises when it comes to education, the racial gap remains with 55% of whites and 84% of African-Americans agreeing that 'affirmative action programs designed to increase the number of black and minority students on college campuses are a good thing' (Pew Research Center 2014; also see Downing et al. 2002). Altbach, Lomotey, and Rivers (2002) provide some insight into the gap by explaining that universities are commonly viewed as key meritocratic 'sorting' institutions, and that despite the prevalence of racially liberal attitudes on college campuses, there remain undercurrents of resentment toward affirmative action and similar programmes.

Largely beginning with renewed controversy over affirmative action in the late 1990s, the use of race as a criterion in college admissions has declined. Several state university systems have eliminated affirmative action altogether from their admissions processes (Long 2004). Such decisions typically have led to a substantially reduced minority population in those schools' student bodies (Espenshade and Radford 2009), despite some states' efforts to make up the difference through alternative policies – e.g. by guaranteeing admission to a certain top percentage of each high school's graduating class (Long 2004). Debates over affirmative action in higher education have continued into the present, leading, among other things, to some recent and prominent court challenges. Results in these cases have been mixed: for example, an appellate court in Texas ruled that the University of Texas at Austin could continue to use race in admission decisions (Greenblatt 2014).⁴ Yet around the same time, the United States Supreme Court upheld a Michigan constitutional amendment banning the use of affirmative action in admissions (Liptak 2014).

Even where racial considerations in admission are explicitly banned, however, there remains a loophole of sorts in the form of 'special admission.' As Sperber (1995) explains, special admission enables institutions to consider 'special talents' in areas such as music

and athletics when choosing which applicants to admit – and African-American athletes comprise a significant portion of students recruited on such a basis. Sperber (1995) further notes that even fervent opponents of race as an admission criterion seldom express opposition to such special actions. For us, the relevant question is whether these exceptions for athletic ‘special talents,’ and potential enhancements in the scholarships that come with them, are in fact viewed as a type of affirmative action. In other words, are the supplementing of extant scholarships with additional money (pay for play) and the right to unionize viewed as extending affirmative action? And if not, is it possible to re-frame these additions to athletic scholarships in such terms?

Athletic scholarships and affirmative action

As explained, debates concerning the criteria used for college admissions are wide-ranging, and one of the most heated points of disagreement concerns the consideration of an applicant’s race. Since race is often not a viable explicit criterion (see above discussion), many supporters of affirmative action in education focus on other admission criteria – particularly the above-mentioned ‘special talents’ – that correlate with minority status. Of particular note is the possibility of using athletic scholarships as a mechanism for affirmative action among African Americans. For example, in her dissent of the Supreme Court’s aforementioned decision to uphold a Michigan ban on affirmative action for public universities, Justice Sonia Sotomayor cited athletics, *inter alia*, as a criterion that can be used in admission decisions (see <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/pdf/12-682.pdf>).

The idea that athletic scholarships serve as a form of affirmative action tracks ‘the generally held view [that] the beneficiaries of affirmative action athletic scholarships are mainly African Americans’ (Fobanjong 2001; also see Dolinsky 2001). Relative to their proportion in colleges, African-Americans receive a disproportionate number of athletic scholarships. For example, in 2007–2008, African-Americans received nearly 23% of athletic scholarships but they made up about 12% of the student population (Kantrowitz 2011). No other racial/ethnic group had its percentage of athletic scholarships exceed its percentage among the student bodies. Indeed, ‘college sports are often heralded as vehicles for racial integration and social mobility. Successful integration and mobility are thought to be achieved by providing educational opportunities to a diverse group of students, many of whom might be unable to attend college were it not for their athletic abilities and corresponding sports scholarships’ (Van Rheenen 2013). Thus, while African-Americans would not constitute the majority of the beneficiaries of expanded aid for college athletes, they may well be perceived as the most important potential recipients: ‘college sports persistently disadvantage Black male student-athletes ... conferences should commit a portion of proceeds earned from championships and other revenue sources back to member institutions for programming and other interventions that aim to improve racial equity within and beyond sports’ (Harper, Williams, and Blackman 2013; also see Funk 1991). *The key point is that, even though the majority of athletic scholarship recipients are not African Americans, athletic scholarships still disproportionately tend to benefit African Americans.* This is particularly true in the revenue-generating sports of men’s basketball and football, where data from 76 institutions and six athletic conferences suggest that between 2007 and 2010, Black men were 2.8% of full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students, but 57.1% of football teams and 64.3% of basketball teams’ (Harper, Williams, and Blackman 2013).⁵

Even if athletic scholarships serve as mechanism for affirmative action, are they sufficient (historically covering the cost of tuition, fees, textbooks, and room and board; we later return to recent reforms that enhance scholarships – a development that occurred after our data collection)? While athletic scholarships include such supports as tutoring, for many, scholarships on their own provide insufficient resources to ensure a good education. Hawkins (2010) states that even top university athletic programmes often recruit students, including a large number of African-Americans, who lack the skills or preparation to succeed at the college level, and that many institutions thereafter take relatively little initiative to help these student-athletes through their academic struggles. Benson (2000) asserts that the ‘academic inadequacies’ observed among some African-American student-athletes result not just from their own choices but from those made by their teachers, coaches and others within their universities – for example, funnelling athletes toward easier classes or failing to impose consequences for poor grades. Along similar lines, interviews with several former student-athletes suggest they feel that they were instead treated as ‘athlete-students’ (Beamon 2008), with academics treated mainly as a means to maintain athletic eligibility. Such institutional practices may diminish or even eliminate the purported downstream benefits of attending elite universities, as Loury and Garman (1993) find – perhaps unsurprisingly – that the impact of attending a selective college on future earnings is moderated by a student’s actual academic performance.

