

Panopticonics: The Control and Surveillance of Black Female Athletes in a Collegiate Athletic Program

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This article analyzes black female student athletes' participation in an elite collegiate athletic program and shows how the program maximizes black female participants' athletic and academic potential through surveillance, control, and discipline. The program instills in black female athletes a model of womanhood whereby they come to expect and achieve academic and athletic success, but does so at the expense of their autonomy and freedom from surveillance. Ultimately, this analysis shows the promise and peril of panopticonics as educational technology.

In thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking . . . of the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.

—Foucault, 1980

We study, go to practice, have mandatory study hall, travel, and compete. I compete and I get the grades. I had it out with the President of Alpha [a black fraternity], because he told me that if I just applied myself I could accomplish anything. I know that a lot better than he does.

—black female athlete at Midwestern University

As an elite black female student athlete in her junior year at Midwestern University (MU), the student quoted above constructed herself as a self-aware high achiever who was successful across academic and athletic arenas. In so doing, she reinforced for herself a sense of self and of purpose that had been cultivated during her participation in the MU women's athletic program. This sense of self and purpose had been cultivated as much for her as it was by her. In Foucault's terminology, this individual, "with [her] identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, movements, desires, forces" (Foucault 1980:74).

This article is a Foucauldian description and analysis of the circumstances by which, during the tenure of my ethnographic research at Midwestern University, black female student athletes' identities were shaped, as well as the implications of the formation process for their

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academic achievement. It describes the MU women's athletic program as a modern-day panopticon and describes how it functioned with precision to maximize participants' athletic and academic potential through surveillance, control, and discipline. I characterize the program in terms of the infrastructure that ensured the transformation of elite athletes into successful women, with success defined in terms of athletic achievement, degree attainment, and preparation for life after graduation. Finally, I use the stories of student athletes and others associated with the athletic department to show how black female athletes came to embody a specific contemporary model of womanhood, but sacrificed autonomy and freedom from surveillance in the process. Although the voices of black female athletes provided data for this analysis, this article is not only about them but also about the control and surveillance to which they subjected themselves in order to realize academic and athletic success.

This project is part of my effort to address Foucault's call for intellectuals to provide thick, penetrating descriptions of institutions and the mechanisms of power they employ (Foucault 1980:51). Such studies "make it possible to locate lines of weakness, strong points, [and] positions where instances of power have secured and implanted themselves. In other words, a topological and geological survey of the battlefield" (Foucault 1980:62). This is "never a matter of escaping social webs, but of making them more transparent" (Cladis 1999:12).

In a departure from Foucault, however, my final analysis contradicts the idea that discipline is the heart of repression. Although Foucault believed that institutional control, surveillance, and discipline produces meaning and efficiency at the expense of experience and pleasure (Brown 2000), my account of the MU women's athletic program leads to a different conclusion. I conclude that rather than ultimately subjugate the bodies of student athletes, the program provided the means for their empowerment and perfection. This conclusion is more optimistic than Foucault, and more closely resembles Durkheim's view of society and its institutions. According to Durkheim's view,

being initiated into society's beliefs, ideals and practices is a crucial component of moral education. Such initiation is not for the sake of blind conformity. Discipline produces self-mastery, and self-mastery . . . is the first condition of genuine power and liberty. Self-mastery enables us to develop and focus our power and talents to a precise point thereby creating something lovely and novel. [Cladis 1999:13]

A "problem" that occurred in the case of black female athletes, however, was that as athletic department staff acted as agents for the process of transforming black female athletes, they operated with assumptions that were based in racialized expectations of behavior. These assumptions translated to greater surveillance of black female athletes than others, and diminished opportunities for black female athletes to exercise autonomy in decision making and in establishing their hourly and daily

schedules. I put the word "problem" in quotes because this greater surveillance also contributed to graduation rates among black female student athletes that often surpassed those of the nonathlete black students and the student community as a whole.

My approach to this analysis is ethnographic, and informed by relationships with black and nonblack male and female athletes in different contexts over several years at Midwestern University. Several of these relationships are best characterized as that between a researcher and subjects. In other instances, I was first a fellow student, tutor, mentor, classroom instructor, or friend, and only later took on the role of researcher. The variety of roles I occupied vis-à-vis the subjects of my study complicated, but also added insight to my work. In many ways, I was a willing participant in the very processes that shaped students' development and that I describe and critique in this article. Data for this article were gathered between 1999 and 2001 and included open-ended interviews, participant observation in the academic affairs office of the women's athletic program, and ongoing interaction with black and nonblack male and female athletes, tutors, mentors, counselors, and with two associate athletic directors. Finally, in terms of background and initial interest in the intellectual life of student athletes, my work bears the influence of my experiences as an intercollegiate athlete on a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I wrestling team, and my experiences with three younger siblings who were also intercollegiate athletes.

During the 2000–01 academic year, the MU women's athletic program included 211 female student athletes on the rosters of nine intercollegiate athletic teams. Of the 211 female student athletes, 28 were black. With the exception of two black swimmers, all of the black female athletes were either on the track or the basketball team. I worked most closely with the 14 black women on the 28-member track team. I interacted with student athletes in several areas, including the Bell Academic Center for Student Athletes (BAC), the Bell Field House and the Crimson Cafeteria. All statistical information for this article came from the university's institutional research office, the athletic department's sports information office, or the NCAA. The names of individuals, the university, and campus facilities in this article are pseudonyms.

