

# **LIFE SKILL TOOLS NEEDED TO ASSIST AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES WITH OFF FIELD SUCCESS AT PREDOMINATLY WHITE DIVISION I-A UNIVERSITIES**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the career planning, educational involvement, and lifestyle planning of African-American male student-athletes differ from their Caucasian counterparts. Forty-five African-American male student-athletes and 45 Caucasian student-athletes from a Division I-A university responded to the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA) (Winston, Miller, & Cooper, 1999). A one-way ANOVA was conducted and significant differences were found between African-American male and Caucasian male student-athletes in all three areas: Career Planning,  $F(1, 88) = 9.49, p = .003$ , Educational Involvement,  $F(1, 88) = 4.52, p = .036$ , and Lifestyle Planning,  $F(1, 87) = 12.70, p = .001$ . Furthermore, African American male student-athletes standard scores for each of the categories were lower than those of Caucasian male student athletes. Results will be extended to the benefit of a CHAMPS/ Life Skills program in further developing the career, educational, and lifestyles tools needed for African American males to succeed in life after sport.

## **Objectives, Purposes, & Rationale for Research**

When dealing with player development at the collegiate level the focus is more of a personal development approach. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has cited five areas which they believe to be most vital to the success of student-athlete's lives; those five areas include academics, athletics, personal development, career development and community service (NCAA, 2006). The most research and efforts

towards player development with collegiate student-athletes are in the areas of personal and career development because student-athletes are more apt to focus on their identity as an athlete and lack initiative to develop and explore any other forms of identity (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003).

The CHAMPS (Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success)/ Lifeskills program was established in 1991 by the NCAA in hopes of creating a total development program for student-athletes (NCAA, 2006). Despite the growing interest in providing the CHAMPS/ Lifeskills program, research infers a gap has been created in the general application to African-American student-athletes as opposed to Caucasian student-athletes and male student-athletes over female student-athletes.

Most research concerning player development focuses on collegiate student-athletes and very few studies address the developmental needs of student-athletes (Watson, 2003). When examining the personal developmental needs of African-American male student-athletes there is even less research available (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 2002). With the gaps in research presented about student-athlete personal development, especially African-American male student-athletes, it can be understood why obstacles are present when trying to properly assist this population.

### ***Research Questions***

The following questions will be addressed in this study:

1. Is there a difference between the career development tools of African-American male student-athletes and Caucasian male student-athletes?
2. Is there a difference between the educational development tools of African-American male student-athletes and Caucasian male student-athletes?

3. Is there a difference between the lifestyle development tools of African-American male student-athletes and Caucasian male student-athletes?

### **Conceptual or Theoretical Framework**

#### ***Challenges of African-American Male Student-Athletes at PWIs***

Research developed by Clarence Spigner (1993) reveals at a majority of Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), there is an over- representation of African-American male student-athletes. The cause of this over-representation is cited by two reasons: (a) the higher number of scholarships allotted at PWIs versus Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and (b) African- American male student-athletes at PWIs were more likely to get better media coverage, better housing separate from the general student body, better sports equipment, better dining facilities, better sponsorship, and better athletic facilities (Jackson, 1986; Wiggins, 2000).

Research has also indicated African-American male student-athletes at HBCUs have higher instances of feeling satisfied, feeling as a member of campus, and more adjusted. African-American male student-athletes at PWIs also have higher instances of poor educational backgrounds, poor relationships with faculty, significantly lower grade point averages, lower enrollment in post-graduate programs and higher feelings of isolation (Allen, 1986; Fleming, 1984; Gurin & Epps, 1975; Thomas, 1984). From this research it can be inferred African- American male student-athletes need some form of personal development in order to gain a successful experience off the field at PWIs.

#### ***Career Transition***

In research completed by Harrison and Lawrence (2003) concerning student-athletes perceptions about career transition five main themes surfaced which correlated to

the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of student-athletes. Those five themes are: inspirational imagery validation, academic and athletic success, classroom accomplishments, family devotion, and life after sports.