This is in line with a general argument that, when it comes particularly to the revenue-generating men’s basketball and football (see note 1), student-athletes are exploited given the schools’ profits relative to the often insufficient educational opportunities provided (Beamon 2008; Benson 2000; Hawkins 2010; Sperber 1995; Van Rheenen 2013). Such a dynamic calls into question the degree to which these scholarships truly provide students with the enhanced educational opportunities they need. ‘[I]f an educational opportunity is unlikely to be realized based upon structural constraints and conflicts, or even with genuine effort expended on the part of the college athlete, the relationship is indeed *exploitive*’ (Van Rheenen 2013; italics added).

This pattern of institutional exploitation also closely intertwines with issues of race. In a study of 581 Division 1 athletes, Van Rheenen (2011) finds the subjective feeling of being exploited, similar to that described by Beamon (2008), to be far more common and pronounced among African-Americans. Hawkins (2010) further argues that this sort of exploitation is not merely economic, but a manifestation of broader socio-political trends of racism and discrimination: the valuing of African-Americans more as athletes than as students, he suggests, arises naturally from historical patterns of commodification and dehumanization (also see Allen 2004). From such a perspective, it becomes quite easy to view expanded benefits for college athletes as a means toward remedying persistent and pervasive racial inequalities.

There also is the basic issue of whether scholarships provide the economic means needed to live and excel in college, given that Division 1 scholarships, at the time of our study, covered some items (e.g. tuition, university fees, required textbooks, room and board) but not others (e.g. parking permits, student identification cards, course fees, library fines, graduate fees). One NCAA student-athlete explains, ‘[t]he average full scholarship, which pays for tuition, housing, and food ... isn’t enough to cover inevitable, out-of-pocket expenses that a normal college student has ... the average Division 1 athlete actually dedicates about 40 hours a week to athletic endeavors [which makes it] impossible for a student-athlete to

[have a job] ... Providing monetary compensation sufficient to cover expenses ... would allow student athletes to continue to compete at the college level while also completing a meaningful, not token education' (Anonymous 2014; also see Beamon 2008). Approximately, 85% of scholarship student-athletes live below the federal poverty line, leading to decreased graduation rates (Nance-Nash 2011; also see Huma and Staurowsky 2011) which in turn belie the 'promise of an education in exchange for athletic performance' (Van Rheenen 2013).

The take-away of this discussion is threefold. First, the key beneficiaries of athletic scholarships, particularly when it comes to the revenue-generating sports of men's basketball and football, are often seen to be African-Americans, and in this sense, athletic scholarships can be construed as a form of affirmative action – the scholarships help African-Americans pursue educational opportunities. Second, even if seen as a form of affirmative action, to many, athletic scholarships do not provide sufficient supports to ensure a good education and resources to cover cost of living. This raises issues of exploitation of student-athletes by their institutions and the basic lack of economic resources to cover costs and ensure one lives above the poverty line. Third, in light of the prior two points, enhanced benefits added to the scholarship can be seen as extended affirmative action, aimed at vitiating such exploitation and ensuring sufficient resources for African-Americans.

In the domain of athletic scholarships, two prominent proposals include pay for play and unionization. Pay for play would allow student-athletes to receive pay – akin to salaries – beyond their existing scholarships. This could help student-athletes achieve relatively better material comfort that could facilitate educational success, and it would, at least partially, address the aforementioned exploitation due to some revenue redistribution. Unionization would ensure collective bargaining rights (by viewing student-athletes as employees) that could generate protections as well as additional finances (stipends) and benefits (e.g. medical) that would promote long-term educational success (i.e. it would make universities more responsible for student-athletes' long-term well-being; see Druckman et al. 2014).

Consequently, both pay for play and unionization can be viewed as part of an affirmative action initiative 'designed to help blacks and other minorities get better jobs and education (e.g. a college education)' (Pew Research Center 2009). The policies do so, in part, to compensate for unequal opportunities/discrimination/exploitation. Consequently, *if an individual views pay for play and unionization as part of extended affirmative action programmes, then the more he/she supports affirmative action, the more he/she will support pay for play and unionization.*

Individuals are more likely to view pay for play and unionization in this light when they take the perspective of the main beneficiaries, who, given relative proportions, are African-Americans. The theory of linked fate argues that there is an 'acute sense of awareness (or recognition) that what happens to the group will also affect the individual member' (Simien 2005; also see, e.g. Gay and Tate 1998; Herring, Jankowski, and Brown 1999). The implication is that African-Americans will focus on the beneficiaries since they are part of the same group, leading them to think in terms of the accrued affirmative action benefits.⁶ In addition to linked fate, African-Americans are more likely to take the perspective of affirmative action due to their historical experiences. Blackstone (cited in Putterman 2014) states, 'Black folks much more easily identify with the majority of athletes ... They have more emotional understanding, political understanding of the mechanisms of college athletics.' Similarly, sociologist Aldon Morris explains that whites will more likely sympathize with the managerial interests like the university, while African-Americans will relate to the

working-class perspective of the student-athletes. He continues that for whites, thinking of 'athletes as workers, as employees goes against their view of the benign, embracing culture of their university ...' (Putterman 2014). Thus, we predict that *African-Americans will be significantly more likely, than others, to view pay for play and unionization as a type of affirmative action and their opinions on the issues will reflect their affirmative action views.*

Instead of viewing the issues through the lens of affirmative action, non-African-Americans will think more about the overall product: college sports. If they value that product – that is, they are fans – they will be more likely to support the NCAA perspective. As NCAA President Mark Emmert explains, 'one of the biggest reasons fans like college sports is that they believe the athletes are really students who play for a love of the sport ... To convert college sports into professional sports would [lead to a product that is not] successful either for fan support or for the fan experience' (Dahlberg 2014).⁷ He further states that 'No, it will not happen – not while I'm president of the NCAA' (cited in Mondello et al. 2014). In short, pay for play and unionization would have potentially deleterious effects on the product, which most non-African-Americans perceive. Thus, the more such individuals care about the product, the more they oppose the policies. We predict that *for non-African-Americans, support for pay for play and unionization will decrease as being a fan increases.*