Race and the MU Women's Athletic Program

The Midwestern women's athletic program has consistently yielded tangible and widely acknowledged positive results in student athletes' lives. The program has routinely fielded nationally competitive sports teams and boasted higher graduation rates than most other units on campus. According to the sports information office, the program has produced over 1,500 all-Americans and 22 Olympic medalists since 1979. Through the 1990s, the graduation rate was often higher than 90 percent. These high graduation rates among the female student athletes

held across races, and in some years were higher for black female athletes than for nonblacks.

Under the leadership of the women's athletic director and the women's associate athletic director for student affairs, the women's program has developed into a comprehensive structure that molds female student athletes into a specific ideal of young women as high-achievers and role models across intellectual, athletic, and civic realms. This structure has combined academic and personal support with surveillance, the rigid structuring of female athletes' day-to-day lives, and a physical plant that facilitates this support, surveillance, and structuring. Through this structure, black female student athletes' athletic potentials, as well as their grade point averages (GPAs), have been maximized, a result that stands in contrast to those university athletic programs that develop African Americans' athletic abilities to the exclusion of their academic development (Siegel 1994; Spigner 1993). The program ideal of producing success across realms that are otherwise assumed to be mutually exclusive has undermined the "tyranny of talent" so common in athletics, whereby one set of skills in talented young people is developed to the exclusion of development in other areas (Gardner 1961:75).

In terms of race, this process also reflects the influence of preconceived notions and generalizations about black female athletes. During my work with women's athletics, staff members routinely ascribed black student athletes with a racial identity that characterized them as immature, academically deficient, and sexually overactive. Like many other students, many black female athletes came to campus with poor academic skills and with social skills that were not appropriate to the college environment. But others arrived with strong academic backgrounds, well-developed social skills, and advanced academic standing as a result of college credit earned during high school. In either case, as staff protected and guided students' development, they deprived them of privacy and promoted their dependence on the athletic department structure. Black student athletes were taught to rely on the athletic department structure for everything from coaching and training to housing, dining hall arrangements, class scheduling, tutoring, academic advising, and personal and professional development. Such protection and guidance were also present among nonblack female athletes, but were more pressing for black women and reflected staff members' assumptions about black student athletes. In short, life within the athletic department facilitated black women's on- and off-the-field success according to the measures of championships won and graduation rates, but denied them autonomy and opportunities to make decisions (and mistakes) for themselves.

The following section describes key aspects of the structure within which black female athletes operated, as well as its effect on them. The section is heavily descriptive and provides necessary context for considering the circumstances of black female student athletes. This analysis

contributes to educational anthropology, educational research, and social science generally by participating in the Foucauldian project of "generating detailed descriptions of social institutions that require reform" (Cladis 1999:13). Such analyses include addressing the specificity of the mechanisms of power, locating the connections and extensions, and building a strategic knowledge (Foucault 1980:145). The goal is to make "visible the unseen," to "address oneself to a layer of material which . . . hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic, political or historical value" (1980:59).

Following the description of facilities and the methods of control produced therein, the next section uses the stories of black female student athletes to discuss how they were subjected to departmental control on the basis of their assumed racially based deficiencies. As black women spoke of their collegiate experiences, they also demonstrated the extent to which they had internalized the norms and values expected of MU student athletes. The final section offers my conclusion. In it, I acknowledge the restrictive nature of the athletic program panopticon, but reiterate my sense that the discipline and constraints imposed on MU's black female athletes produce not subjugated bodies, as Foucault would argue, but rather bodies that are perfected according to standards that include degree attainment and athletic achievement. This conclusion, which has implications for educational practice and the design of educational structures both within and beyond women's athletic programs, is based largely on the extraordinary levels of success the participants realize, especially when contrasted with the consistently lower level of academic success among female nonathletes on campus. The reform I recommend speaks to the need to eliminate the tendency to categorize black athletes as similarly deficient in academic and social arenas. Such an effort would not produce much change in the surveillance of black female athletes. It would, rather, impose the program's strict control and surveillance more evenly, thus more broadly reproducing the academic and athletic success rates that are already present among MU's black female athletes, while simultaneously undermining racial divisions, racial stereotypes and cross-racial misunderstandings within the department.

Athletic Department Academic Facilities: An Architecture of Control

A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen . . . or to observe the external space, . . . but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control—to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. [Foucault 1979:172]

In order to discuss the academic values among the black female athletes while also illuminating the process by which these values were instilled, it is necessary to understand the structure and function of the facilities within which they spent much of their time. These facilities served multiple functions. They provided basic services for athletes, isolated them from the rest of campus, and facilitated the surveillance and control of their activities. As it isolated and protected student athletes, the athletic program provided a rigid and highly structured experience that was barely comparable to that which nonathletes experienced. In all the ways described above, the department was a panopticon—"an ensemble of mechanisms brought into play in all the clusters of procedures used by power," including the permanent surveillance of a group of individuals through a generalized set of procedures (Foucault 1980:71).

The Bell Academic Center was at the heart of the ensemble of mechanisms that ensured student athletes' constant surveillance. Located in the football stadium, the BAC was part of a self-contained set of facilities that included weight rooms, practice fields, training rooms, academic centers, and athletic department offices. Passing through a set of oak doors into the BAC, the hallway tile gave way to a hardwood floor and an elegantly appointed waiting area complete with richly colored carpeting, leather couches, a wooden coffee table, and bookshelves that covered the walls from floor to ceiling. This room accommodated athletes and tutors waiting to meet. Along the corridor past the waiting area, a large window looked in on a computer lab.