During inspirational imagery validation, the student-athlete develops a recognition and value of hard work. Academic and athlete success involves the student-athlete developing themselves to reflect the profile of a role model or motivator for the general student body. Classroom accomplishments deal with the student-athlete taking command of the academic realm of their student-athlete title. Family devotion is found to be especially important to student-athletes who tend to come from lower socio-economic standards of life. A focus in family devotion allows the student-athlete the ability to recognize the importance and reality of having a family (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Most importantly, the student-athlete learns how to balance the importance of taking care of the family with the reality of how they can actual take care of the family. The interpretation of these five themes during the student-athlete's developmental stage at the collegiate level is thought to give the student-athlete a strong self- identity.

The most important theme is life after sports. Life after sports is achieved when a student-athlete is able to self-reflect and identify the necessary steps critical to their achievement of a successful career transition (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Unfortunately, this area is where many student-athletes lack commitment and fail. The theme of "life after sport" is probably the most focused and most researched because of the tunnel vision many student-athletes possess including the belief the next road after collegiate athletics is professional athletics. Also, for student-athletes who do not

continue with athletics in the professional realm after graduation, the student-athlete is left to ponder, “Now what?”

### ***Life After Sports and Life Skills Development Approach***

Life after sports has become the main focus of player development departments in collegiate athletics in hopes of assisting the student-athlete in developing career choices other than professional athletics. Research developed by Broughton and Nayer (2001) indicates student-athletes have the same personal goals concerning academics, emotions, and personal goals as the non-student-athlete counterpart. Many of these concerns found to be similar between student-athletes and the general student body can range from general issues such as adolescent development to more in-depth issues such as addiction, depression or even suicide (Broughton & Nayer, 2001). These concerns become even deeper for student-athletes when coupled with dealing with the stress of competition.

Many colleges and universities may or may not address these concerns when dealing with their student-athletes. It is implied many colleges and universities take high priority when assessing and servicing academic, personal and career needs of their student-athletes, however, the opposite appears to be true (Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981). Research continues to suggest many higher educational institutions focus on three main areas of class scheduling, academic tutoring, and time management which dates back as far as the 1970s (Broughton & Nayer, 2001). This narrowed focus makes career development for success during the transition from collegiate athletics to life after sports obsolete.

What lacks in most research developed about life after sports is tailoring the personal development program to each student-athlete or at the very least categorizing

similar characteristics of student-athletes to allow for some sort of personalization.

Comeaux (2005) concludes there is a strong importance for colleges and universities to focus on pre-collegiate environmental factors which would affect the student-athletes' success while at the university as well as life after sports.

The "Life Skills development approach" takes on a position of developing and maintaining the personal, practical and emotional aspects of a student-athletes life. This developments focuses on topics such as drug and alcohol education, interpersonal communication skills training, time management, career development and selection and appropriate sexual relationships (Broughton & Nayer, 2001). The "Life Skills development approach" is often presented in the form as an academic course or a series of workshops. The purpose and hopes of "Life Skills development approach" is to assist the student-athletes with issues they will face during their college years and beyond (Broughton & Nayer, 2001).

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA) (Winston, Miller, & Cooper, 1999) questionnaires were administered at various times by sport. The independent variable utilized in this study was race. Career planning, educational involvement, and lifestyle planning served as the dependent variables.

### ***Participants***

Participants in this study were student-athletes enrolled at a PWI located in the Midwest that sponsors sports at the Division-IA level. Forty-five African-American male student-athletes and 45 Caucasian male student-athletes were selected at random from a

group of male student-athletes who participate in football, baseball, men's soccer, and men's basketball. No compensation or incentive was rewarded for participation in this study.

### ***Instrumentation***

The SDTLA was used to measure personal development and growth of collegiate students. For the purpose of this study, participants will fill complete the version of the SDTLA which focuses on career planning, educational involvement, and lifestyle planning. This instrument draws the conclusion the successful completion of one category will lead to successful completion in other categories in the future. Failure to successfully complete a category will result in future adjustment problems. The scale for the SDTLA shows the degree to which participants report possessing various characteristics of behaviors, attitudes and feelings.