Framing

A large literature suggests that individuals' opinions shift when presented with a re-framing of an issue. For example, the presentation of welfare provisions as promoting equality causes people to support increased welfare benefits. When welfare is instead described in terms of increased taxes, support declines (Sniderman and Theriault 2004; for a review, see Klar, Robison, and Druckman 2013). Lewis and Weaver (2015) explain, 'Sports journalists can and do employ various frames that emphasize specific content in their stories; but the influence these frames have on subsequent audience evaluations pertaining to athletes features within them is unknown.' Aside from these authors, scant research has explored the impact of frames on sports attitudes. In recent times, common frames have evolved from those emphasizing game statistics and performance (e.g. Nixon and Howard 2014) to a greater focus on individual players and their stories/struggles (Lewis and Weaver 2015).

Given our focus, we are interested in identifying a frame that increases the likelihood that individuals view pay for play and unionization through an affirmative action lens. Past work suggests four critical elements to such a frame. First, the frame needs to connect pay for play and unionization to race since affirmative action programmes *are meant to help African-Americans and other minorities obtain better jobs and education.* Second, the frame needs to make clear how the programmes will help to ensure improved educational experiences (e.g. the programmes are then a form of affirmative action). Third, in the domain of race and affirmative action, past work suggests a particularly effective frame focuses on remedial action: 'supporters of affirmative action have typically defended their position ... by reference to the need for remedial action. Under this frame, race-conscious programs are required to offset the continuing pernicious effects of ... racial discrimination' (Kinder and Sanders 1996; italics in original). When the issue is framed this way, support for affirmative action tends to increase (Kinder and Sanders 1996). This applies in our case, in some sense, although the current status of student-athletes is better characterized as a case of exploitation (as explained) than discrimination per se. Thus, the remedial action here is

about offsetting the effects of racially relevant exploitation (e.g. schools receive much revenue from basketball/football without providing adequate resources and/or educational opportunities to the student-athletes).⁸ Fourth, affirmative action is linked mostly to improved opportunities rather than outcomes: indeed, support for policies increases when they are described in terms of 'opportunity enhancement,' as opposed to striving for equal outcomes for all members of disadvantaged groups (Bobo 1998; Krysan 2000).

Thus, an effective frame would make the racial element clear, suggest that pay for play and unionization would enhance educational experiences, portray the policy as way to address past discrimination (or, in our case, exploitation), and focus on resources needed to fully benefit from the opportunity for educational success. These elements, taken together, would prime an affirmative action perspective and therefore lead to increased support concomitant with increased support for affirmative action.

We predict that exposure to an affirmative action/exploitation frame (as just described) will increase the salience of affirmative action in the formation of pay for play and unionization attitudes. This is relevant particularly for non-African-American individuals, as we expect affirmative action considerations to matter even sans a frame for African-American individuals. In this way, our research expands the concept of framing to a novel policy domain while drawing upon a large body of literature on race, inequality and remedial policies. We expect African-Americans to exhibit substantially more overall support for pay for play and unionization – consistent with the aforementioned polls. This follows since African-Americans base their opinions on affirmative action considerations, and nearly unanimously support programmes when they are explicitly tied to jobs and education (Pew Research Center 2009, 2014). In contrast, non-African-Americans will inevitably be more variable – with a lower overall mean – in the extent to which they are 'fans of college sports,' and since this will drive overall support, such support will be lower. Even when re-framed to an affirmative action perspective, non-African-Americans will still be less supportive since their support of affirmative action is relatively lower: between 55 and 70% are supportive (Pew Research Center 2009, 2014). Thus, the racial gap in overall support will not disappear with a re-framing.⁹

Survey experiment

We tested our hypotheses with an experiment embedded in a nationally representative survey in the United States (implemented over the Internet) with a total of 1555 participants. The data were collected from 23 July to 30 July 2014, which preceded reforms (discussed below) that enable selected NCAA conferences to have increased autonomy in rule-making, allowing for increased student-athlete subsidies.

To collect our data, we contracted with the survey vendor ResearchNow (<http://www.researchnow.com/en-US.aspx>). The company implemented our survey via the Internet on a representative sample of the US population. The sample is an opt-in panel that acquires potential respondents from a wide host of partners (e.g. commercial sponsors). They invite individuals to join the survey panel and compensate them for participation. For each particular survey, ResearchNow (2015) employs 'a proprietary method of exclusively inviting pre-validated individuals, or individuals who share known characteristics ...' In other words, they employ an algorithm based on likely response rates to ensure a sample that closely resembles (i.e. is representative of) the US population, based on US census figures (see

ResearchNow 2015). The company also implements a wide range of data quality validation checks, including checking for logical answers, consistent reporting, minimal non-response, realistic response times, etc. (for general discussion of these types of samples, see, e.g. Callegaro et al. 2014; Gelman and Rothschild 2014).¹⁰ For us, this approach to sampling and survey design ensures high quality data: a growing body of evidence suggests that opt-in panels generate analogous inferences to probability samples, especially when it comes to experimental research which is a part of our focus (see Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012). A critical issue relevant to the generalizability of an experimental causal inference concerns the identification of a variable that moderates the impact of the treatments (Druckman and Kam 2011). In our case, we have a clear theory that posits race as such a moderator, thereby facilitating causal inference.