Past the computer lab was a long hallway carpeted with school colors. A row of small, windowed meeting rooms lined the corridor. Each room was similarly furnished—two to three chairs, a table, and a white board. The windows of each room were one-way mirrors. Instead of being mirrored on the outside, however, so that students and tutors would have privacy during their sessions, they were mirrored on the inside. The effect of this architectural arrangement surpassed the mere elimination of privacy. It also did more than simply facilitate good behavior, which in this case meant focusing on specific study tasks. The most profound importance of the BAC design was that it led to the internalization of good behavior as each student's "normal" way to be while in the BAC. With this design, a single staff member could monitor a large number of students without their knowing when, if, or by whom they were being observed. The invisibility of department staff, coupled with the permanent visibility of the student athlete, was a guarantee of order (Foucault 1979:200). According to Foucault, "she who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; . . . [s]he becomes the principle of [her] own subjection" (1979:202–203).

While the consolidated study area contributed to their internalization of proscribed behaviors, it also served the more transparent function of facilitating academic support. The comfortable and well-designed study

setting took away student excuses. Gone were the days when an athlete could say that she and her tutor somehow missed each other at the library or some other facility where they had planned to meet. They now not only had a place to meet, but the meeting place was conveniently located in the heart of the sports facilities. There was even a receptionist who checked students in so that it was almost impossible for students and tutors to miss each other as long as both showed up. Finally, athletes who missed scheduled tutoring sessions and did not call the tutor to give 24 hours notice of the cancellation were billed \$15 for their tutor's time, thus adding a quantifiable punitive dimension to the program's methods for encouraging behavior that was conducive to academic success.

All tutoring took place in the BAC. Female student athletes were required to attend so many hours of tutoring and study hall per week, as determined by their coaches, academic counselor, and mentor. On entering the BAC, athletes handed their student identification cards to a receptionist. The cards were swiped through a bar code reader, their entry time recorded, their cards filed in a card box. The identification cards were swiped again and given back when they left. Academic counselors accessed the Center's computer logs to check whether their students were in or not and how many hours they had spent in the study center over any given time period. By requiring athletes to spend up to 20 hours per week in the academic center, coaches and counselors placed athletes in a space where they controlled and limited their outside activities, as well as their interactions with nonathletes. Through this array of mechanisms, students were systematically tracked, constrained, and marked for reward or punishment in an integrated accounting of individual records (Foucault 1980:71).

Another function of the BAC was to structure, contain, and allow maximum oversight for some of the most important interactions in athletes' academic lives—namely, those with the hired tutors and mentors. The mentors monitored athletes' academic performance, study habits, time management, and overall mood, and provided guidance to them in the academic areas of their lives. Mentors were usually graduate students who had a specific interest in (if not passion for) promoting the academic success of the student athletes with whom they worked. Meanwhile, tutors provided academic support for students with a wide range of academic proficiencies, including several who were ill-prepared for the academic rigor of college but were admitted because of their athletic prowess. Tutors also were largely drawn from the graduate student population. However, their commitment to the students did not need to be as great as that of the mentors in order for the tutors to perform their jobs effectively. Their job was focused on a particular academic skill or subject instead of particular students, and several had little interest in the students' lives outside of the particular class for which they were tutoring. Even in these circumstances, the tutors were largely

effective, delivering a valuable service to even the strongest students. For academically weaker students, the tutors helped with the basics of a subject or at least helped them to receive passing grades. For academically stronger students, tutoring compensated for time-consuming training and competition schedules. Tutoring provided focused and structured time to get in as much academic work as possible between travel, injury rehabilitation, competition, and other constraints that forced athletes to miss class often and limited (or eliminated) their ability to participate in outside study groups.

Viewed in the dehumanizing but apt sense of being constituent components of an integrated structure, the athletic department staff—the tutors, mentors, coaches, and counselors—along with nutritionists, strength coaches, physical therapists, and trainers, were part of a thorough, unacknowledged, and complex disciplinary apparatus. This apparatus incorporated personnel into a defined structural space dominated by its architecture and characterized by its surveillance function. This structural space housed the administrative functions of management (counselors and athletic directors), the policing functions of surveillance, and the economic functions of control and checking (Foucault 1979:173). In so doing, it also served what Foucault called the “religious functions of encouraging obedience and work” (1979:173).

Among both athletes and staff, the need for this structure was a self-evident reality given the tremendous time pressures the athletes faced as well as the dual responsibilities they held to be academically and athletically successful. Of course, most of the time constraints originated from the athletic program, whether in the form of travel and competition, physical therapy sessions, study hall, tutoring, mentoring, media-related activities or service projects. Still, the theme of “great responsibilities and little time” allowed for, justified, and ultimately naturalized the need for counselors and coaches to assume strict control over athletes. The provision of high-quality academic support resources was in itself an effective means of control.

High quality academic support is as unexpected a means of control as it is effective, so the power dynamic at play was consistently obscured. This is not to say that athletes did not complain about a lack of freedom, but they most often did so as a child might grumble about being required to spend so many hours on their homework each night. They viewed the constraints as unpleasant, but did not question that they were for their own good. For instance, most student athletes did not see being required to attend tutoring at the BAC as oppressive or controlling. Rather, they recognized free tutoring as a privilege. To the extent that they acknowledged the limitations placed on their daily movements and activities, most associated these limitations with the nature of college athletics. They did not actively think about the idea that they operated within a system specially designed to regulate all aspects of their lives so as to ensure optimal athletic performance as well as academic

eligibility to compete. As we shall see, those who did operate with an awareness asserted that the rewards outweighed the sacrifices.