### ***Procedures***

Athletic Department Academic Services were contacted for permission and to gain accessibility to the student-athlete participants required for this study. The purpose of this study will then be explained to the participants and after agreeing to participate, student-athletes will sign a consent form to participate. From there, the participants will be given a folder consisting of the instrument (SDTLA), a copy of the consent form, and contact information for the researchers.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

A one-way ANOVA was performed to determine whether or not significant differences exist between African-American male student-athletes and Caucasian student-

athletes in relation to the three dependent variables being measured (career planning, lifestyle planning, and educational involvement).

## **Results**

The results of the ANOVA revealed significant differences between African-American male student-athletes and Caucasian male student-athletes on all three dependent variables: Career Planning,  $F(1, 88) = 9.49, p = .003$ , Educational Involvement,  $F(1, 88) = 4.52, p = .036$ , and Lifestyle Planning,  $F(1, 87) = 12.70, p = .001$ . Furthermore, African American male student-athletes standard scores for each of the categories were lower than those of Caucasian male student athletes. See Table 1 below for the means and standard deviations of all three categories for African American and Caucasian student athletes. All means are standard scores reported from the instrument.

Table 1 – Means (Standard Deviations) for Dependent Variables

<b>Race</b>	<b>Career Planning</b>	<b>Educational Involvement <u>Mean (SD)</u></b>	<b>Lifestyle Planning</b>
African American	42.04 (6.69)	43.06 (6.97)	42.58 (7.37)
Caucasian	46.88 (8.14)	46.98 (10.25)	49.36 (10.36)

## **Discussion**

### ***Cultural Contributions of Findings***

This study is meaningful because it adds to the current literature about African-American male student-athletes. African-American student-athletes comprise of 25% of the total student-athlete population, but when looking at revenue producing sports

African-Americans and males especially represent over 50% of the total population (NCAA, 2006). This percentage shows a need to better understand the different experiences that African-American male student-athletes have in predominately white institutions. By understanding what these different experiences are programming for African-American male student-athletes can be better tailored.

### ***Practice Implications***

The results of this research have implications for those professionals who have a day to day impact on the lives of African-American male student-athletes at Division I predominately white universities. This study could be useful in the assistance of developing programming focused on African-American male student-athletes. These programs should include information to understand race and culture. Classes focused on career development will also be useful and focus should be placed on assisting African-American male student-athletes develop realistic career paths to utilize after graduation. The ideal of types of attainable career, economical status and educational needs should also have a focus.

Due to the unique issues of African-American male student-athletes a mentor program should be developed to serve in addition to current counseling practices utilized by the school. These mentors should all be African-American males who are current successful student-athletes or community leaders. These leaders should be able to show how goal can be set and attained in a realistic manner.

In relation to the CHAMPS/ Lifeskills program life skills should be taught in such a way which would enhance the individual's personal growth. Participants of the program should be taught and allowed to develop goals for success off the field. The

goal path should be actively evaluated by the CHAMPS/Lifeskills program administrators to make sure student-athletes are following their goals and making positive, necessary changes when appropriate.

### ***Limitations***

As with any study, limitations will be present. The first limitation is the instrumentation utilized for this study, is self-report. Since this instrument is self-report, truthfulness and accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Even though, the SDTLA has been tested for validity and reliability, all questions are open to interpretation by the participant and it relates to their own lives.

It should also be understood, the results of this study are limited to this particular institution. Other, institutions can value this study as a way to evaluate their performance in assisting African-American male student-athletes, so should not be the sole study utilized in deciding needs, since populations may vary.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Due to the findings, questions and issues which may have surfaced during this study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. A similar study be completed across various colleges and universities to gain a more general idea of services needed by African-American male student-athletes in relation to personal growth.
2. A comparison study of African-American male student-athletes at Division I universities verses African-American male student-athletes at Historically Black Colleges and Universities or Division II or III universities.

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