There are three key components to our survey experiment. First, our central dependent variables were questions about support for pay for play and unionization. The former asked, 'Recently, a proposal has been made that would allow student-athletes to receive pay – akin to salaries – beyond their existing scholarships. To what extent do you oppose or support this proposal?' with answers on a seven-point fully labelled scale ranging from strongly oppose to strongly support. The latter asked, 'To what extent do you oppose or support efforts to unionize college athletics, so that student-athletes can then negotiate (and collectively bargain) about their working conditions?' again with a seven-point fully labelled response scale from strongly oppose to strongly support. Both wordings resemble those used in prior surveys (e.g. Druckman et al. 2014; Mondello et al. 2014; Prewitt 2014), although unlike some (but not all) previous work, we allowed a wider array of responses rather than simply 'yes' or 'no.'

Second, we measured affirmative action support and the extent to which respondents were sports fans. For affirmative action, we focused on educational opportunities: 'To what extent do you oppose or support affirmative action programmes designed to help blacks and other minorities get better jobs and education (e.g. such as a strong college education?)' with answers on a seven-point labelled scale from strongly oppose to strongly support (see Pew Research Center 2009). Thus, our measure tracks closely on how we described the potential ways in which pay for play and unionization could facilitate educational experiences. Our college sports fan question asked: 'On a scale on which a five means you are "a very big college sports fan" and a one means you have "absolutely no interest in college sports," in general, how big of a college sports fan are you?' (see <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/otl/news/story?id=5988173>). (We asked these two questions at the start of the survey, and they were followed with a host of unrelated questions, prior to our experiment.)

We included various independent control variables including self-identified racial and ethnic group (which we used to identify African-American respondents), age (on a six-point scale that included age ranges), gender, education (on a five-point scale that gauged highest level of education), income (on a five-point scale that included income ranges), ideology (on a seven-point scale with higher scores indicating increased conservatism) and racial prejudice (which merged four measures of racial resentment/symbolic racism used by the American National Election Studies, with higher scores indicating greater prejudice; see, e.g. Kinder and Sanders 1996).

Finally, to test our framing prediction, we randomly assigned respondents to one of three conditions. The control condition asked the aforementioned questions ($N = 566$). Our affirmative action/exploitation frame condition ($N = 496$) began with this statement:

As you may know, there is an ongoing debate about whether college athletes should be paid salaries beyond their scholarships. This is related to a debate on whether student-athletes should be allowed to unionize so as to collectively bargain. We are interested in what you think.

A recent report by the National College Players Association found that 85% of student-athletes on full scholarships continue to live below the federal poverty line; in contrast, men's college football and basketball generates \$6 billion in annual revenues. Unionization would help student-athletes have access to important benefits like medical care and guaranteed four-year scholarships. These provisions would ensure student-athletes, from all backgrounds, have the resources needed to have a successful and quality educational experience.

We wrote this frame with the aforementioned dimensions in mind – that is, the elements we believe necessary to prime affirmative action and exploitation considerations. This includes a racialized reference due to our use of 'poverty' – much prior work suggests that this reference primes racial considerations as poverty has long been seen as a 'race-coded' word (see Clawson and Kegler 2000; van Doorn 2015; Gilens 1999, 2003; Winter 2008).¹¹ Moreover, given the large percentage of African-American athletes involved in Division 1 men's basketball and football, the focus on these sports is itself likely to prime racial considerations. (We recognize that this means our frame is limited in its application due to the reference to Division 1 basketball and football, however.)

The frame also includes a statement that pay for play and unionization will enhance educational experiences (e.g. 'resources needed to have a successful and quality educational experience') (e.g. Nance-Nash 2011), a reference to discrimination/exploitation (e.g. drawing the contrast between the status of student-athletes and revenue generated) and a focus on opportunity and not outcomes (e.g. educational opportunities). For these reasons, we refer to it as an 'affirmative action/exploitation' frame.

We included a third condition that utilized a distinct frame, which focused on considerations of added material benefits ($N = 493$) and read:

As you may know, there is an ongoing debate about whether college athletes should be paid salaries beyond their scholarships. This is related to a debate on whether student-athletes should be allowed to unionize so as to collectively bargain. We are interested in what you think.

This would be pay beyond their current scholarship – which most estimates place as being worth roughly \$200,000 over four years. The pay would help student-athletes better defray costs of miscellaneous living expenses and support their families. Additionally, unionization would help student-athletes ensure access to more benefits that would make their lives a bit easier.

This frame lacks all of the elements we predicted would prime affirmative action insofar as there are no clear racial referents (e.g. no poverty reference), no statement about increased educational opportunities (e.g. the focus is on making life easier but there is no statement about educational experience which is at the heart of affirmative action) and no statement about discrimination or exploitation (e.g. no relative comparison). We thus do not expect this frame, which we refer to as a 'material benefits' frame, to affect opinion formation.¹² We include it as another baseline of comparison, in part because, if differences between the affirmative action/exploitation frame and control condition were found, we would not otherwise be able to assess whether the presence of any argument/frame would influence opinion (see Druckman 2001).

Results

Given that we measured our primary dependent variables on seven-point symmetric scales, any score greater than a '4' indicated some level of support. Consistent with other surveys,

Table 1. Support for pay for play.