To most student athletes, it was common sense that if they were to meet someone for tutoring, they should go to the BAC. The central organization made life easier. Moreover, when they went to the academic center to study, they were going to a place where their teammates, as well as athletes from other sports, were gathered. During mandatory study halls, student athletes tapped on the glass of rooms where friends were being tutored and stopped to gossip during breaks. Some congregated in the computer area, running up the number of hours they recorded in the BAC so that they could claim that they had spent a lot of time studying. All of the studying, and the attendant games, however, took place in a highly structured environment.

At night, after track, basketball, volleyball, and other team practices, the BAC was especially active. It overflowed with students and tutors who took up all the available computers and tutoring rooms and spilled out into a large open area that on football game days was used for alumni parties. In addition, mentors met with students in the Centennial Room, a comfortable room that overlooked the football field. In short, the BAC and its overflow areas were key spaces in the lives of student athletes. They facilitated interaction among athletes to the exclusion of association with nonathletes, and they helped the athletic program staff to keep close tabs on student athletes' movements, activities, and even friendships and romantic relationships.

I have mentioned that to understand the circumstances of the black female athlete on campus it is necessary to look at the circumstances of MU athletes generally and recognize that they occupied a space and lived within circumstances that were barely comparable to those of nonathletes. They were a well conditioned, hard-working competitive elite who operated under a different set of circumstances than those of other students. Other than when attending classes, training, or sleeping, most student athletes spent their time within the collection of facilities described above, isolated from the rest of the student population. In season, student athletes lived according to guidelines whereby meals, study halls, tutoring sessions, weight lifting, injury rehabilitation, classes, practice times, and sleep were built into an hour-by-hour daily schedule. In the women's program, daily planners for athletes were standard issue.

Even out of season, schedules were structured. Both the women's basketball and track coaches, for instance, ensured that their athletes lifted weights and practiced as many hours as the NCAA allowed during the off-season for their specific sport. Meanwhile, the academic counselors continued to require tutoring, study halls, meetings, and participation in life skills development activities of each athlete. Athletes' conceptions of academic success and their strategies to achieve it were forged within the context of this array of activities. This held for male athletes for

whom maintaining eligibility was often the ultimate academic goal, and among females for whom graduation was just a step in their career paths.

As a result of their highly structured existence, many student athletes found that their understandings and expectations of school and social life, developed in the context of life dedicated to sports excellence, were so different from those of nonathletes that they had little in common with other students. Moreover, they had little time to even explore the possibility of commonalities with nonathletes. But despite occasional expressions of resentment about the control, as athletes strove for national or world dominance in their sports, they understood that even minor deviation from strict regimens could mean personal, athletic, and academic disaster. Without strict scheduling they would have had no time to do all the things required of them as students, athletes, and (depending on the sport) high profile role models.

Finally, in those instances where compliance to the athletic department structure was resisted, complaints and undesired behaviors were mediated by threats. Noncompliant athletes were routinely told that some or all of their scholarship money could be taken away from them at any time if they misbehaved. One black female athlete shared that, "They won't take scholarships away for poor performance on the field, but they will for bad grades or if you just mess up in your life." Many black female athletes spoke of how they were watched and controlled and how this scrutiny was not placed so heavily on any other group. Ultimately, according to black female athletes, failure to behave in a certain manner could affect their scholarships. Moreover, although the threat presumably held for all student athletes, it was black women who expressed feeling pressure to behave in a certain manner lest they be punished. White women with whom I talked did not share black women's complaints, nor did they express the same fear of punishment for inappropriate behavior. One reason that they did not fear punishment was because it was not exerted on them as it was on the black women. This circumstance created greater autonomy for white females, but also contributed to their underperformance relative to black female athletes. In the next section I address the program's treatment of and approach to black female athletes.

The Racialization of Black Female Student Athletes

During my fieldwork, the athletic component of black student athletes' experiences was the primary structuring force in their lives. Within that reality, race and gender also were important, shaping the experiences of black athletes within the athletic department. For the remainder of this article, I will focus on examples from women's track and field. The team provides an apt example of the issues of race, gender, and academic socialization that were common throughout the department and among the black athletes on the women's teams.

Racializing Norms and Values

Racialization in women's track and field was reinforced in a variety of ways. For instance, the head coach, who was black, encouraged her athletes to dress well for classes and to handle themselves in a socially conservative manner. She was also the sprinter coach and coached the majority of the black women on the team. Thus, her influence was more strongly felt among this all black group. The result was a group of well dressed professional women, from a variety of social class backgrounds, who were all black and who stood out against the more casually dressed female athletes walking around the department, almost all of whom were white. In addition, black female athletes were placed together as roommates, lived on the same dorm halls, ate together and shared rooms on the road. In these settings, they passed on values to one another—values that *may or may not* have been racial in nature, but that were passed on in a racialized milieu and thus bore a mark of being distinctly "black" ways of looking at things.

One of the lessons older black members of the track team shared with freshman and transfers was that the best way to get academic counselors "off your back" and to secure free time was to perform well academically and to conform to the behaviors that the counselors and coaches advocated. Their assumption was that this advice was more important for other black women because it would be more of an issue in their lives than it would be for the other women, especially the white women. An effect of this advice was that the possibility of relief from scrutiny became a motivating factor encouraging black student athletes to value high grades, conformity, and academic success.

Within the athletic department, a wide range of athletes' behaviors were routinely generalized and attributed to race. Most notably, their lives as competitive performers, their personal lives, and their academic lives were often reduced to caricatures by coaches, trainers, reporters, nonathlete students, and even one another. Within the department, athletes were often treated according to an informal but routinely applied formula of "how we deal with the sprinters" (all of whom were black) or "how we deal with our swimmers" (the overwhelming majority of whom were white). Coaches, advisors, and others routinely prejudged how student athletes were likely to perform as students according to their ascribed racial identity. Comments from counselors such as, "She is a swimmer so you won't have to worry about her," were common and contrasted with the assumptions about deficiencies in the academic preparedness or social mores of the black female track athletes.