	Full sample (Model 1)	Full sample (Model 2)	Control (Model 3)	Material benefits frame (Model 4)	Affirmative action/exploitation frame (Model 5)	Full sample (Model 6)
African-American	.75*** (.15)	-.64 (.51)	-1.18 (.87)	-.54 (.97)	-.11 (.88)	-.62 (.51)
Affirmative action view	.27** (.12)	.22* (.12)	.08 (.21)	.20 (.20)	.54*** (.22)	.11 (.13)
Prejudice	-.53*** (.18)	-.53*** (.18)	-.28 (.31)	-.45 (.32)	-1.11*** (.35)	-.52*** (.19)
Fan	-.33*** (.09)	-.33*** (.09)	-.27* (.16)	-.61*** (.17)	-.13 (.16)	-.44*** (.11)
Age	-.16 (.13)	-.17 (.13)	-.25 (.22)	-.33 (.25)	.06 (.23)	-.17 (.13)
Male	-.04 (.06)	-.04 (.06)	-.06 (.10)	-.02 (.11)	-.07 (.11)	-.04 (.06)
Education	-.06 (.13)	-.06 (.13)	-.03 (.22)	-.12 (.23)	-.18 (.24)	-.09 (.13)
Income	.02 (.11)	.03 (.11)	-.04 (.18)	.06 (.19)	.08 (.19)	.04 (.11)
Ideology	-.54*** (.13)	-.55*** (.13)	-.51** (.21)	-.78*** (.23)	-.19 (.24)	-.53*** (.13)
African-American X affirmative action view	-	1.79*** (.62)	2.19** (1.01)	2.03* (1.24)	1.43 (1.12)	1.78*** (.63)
Affirmative action/exploitation frame	-	-	-	-	-	-.41*** (.15)
Affirmative action/exploitation frame X fan	-	-	-	-	-	.34* (.19)
Affirmative action/exploitation frame X affirmative action view	-	-	-	-	-	.36* (.20)
Cut-points:	See below	See below	See below	See below	See below	See below
Log-likelihood	-2574.69	-2570.39	-929.42	-786.72	-822.00	-2566.52
Number of observations	1404	1404	508	442	454	1404

Notes: Entries are ordered probit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 1 are: -1.42 (.22), -1.07 (.22), -.81 (.22), -.41 (.22), -.09 (.22), .33 (.22). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 2 are: -1.45 (.23), -1.10 (.22), -.85 (.22), -.45 (.22), -.12 (.22), .30 (.22). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 3 are: -1.31 (.39), -.96 (.39), -.71 (.39), -.33 (.39), -.05 (.39), .29 (.39). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 4 are: -1.80 (.39), -1.48 (.39), -1.22 (.39), -.81 (.39), -.56 (.39), -.20 (.39). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 5 are: -1.39 (.40), -.99 (.40), -.74 (.40), -.31 (.40), .18 (.40), .83 (.40). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 6 are: -1.60 (.23), -1.24 (.23), -.99 (.23), -.59 (.23), -.26 (.23), .16 (.23). *** $p \leq .01$; ** $p \leq .05$; * $p \leq .10$ (two-tailed tests).

Table 2. Support for unionization.

	Full sample (Model 1)	Full sample (Model 2)	Control (Model 3)	Material benefits frame (Model 4)	Affirmative action/exploitation frame (Model 5)	Full sample (Model 6)
African-American	.72*** (.15)	-.17 (.51)	-1.04 (.86)	-.05 (.99)	.82 (.90)	-.10 (.52)
Affirmative action view	.31*** (.12)	.28** (.12)	.20 (.21)	.19 (.20)	.66*** (.23)	.11 (.14)
Prejudice	-.69*** (.19)	-.69*** (.19)	-.35 (.31)	-.46 (.31)	-1.50*** (.36)	-.68*** (.19)
Fan	-.28*** (.09)	-.27*** (.09)	-.33** (.16)	-.59*** (.17)	.10 (.17)	-.50*** (.11)
Age	-.30** (.13)	-.30** (.13)	-.25 (.22)	-.40 (.25)	-.36 (.23)	-.32** (.13)
Male	.04 (.06)	.05 (.06)	.07 (.10)	-.04 (.11)	.11 (.11)	.05 (.06)
Education	-.12 (.13)	-.12 (.13)	-.21 (.22)	-.13 (.23)	-.28 (.24)	-.19 (.13)
Income	.06 (.11)	.06 (.11)	.22 (.18)	.05 (.19)	-.04 (.19)	.07 (.11)
Ideology	-.57*** (.13)	-.58*** (.13)	-.39* (.21)	-.80*** (.23)	-.41* (.25)	-.54*** (.13)
African-American X affirmative action view	-	1.12* (.62)	1.86* (1.00)	1.66 (1.30)	.18 (1.10)	1.05* (.62)
Affirmative action/exploitation frame	-	-	-	-	-	-.91*** (.16)
Affirmative action/exploitation frame X fan	-	-	-	-	-	.64*** (.19)
Affirmative action/exploitation frame X affirmative action view	-	-	-	-	-	.66*** (.21)
Cut-points:	See below -2511.53	See below -2509.86	See below -922.77	See below -784.48	See below -753.91	See below -2490.54
Log-likelihood	1399	1399	508	442	449	1399
Number of observations						

Notes: Entries are ordered probit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 1 are: -1.51 (.23), -1.17 (.22), -.93 (.22), -.48 (.22), -.15 (.22), .20 (.23). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 2 are: -1.53 (.23), -1.19 (.23), -.95 (.22), -.50 (.22), -.16 (.22), .19 (.23). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 3 are: -1.26 (.39), -.89 (.39), -.68 (.39), -.24 (.39), .06 (.39), .35 (.39). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 4 are: -1.87 (.39), -1.56 (.39), -1.30 (.39), -.88 (.39), -.64 (.39), -.26 (.39). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 5 are: -1.71 (.41), -1.35 (.41), -1.08 (.41), -.57 (.41), -.02 (.41), .50 (.41). The coefficients and standard errors for cut points 1 through 6 for Model 6 are: -1.84 (.23), -1.50 (.23), -1.26 (.23), -.81 (.23), -.46 (.23), -.10 (.23).