Even within the athletic program, where the development of relationships among athletes from different backgrounds undermined stereotypes, race was an important component in the way the black women were perceived and treated. For instance, in separate conversations with each of the three academic counselors on the women's department staff (two black women, one white woman), one was quick to explain the

need to “protect these [black] girls from themselves sometimes.” Another offered a similar sentiment, but described their practices as simply insuring that the women had “matured” before relaxing the restrictions and surveillance of their lives. These perspectives were consistent regardless of the race of the counselor.

Racializing Athletic Performance

The most prominent area of track athletes’ racialization occurred on the field of competition and was manifest as a difference in who competed in which event. At MU (as with U.S. track and field generally), the sprinters were black, whereas most distance runners were white. Moreover, members of the team referred to themselves as if there were two distinct teams, the track team and the cross-country team. The teams cheered each other on at meets, but tension erupted in unexpected places and times.

A conversation with one black female track athlete provided a window to the issues of race within the athletic department.

La’Keita: I remember last year we wanted to get [the track and field] coach a gift for her birthday. I couldn’t understand why we were getting her two gifts. The cross-country girls were going to get her one and we [the track women] would get her one. I just didn’t understand why we didn’t pool together and get one gift. I mean it just makes sense. And it is less money. But everybody made a big thing about it. They said that is the way it was always done. When coach heard about the arguments, she just told everybody to forget it, she didn’t even want a gift. She was really upset.

Kevin Foster: Is “cross-country” another way of saying white, and “track” a way of saying black?

L: Well, we don’t necessarily think about it like that, but basically yes. I have a little different perspective, though, because last year I ran the quarter on the distance medley team. The other three girls were white. We had dinner together to get to know each other and they said they were just uncomfortable around us [black women on the track team]. I know how they feel. And it is just crazy because it goes both ways. I know a black distance runner last year who actually quit—she turned in her scholarship because she said she didn’t feel like she fit in with them. But then again, we’ll do the exact same thing to some of them.

KF: So that line is never crossed?

L: Well, no . . . I mean, like there is one girl. She is Hispanic, but down with us. See but she represents [presents herself in an exemplary manner]. She placed second at nationals last year, so you can’t touch her.

KF: So performance in competition is important?

- L: Hell yeah, I mean that is the thing. You can't talk to us [black/track women] because at the meets we score all the points. It drives them [white/cross-country runners] crazy. They can't stand it.

Conversations with other runners amplified many of the themes present in conversations with La'Keita. Especially notable was the separation of blacks and whites within an integrated team. Not only were track and cross-country separated by black-white racial identity, but the dividing line was well established. The line between track (black) and cross-country (white) was the 800-meter race. A short race for distance runners and a long race for sprinters, the 800 was popular among neither group. Often, runners had to be placed into the 800 by coaches because the awkward distance strained the training habits of both sprinters and distance runners. In a sport where racial lines are masked in terms of distance and event, the ambivalence toward running the 800 was symbolic of deeper issues.

Racializing Sexuality

The racialization of athletic performance reinforced racial grouping among athletes and facilitated the racialization of other aspects of their lives, including perceptions about their sexuality. The track women were physically fit and had physical attributes that made them sexually desirable among black males and others. At least one had modeled professionally, and all were subject to the presence of old-fashioned myths about the hyper-sensual and oversexed black woman (White 1985). Taken together, these factors contributed to a mystique about those whom one football player referred to as "those fine track girls."

It should also be noted that some track women publicly played into expectations about their sexuality rather than deny them. Possibly in order to counter perceived stereotypes about female athletes as manly or lesbian (Menesson 2000), they put forth a "jezebel" image that was expressed through dress, discourse, and action, and that may or may not have been reflected in their private behaviors. For some, their public behaviors included associating with high-profile male athletes who were generally assumed to be sexually promiscuous (as opposed to shunning them as their counselors advocated), carrying their books in Victoria's Secret bags instead of backpacks, or simply speaking openly about themselves as attractive and sexual women.

Expressing confidence through open declarations of their heterosexuality was only one of the areas beyond athletics where many of the black track athletes expressed a confidence based in a racialized sense of identity. La'Keita was typical of the track women. She was attractive and said that because of her looks, her brain, and her speed, she knew she was going to be successful in life. She was raised by her mother and lived and attended school in a high poverty section of the largest city in the state,

but also knew that "some people think I am fine" and expressed no doubts regarding her future success. Her attitude mirrored that of her black peers on the track team and fit a stereotype of MU female track athletes that is reminiscent of the black superwoman described by Michelle Wallace (1979), and that is the opposite of the raceless black student (Fordham 1988) who succeeds by disassociating herself from a black racial identity. La'Keita's testimony also lent credence to research that points to women's athletics as sites of empowerment and upward mobility (Downing 2000; Lee 2000).

Consistent with the dilemmas of black womanhood described by Wallace, black female runners were desired among black nonathletes and black male athletes alike as attractive and "together," but also described by these same black males as "stuck up," "uppity" or women who "think they are all that." Such negative comments about female athletes generally, and about black female athletes in particular, came out in classroom discussions in my Race and Sports in African American Life class, as well as in one-on-one and group conversations with members of the MU men's basketball and football teams. Even given the negative comments, however, the women remained desired, and during the time I worked with the black female athletes, all of the track women who had publicly acknowledged boyfriends were dated by black male football players, the highest status group of black males on campus.