***p ≤ .01; **p ≤ .05; *p ≤ .10 (two-tailed tests).

we find that 37.41% support pay for play and 34.92% support unionization (e.g. Mondello et al. 2014; Prewitt 2014).¹³ When we divide support by race, we replicate the aforementioned large racial divide with African-American respective support being 81.25 and 76.19%.¹⁴ We also see a large racial divide on support for affirmative action, with 82.09% of African-Americans supportive compared to 41.04% of non-African-Americans (see Pew Research Center 2009, 2014).¹⁵

To test our hypotheses, we regress (using ordered probits) our dependent variables on our main explanatory variables. The dependent variables remain on 1–7 scales; we re-scaled the independent variables so they ranged from 0 to 1.¹⁶ In Table 1, we present the results for support for pay for play.¹⁷ The first regression, which merges data from all conditions, reveals a strong race effect with a large and significant coefficient for African-Americans. We also find that support significantly increases as individuals become more in favour of affirmative action programmes, and decreases as racial prejudice, being a college sports fan and conservative ideology increase.¹⁸ These findings suggest a strong racial component to pay for play – opinions are substantially influenced not just by the race of the respondent but also policy and affective dimensions of race. The decreased support among college sports fans coheres with our expectation (although see <http://www.cbssports.com/collegefootball/writer/jon-solomon/24597455/ncaa-expert-69-of-public-opposes-paying-college-players>). The ideology finding likely reflects conservatives being less supportive of ‘labour,’ which characterizes college student-athletes (see Putterman 2014). The next model adds an interaction variable between race and affirmative action attitudes; its significance, along with the now insignificance of the African-American variable, shows that it is affirmative action attitudes that drive African-American opinion.

We directly test our hypotheses with the distinct regressions for each experimental condition. The models for the control and material benefit frame condition mirror one another. As predicted, the more one is a college sports fan, the less he/she supports pay for play. Conservative ideology continues to have a negative relationship with pay for play attitudes. As we hypothesized, affirmative action attitudes are not significant, *except for African-Americans*, even if only marginally significant in the case of the material benefits frame condition (and, in both conditions, the race main effect is not significant). This affirms that different groups employ different criteria in opinion formation, with whites thinking about the entire product of sport (e.g. the fan result) and African-Americans employing an affirmative action/exploitation frame of reference.¹⁹

To assess the substantive impact of these findings, we generated predicted probabilities of supporting pay for play (i.e. a score above a ‘4’) for various scenarios.²⁰ First, we merged the control and material benefits frame model (since the two models replicated one another), and set all values to their means other than African-American and the African-American X affirmative action interaction, both of which we set to 0. This then represented a predicted probability for an ‘average’ non-African-American respondent and came to a .35 probability of supporting pay for play. In contrast, if we look at African-American respondents, setting their mean support for affirmative action (in the interaction and main effect variables), we find a .64 probability of supporting pay for play.²¹ As we posited, this explains the race gap in opinion: non-African-American support for pay for play stems from views about the product of college sports (i.e. being a fan) rather than attention to affirmative action. This results in fairly low levels of overall support. In contrast, African-Americans take an

affirmative action perspective, and since average support for affirmative action is so high among African-Americans, they consequently exhibit high levels of support for pay for play.

When we turn to the affirmative action/exploitation frame condition we find a notable shift in attitudes. Results show strong support for our hypothesis that the frame primes individuals to base their opinions on their views of affirmative action: the coefficient is large and significant. Also, the interaction between African-American and affirmative action views falls to insignificance because all respondents (and not just African-Americans) are thinking through the lens of affirmative action. The significance of the prejudice variable accentuates the racialization of the issue – in short, the frame racialized pay for play, leading individuals to think about both their policy beliefs (affirmative action) and affect towards African-Americans (prejudice).²² The frame also vitiates the impact of being a fan and ideology, as both variables are no longer significant. The final regression – which merges all data and adds interactions between the affirmative action/exploitation frame condition and the key explanatory variables of fan and affirmative action view – confirm that the differences between the control and material benefits frame conditions against the affirmative action/exploitation frame condition (regarding the impact of fan and affirmative action views) are in fact significant.

Interestingly, however, this re-framing does *not* attenuate the racial gap in opinion. If we set each value at its mean and again look at an 'average' non-African-American, the predicted probability of support remains .35. The prejudice effect counteracts the affirmative action effect, which even itself does not lead to tremendous support given non-African-American opinion is mixed on affirmative action. Moreover, even if we set the affirmative action variable to its maximum, non-African-American support rises to only .45 (nowhere near the levels of support found among African-Americans). In sum, the results reveal that African-Americans and non-African-Americans use different frames of reference – with non-African-Americans taking a fan and ideology perspective and African-Americans employing a race frame. However, even when non-African-Americans are re-framed to take a racial perspective, the race gap does not disappear because support for affirmative action is much higher among African-Americans and prejudice is much more variable among non-African-Americans. Race dramatically shapes individuals' mindsets, but the racial disparity in opinion persists even when mindsets are changed due to varying affirmative action and prejudice attitudes.

In Table 2, we present the support for unionization results; they virtually replicate the pay for play results, which is not surprising given the high correlation between the two variables (see note 13). The only notable exception is the lack of significance for the African-American and affirmative action view interaction in the material benefits model, although it trends in the correct direction and approaches significance. Other exceptions are that age is significant and negative in the full sample model and ideology is significant in affirmative action/exploitation frame model. The latter result likely reflects the long-standing connection between ideology and unions in general. Otherwise, the coefficients themselves are even very similar in size (with perhaps the most noted difference being the prejudice coefficient is a bit larger and the African-American X affirmative action interaction is smaller). The substantive shifts closely resemble those found in the pay for play models (albeit with the support percentages being a bit lower).