Whereas black males across the MU campus simultaneously loathed and lusted over black female athletes, academic counselors acted out of concern for their gynecological health and personal safety, but also on a perception of the women's hypersexuality. In this area, the academic counselors in women's athletics approached the female student athletes from a standpoint of concern and a desire to protect. As one academic counselor explained, "Our girls are very attractive and extremely vulnerable." Her concerns were reflected in her actions, specifically in instances where she limited female athletes' contact with anyone outside the circle of people whom department staff knew and could (to some extent) control. She provided an example of finding a new apartment for a female athlete and relocating her because an ex-boyfriend was harassing her. She went on to state that:

We will move a girl if she is being harassed, set her up with an unlisted number and do whatever it takes. But this is our responsibility. We spend all this time publicizing them. We write bios about them, print up glossy press guides and give them to anyone who asks for them. You can go next door [to the media relations office] and learn about their home town, background, whatever is in there. And then you can go on the web and look up their number and address. As students, that is all listed. So we have to take extra care.

Academic counselors' desire to protect extended well beyond academic concerns. Some black runners felt that this phenomenon had a

strong racial component. Indeed, counselors had an idea that they were not only protecting the women from outsiders but also protecting the women from themselves. Some staff spoke of unstable home lives and other aspects of runners' precollegiate backgrounds as important considerations in understanding their behavior. This was the case for one runner whose father was known to be emotionally abusive and whose classroom inconsistencies and underperformance on the track were attributed to home-life circumstances. Fueled by such examples, ideas of the fragile black student and of the damaged black community from which they were assumed to have come influenced staff dealings with black athletes, just as images of black pathology have influenced American social policy from even before the time of the infamous Moynihan report on the black family (Moynihan 1965; Scott 1997).

Despite studies that have shown that athletic participation leads to reduced sexual risk-taking behaviors among women (Savage and Holcomb 1999), black female athletes were viewed as needing considerable guidance and shepherding, lest they, as one counselor put it, "get mixed up with the wrong guy, and even get pregnant and drop out." Accordingly, the counselors felt that it was important to keep close tabs on their girls and had no problem calling dorm rooms and apartments at 1:30 a.m. or 7 a.m. to ensure that students were not, as one counselor put it, "out sleeping around." Moreover, and as both a junior year athlete and an athletic department staff member mentioned in separate conversations, the issue was not just academic performance, but conformity and attitude. The staff member was quite clear when she offered that:

Some of these girls just don't get it. Like Shaumi. She thinks she shouldn't be in study hall this semester because she got good grades in the fall. But it is not about their GPA. It is about their maturity and their attitude.

Indeed, Shaumi had consistently demonstrated academic strength. She was in the National Honor Society in high school and graduated with high honors. In college she was maintaining a 3.3 cumulative GPA, and over the three semesters in which we spoke most often, her stated goal was always to earn a 4.0 for the semester. Although I was not privy to all aspects of the counselor-student athlete relationship, it appeared that Shaumi's mandatory study hall hours were the result of her refusal to act with deference to her counselor and other program staff, along with sprinter identity. Although she was well liked and her intelligence acknowledged by staff, she was viewed as lacking maturity and, therefore, still in need of departmental guidance. As older (junior, senior, and fifth-year) and younger (freshman and sophomore) black female athletes seemed to realize, and as athletic department staff acknowledged, grades were only part of the picture. When it came to enjoying increased freedom from study hall and mentoring, conformity—in the hegemonic sense of accepting and internalizing the program staff's moral leadership and guidance—was critical (Femia 1981; Gramsci 1971).

Accepting and Internalizing Racialized Control

Even as they acknowledged the strict guidelines governing their lives, some black track athletes said that they were not bothered this. Rather, they accepted them as part of the price of their success. Moreover, and as Nilda Flores-González (1999) analogously found in her exploration of ethnic identity among high-achieving Puerto Rican students, most black female athletes viewed comportment and the pursuit of academic excellence as consistent with a black racial identity (see also Hemmings 1996; Mehan et al. 1994). The exception was a Canadian-West Indian athlete who was a recent graduate of MU. She shared John Ogbu's (1990) long-standing opinion and John McWhorter's (2000) more recent opinion about the destructive, anti-intellectual behavior of U.S.-born blacks, and expressed the desire to distance herself from them. In her opinion, "going along with the program" was easy for her, but difficult for U.S.-born blacks.

Although minor expressions of resistance were apparent in conversations with the black female athletes, they seemed to be little more than coping mechanisms for dealing in a controlling environment. For instance, Nikki, a junior and a short hurdler, and Tamara, a freshman who ran the 100-meters, shared a similar approach to their participation in the nonathletic side of the program. Both said that although they often complained, their complaints were part of an ongoing game with their mentors and counselors. In explaining why she stopped playing soccer and only ran track, Tamara shared that she wanted to compete in both sports, but that "they have me on this lockdown thing; when they pay your way [via full scholarship] that's how it is; they control you." Even as she explained this, however, she wore a disarming smile, and to further tone down her rhetoric followed her initial statement by volunteering that, "Oh, I just like to complain, they know that; but really it's all for my own good so it is no big deal." I could not tell if her follow-up comments were self-protection (in case I was to share her views with her counselor) or if she was unreflectively voicing her opinions. Either way, the mantra that "it's all for my own good so it is no big deal" was both a tacit admission of the stringent control placed on these black women's lives as well as a coping mechanism. It also provided evidence of athletes' internalization of the norms and values expected of them as MU student athletes.