Our results show that African-Americans view these widely debated policy issues in a distinct light compared to non-African-Americans. The affirmative action perspective that

they employ explains the high level of support, since African-Americans strongly support affirmative action policies. Even when non-African-Americans are exposed to a frame that alters their perspective, they continue to exhibit less support due to their differential racial attitudes.

Conclusion

We began by posing a question about the documented race gap in public support for pay for play and unionization of student-athletes. We demonstrated a fundamental difference in how African-Americans and non-African-Americans view college athletes and education. Non-African-Americans seem to view college sports as a consumption product to enjoy, and the more they value that product (i.e. the more they are fans), the less they support reforms that could alter it. In contrast, African-Americans view athletic scholarships as a form of affirmative action that, with enhanced benefits, can ensure greater educational opportunities. These differing perspectives lead to a race gap since African-Americans, on the whole, strongly support affirmative action while non-African-Americans are more variable when it comes to 'being a fan.' The race gap also remains when non-African-Americans are primed to consider a race perspective since their support for affirmative action is relatively lower and racial prejudice also comes into play. In sum, the race gap reflects differing perspectives, but even when re-framed to a single perspective that focuses on race, attitudes still dramatically differ.

We thus identify a significant racial gap in the perception of athletic scholarships and the ways in which that gap could be altered with re-framing. We are the first, as far as we know, to show empirically that athletic scholarships and their extensions can be viewed as a type of affirmative action. With regard to framing research more broadly, we introduce a novel frame in a new domain. While our frame builds on past work that has looked at remedial action frames, it remains unique in its focus on exploitation and in the domain in which we apply it.

Future work is needed to expand on our findings. This includes investigating attitudes with respect to college sports more broadly (as mentioned, our framing results are limited to Division I men's basketball and football), on a sport-specific basis (e.g. revenue vs. non-revenue sports) and among distinct populations (e.g. coaches, athletic administrators, boosters, other ethnic/racial groups; see Schneider 2000).²³ Additionally, research should track the evolution of opinions over time, as the NCAA and universities institute new policies. As mentioned, one significant change that has occurred since we administered our survey was that the NCAA, starting in the fall of 2015, will allow select schools to offer scholarships that cover the full cost of attendance (e.g. including academic-related supplies, transportation costs, etc.; see Prisbell 2014). In addition, many of those scholarships will no longer be able to be revoked for athletic reasons such as injuries (Strauss 2014). These changes are meant to address the very issues at the heart of our paper – an improved environment to facilitate educational experiences. It is entirely possible that these measures (for the schools that implement them) will alter public views on the topics since any increase in financial benefits should help to defray costs and enable student-athletes to devote more time to academics. That said, for many, the reforms are insufficient as they do not incorporate unionization and fall 'short of giving athletes in the high-revenue sports full salaries, or allowing them to capture their true worth on the open market' (Gregory 2014).²⁴ Finally,

there is of course the obvious question of whether pay for play and/or unionization would in fact enhance educational opportunities.

Our results are a manifestation of a complex historical narrative about race, education, affirmative action and sports. It also speaks to a regularly discussed concern about the over-representation of African-Americans among athletes relative to their underrepresentation among management (e.g. coaches, University administrators). In this sense, the findings reflect the tip of the iceberg in terms of understanding the experiences and perspectives that come into play. Our results also show a divide on the widely debated issues of pay for play and unionization that is unlikely to soon evaporate (even given a recent ruling precluding unionization of Northwestern football players), and this bears directly on the prospect of further reforms. Any actions that pay for play/unionization advocates or the NCAA itself might pursue in the future are likely to be perceived quite differently by different audiences.

Notes

1. The issues of pay to student athletes and unionization have far from trivial stakes. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), for instance, currently accrues over \$770 million each year from television contracts (Hayes 2013). Tickets to Division 1 men's basketball games alone bring in an estimated \$82.3 million (Alesia 2014). In addition, many universities directly receive a substantial amount of revenue from their athletic programmes, as illustrated by the \$77.9 million garnered by the University of Texas from its football programme (Gregory 2013).
2. As Mondello et al. (2014) explain, 'Understanding public perceptions on this issue [i.e. pay for play] is important since the general public are a salient part of the consumers, boosters and financiers (including as taxpayers) of many athletic sports programs across the country. Further, the public does have some influence on what colleges and universities do and do not do as evinced by the large-scale pressures underlying coaching searches and firings.' They also point out that 'Researchers have devoted minimal attention to perceptions regarding the financial compensation of student athletes.'
3. The common rationale, at least when it comes to African Americans, is this observation: 'On basic indicators of educational achievement ... African Americans ... lag far behind the majority white population ...' (Hajnal 2010). Indeed, Espenshade and Radford (2009) argue, 'Successfully attacking the racial academic achievement gap represents the next stage in the struggle for social justice and equal opportunity.'
4. See, e.g. <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CCoQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.usatoday.com%2Fstory%2Fnews%2Fnation%2F2013%2F06%2F24%2Faffirmative-action-universities-admissions-supreme-court%2F2452703%2F&ei=0lNqVM6uI5anyASn8YDIDg&usq=AFQjCNGUgWNeEfiGFwFNHioW79sjUJ0KRg&sig2=BHw3Uj6CK6rNjk8CKkAmfQ&bvm=bv.79142246,d.aWw>; <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/local-news/20140715-breaking-news-appeals-court-rules-university-of-texas-can-use-race-as-factor-in-admissions.ece>. Also see <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/affirmative-action-state-action.aspx> for various state level laws.
5. The 2.8% figure is notably lower than the aforementioned 12% because the latter refers to the entire bachelor's degree-seeking student population while the 2.8% refers to male full-time students only.
6. Journalist J.A. Adande captures the essence of the argument in stating 'other black people are going to be more sympathetic to the fact they see people who look like them' (Putterman 2014).
7. He also stated that, 'We have long heard from fans there is little support for turning student-athletes into paid employees' (Prewitt 2014). Consistent with the contrasting perspectives, a 2011 survey found that white sport fans are substantially more likely to believe

African-Americans have equal opportunities and do not face discrimination or prejudice (<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/otl/news/story?id=5988173>). Also see Lewis and Weaver (2015) on how being a sports fan influences information processing about sports.