Nikki had also accepted the controls of the department and conformed to the norms promoted therein. In our conversations she explained that those who were rebellious and complained would, as they matured, come to understand the benefits of the program to their academic and athletic success. As an older and respected teammate who was a three-time All-American and one-time national champion, her attitude was likely to influence teammates who sought to achieve the goals she had already attained. One conversation about her counselors'

involvement in her personal life captured her view of the athletic department's strict controls.

First of all, if I hadn't messed up last year [academically], my schedule would be a lot easier. If you get good grades and stay out of trouble, they leave you alone. I go to all these tutors and have this schedule because last year my grades slipped. Plus I ran into some [personal] stuff my freshman year that really was a mess. So other girls don't necessarily have such strict schedules. But girls that do, and that complain—they just haven't figured it out yet. I used to rebel too. But even though I still complain, now I understand that it is for my own good.

Even here, grades were not the only issue that determined how much tutoring and mentoring Nikki received. She freely acknowledged that along with her grades, incidents in her personal life also were a factor in the determination of her mandatory hours. As it turned out, the trauma associated with the "stuff" Nikki dealt with during her freshman year heavily influenced her perspective so that she became more accepting of the program's controls. Still, over the course of many conversations, I met no black female athletes who fit her description of the black female athlete who was left alone. Even those who came to MU with almost perfect GPAs complained that they were being too closely monitored. Shaumi expressed the belief that they were waiting for her to mess up so that they would then have an excuse to watch her even more closely. The resounding sentiment among black female athletes was that the athletic department was always "in our business" and always looking for excuses to exercise control.

Clearly, the tutoring and mentoring that took up so much of student athletes' time served additional purposes beyond academic support as strictly defined. First, it was a monitoring mechanism, as the earlier description of facilities makes clear. For those with 20 weekly hours of study hall, there were almost no times during the week when they were not subject to the gaze of the program. Between eating in the athletes' dining hall, sleeping in a dorm room shared by a teammate, practicing each day, and attending class and study hall, the only moment relatively free from interaction with some aspect of the program was the time in class. But even here, student athletes were required to sign a form each week stating that they did not miss any classes, or if they did, explaining why. All student athletes were subject to the program gaze; for those placed in mandatory study hall, this gaze was maximized.

In addition to serving as a monitoring mechanism, study hall was a means of discipline and control. The gaze on the student athletes was virtually complete because nearly every waking hour was accounted for. As a result, there was little opportunity for unapproved activities (control). In addition, study hall was part of an implicit system of rewards and punishments (discipline). The threat of yet more study hall hours and the promise of relief from mandatory study hall promoted

student athletes' conformity to what counselors and coaches deemed appropriate behavior. Given the elaborate gaze of the program, coupled with the athletes' training and expertise that facilitated their on the field success, another way to understand their situation is through Foucault's language of subjugation through discipline.

Thus discipline produces subjugated and practised bodies, "docile" bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in terms of economic utility) and diminishes these same forces (in terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand it turns it into an "aptitude," a "capacity," which it seeks to increase; on the other hand it reverses the course of energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjugation. [Foucault 1979:138]

Almost all of the women I spoke to were successful as students and athletes, their athletic and academic potentials seemingly maximized. The process by which this occurred, however, was one of subjugation of the athletes to the program's dictates and rules, which in turn led to their internalization of the norms and values associated with those dictates and rules. And even as they complained about the strict controls placed over their lives, most were also clear to state that a great deal of their success came from the very same controls that they so often complained about. The only students who did not offer caveats of reluctant acceptance of their lives under the gaze were freshmen—the implication being that given time, even these students would come to accept the control of their lives as a necessary ingredient for the success they hoped to achieve.

Several realities eased black female track athletes' acceptance of the racialized control over their lives. First (and largely because the head coach was also the sprint coach), the black runners won more individual national championships, and became all-Americans more often than did their white teammates. Second, as a result of their success, the team as a whole won national championships. Third, black runners routinely graduated. As a reflection of their superior athletic performance, black sprinters' perceived themselves to be in a different class, and operating in a different situation than their white teammates. Few questioned the differences in treatment between the white and black runners. Even the white athletes accepted the differential treatment and mistakenly saw it as performance based. In effect, those athletes with higher achievements faced stricter scrutiny in all aspects of their lives, but instead of seeing this as a racial dynamic and a point of contention, they saw it as a factor in their success. This nuance brings to mind Foucault's additional comment that "disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination" (1979:138).

How this fits in with academics is not complicated. Black female athletes were dominated by a support structure that featured barely acknowledged, but abundantly present, racial and sexual components.

The attention they received reached all aspects of their lives and could at times be smothering and frustrating. They faced expectations from coaches, nonathlete students, faculty, and media about their athletic performance, their academic responsibilities, and even about their romantic relationships. To be sure, there was a significant extent to which female athletes of all races faced controls placed on their lives. These controls reflected an interest within the women's program to produce well-rounded, role model student athletes. And in the end, female athletes generally developed norms and expectations that were oriented toward success across a range of areas that prominently included academics.

For black female athletes, however, the controls were more tightly applied. This point was driven home to me during my data collection when white female athletes had fewer and less dramatic stories of the controls placed over their lives and expressed shock at the stories of control gathered from black interviewees. For instance, when I asked one white respondent if the department was controlling, she responded, "Yeah, they are always making me come in for tutoring." But when I followed up by asking about the hours she spent with tutors, she explained that the number of hours changed from week to week because her study hours were voluntary. Those white respondents who did report mandatory hours, reported spending up to 12 hours per week in study hall. By contrast, *every* full-time black female athlete I interviewed spent mandatory hours each week with tutors and mentors. Some spent as few as eight hours per week in study hall, but most spent between 16 and 20 hours per week.