8. Relatedly, when it comes to racial issues, a frame will likely be more powerful – when applied to a specific policy such as pay for play and/or unionization – when it includes explicit justifications for the policy (Steeh and Krysan 1996; Krysan 2000; Crosby, Iyer, and Sincharoen 2006; also see Winter 2008).
9. This is not to say that non-African-Americans will experience the same psychological process as African-Americans, as the dynamic at work would not be linked fate but rather favouring a specific policy.
10. In reference to a similar polling company, Gelman and Rothschild (2014) explain that the polls 'fare well when scrutinized along with the major traditional probability polling companies ... there is not so much difference between our approach and traditional probability sampling methods ... non-probabilistic polling is going to become a major part of public opinion research.' Indeed, we also follow a large number of recent studies on public opinion that use analogous samples (e.g. Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Klar 2014; Schuldt, Konrath, and Schwarz 2011).
11. Gilens (1999) states 'for the country as a whole, it remains overwhelmingly true that blacks are the minority group that the public most associates with poverty.'
12. We conducted two pilot tests with students (who did not participate in the main survey experiment) to provide some confirmatory evidence about the frame. In the first pilot test, we followed prior framing studies (e.g. Chong and Druckman 2007) that asked respondents to assess the ineffectiveness or effectiveness (on a seven-point scale) of the given frames, as well as to list thoughts that came to mind when they read the frames. Respondents rated the affirmative action/exploitation frame as significantly more 'effective.' In an open-ended thought-listing question where respondents listed what came to mind, 65% listed affirmative action or something similar vs. 2% for the material benefits frame. In the second pilot test, we asked respondents to assess the extent, on seven-point scales, to which the frame: (a) applies to Division 1 football and basketball players, (b) applies mostly to African-Americans, (c) addresses issues of exploitation of student-athletes and (d) is a form of 'affirmative action.' The results suggested that individuals view the frame as applying to Division 1 football and basketball players (which is somewhat tautological given the explicit reference), applies largely to African-Americans (confirming the race coding of the term 'poverty'), addresses the issue of exploitation (which demonstrates recognition of the revenue/benefit contrast in the frame) and is a form of affirmative action.
13. Our two dependent variables also correlate strongly with one another: $r = .795$.
14. The respective percentages for non-African-Americans are 35% and 33%.
15. The overall mean for pay for play is 3.66 (std. dev. 2.19) and for unionization is 3.56 (2.18). The overall means for affirmative action, being a fan and ideology (rescaled 0–1 for our analyses) are respectively .53 (.32), .45 (.32) and .51 (.27). The mean of prejudice (rescaled .2–1) is .66 (.21). Fifty-three percent of the sample is male and 4.35% is African-American. The distribution of age is: .19% 18 or under, 3.95% 19–24, 14.12% 25–34, 25.65% 35–50, 32.84% 51–65 and 23.25% over 65. The distribution for education is .78% less than high school, 7.15% high school, 29.17% some college, 36.13% four-year college degree and 26.77% advanced degree. The distribution for income is 13.56% < \$30,000, 30.98% \$30,000–\$69,999, 23.64% \$70,000–\$99,999, 25.74% \$100,000–\$200,000 and 6.09% over \$200,000.
16. The one exception is the prejudice scale, which ranges from .2 to 1.
17. For all of our analyses that involve racial differences, we follow Mondello et al. (2014) by distinguishing African-Americans from non-African-Americans (thus, the latter group includes other minorities). This is sensible given our theoretical framework focuses on dynamics connected with African-American student-athletes. (Our results remain largely unchanged if we instead strictly compare African-Americans to whites). Also, the Ns in the regressions shrink due to missing values on some of the control variables.

18. Prior work suggests that no other demographic, aside from race, affects attitudes about pay for play (e.g. Mondello et al. 2014; Prewitt 2014). Our results may differ because we include novel variables including affirmative action views, prejudice and being a college sports fan, and because we utilize a dependent variable with more variance (i.e. a seven-point scale as opposed to a dichotomous support or oppose measure).
19. When we add an interaction between race and being a fan, it is not significant, which suggests being a fan influences everyone's attitudes.
20. We simulated predicted probabilities using *Clarify* (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 1999).
21. This probability may be a bit below the overall percentage because our simulations employed overall averages for other values, rather than African-American-specific values.
22. This supports Mondello et al.'s (2014) suspicion that the race gap on pay for play may be driven, in part, by stereotypes/racism.
23. Druckman et al. (2014) explore the opinions of student athletes and also report a notable race effect in support for pay for play and unionization.
24. The expanded scholarship benefits might still not amount to a 'living wage' for these students; controversy continues not just over what a 'fair exchange' would be for the revenue that college athletes produce for their institutions, but over what constitutes a 'subsistence wage' in their case (Van Rheenen 2013). Moreover, there remains a possibility that expanded athletic scholarships will exacerbate rather than remediate prevailing exploitation issues. Scholarships may become even more coveted – including by minority students – a dynamic that might further commodify athletes and encourage institutions to treat them as a 'special class' to an even greater degree. Additionally, there are questions of fairness to athletes in non-revenue-generating sports – should these students receive greater scholarship benefits as well? Going forward, universities will need to address remedial measures for revenue sports while also remaining mindful of the needs of other athletes.

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