Similarly, when I asked white female athletes if the counselors checked in on them, they most often stated that they checked in with their counselor every week. By contrast, black athletes told not simply of checking in, but of being required to do so. In separate conversations, black female athletes told me stories of late night calls to their dorm rooms from counselors who wanted to ensure that they were "not out messing around." No white athletes shared such stories. After collecting three separate stories of late night or early morning calls from counselors to student athletes, I shared one with a white athlete. Her response was disbelief and shock that such intrusive monitoring would take place. She also stated that such calls to her room would be inappropriate and unacceptable. In some cases, the involvement of counselors and coaches in black student athletes' lives also included ongoing interaction with the women's parents. Again, although I did not speak to as many white female athletes as black, I encountered no white athletes who knew of ongoing contact between their coaches and counselors and their parents.

Because of the control over their lives, black female athletes were successful across such areas as athletics, academics, career preparation, and learning to feel comfortable and competent in a broad range of social and professional settings. The statement of one sprinter that "I know I will have to work hard, but I know I will make it," was widely held

among these black women and held for “making it” athletically, academically and professionally. This attitude of success across a wide range of arenas was reinforced throughout black runners’ competitive lives. In appearance and demeanor, they forged high standards among one another by ridiculing white students who did not wear dress slacks or skirts to class. In academics, they learned that they had a choice between adopting a serious approach or facing hours and hours of mandatory study halls each week, as well as heavy scrutiny in all areas of their lives. Moreover, women who refused to conform to a serious approach to academics were understood to be breaking agreements with their coaches, and were likely to find their scholarships in jeopardy, *regardless of their athletic performance*. Likewise, women who refused to accept the guidance of counselors would face similar reprisals when word got back to coaches that they were uncooperative. Finally, black women who refused to embody an attitude of self-improvement were mocked by fellow black athletes for not valuing themselves highly enough.

Out of this control, and due to the sense of identity they were taught through participation in the women’s athletic program, black female athletes emerged as academically and athletically successful women. And although that control, as well as black female athletes’ hard work, high expectations, and dedication were indisputable, so was the knowledge that the overwhelming majority would graduate, regardless of their precollegiate academic training.

Conclusion

This article has used the tools of educational anthropology to illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of what I will call panopticonics—the purposeful application of surveillance, control, and discipline to the development and maintenance of effective educational structures. I have analyzed a specific power structure, not for the purpose of undermining that structure, but so that its precepts may be understood and applied in ways that produce desired educational and developmental outcomes with minimal negative consequences.

Questions may arise as to whether panopticonics would not be inherently coercive to the point of being tyrannical. To such questions I would answer in the negative. In the MU case, individual participants were free to quit or transfer if they did not like the program. At worst, they would have then had to rely on financial aid instead of a scholarship to fund their education, a circumstance that would be unpleasant but nonetheless common among college students today across racial and socioeconomic strata. I grant that this logic may seem harsh. Although it acquiesces to the inevitably exploitative logic inherent in much of American social and economic life, it also recognizes the efficacy of an educational structure that instills in young women the discipline and mentality necessary to overcome the obstacles they may face. At MU, the structure in place in women’s athletics yielded results that stood in favorable contrast

to those realized among female college students generally. Moreover, the establishment and strict enforcement of rigid behavioral guidelines is consistent with successful black education in segregated, pre-Civil Rights America (Banks 1997; Perry 2003; Shaw 1996). Such rigidly enforced behavioral guidelines proved as effective in women's athletics as they had for the education and ascendance of those black women and men who grew up in an openly racist America, and went on to lead the Civil Rights movement, pioneer academic disciplines, and even sit on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In offering that the program was coercive but not tyrannical I also recognize that program guidelines were at times difficult for athletes to accept and live by. But the guidelines were purposefully created and implemented, and proved effective. Student athletes and program staff both expected student athletes to achieve success. The difference was that although program staff had a well developed, institutionally based sense of what constituted success and how to achieve it, student athletes did not possess a sophisticated blue print for success, although they may have had an idea of what success they hoped to achieve. An important aspect of the program's operations, then, was that it shaped student athletes' approaches to and conceptions of success even as it helped them to achieve it. For many strong-willed young student athletes, being subject to such an effective and powerful force felt smothering, even if in the final analysis they expressed acceptance—or even gratitude—for the program's stringent design.

Although the program I observed and participated in was not tyrannical, the model it offers would benefit from minor, but critical, modifications. In the case of MU women's athletics, the racialization of student athletes contributed to performance differences among students classified by race. As black athletes were subject to stricter scrutiny, surveillance, and scheduling, their internalization of norms and values that were conducive to their success was overdetermined to a greater extent than it was for white athletes. As a result, they experienced greater success than their nonblack peers, creating an instance where Foucauldian control benefited members of the group that was most fully subject to its disciplinary and surveillance apparatus. But the surprising outcome does not justify maintenance of those aspects of the program structure that were racially problematic. Unpleasant though the idea may be to those who favor a more *laissez-faire* approach to education, appropriate adjustments would in this case mean subjecting all student athletes equally to strict scrutiny and control.

Other than advocating internal reforms to eliminate racial bias in the Midwestern University women's athletic program operations, my other hope would be to see such well developed structures put into place in other departments across the country and expanded to displace the structures that govern much of male collegiate athletics. With too few exceptions, male student athletes in Division I schools are systematically

exploited (Zimbalist 1999), undereducated (Adler and Adler 1991), and conditioned to embody deviant and even criminal behaviors (Benedict 1997). MU's women's athletic program offers an alternative that would facilitate on-the-field success in such sports as football and men's basketball, while also promoting an achievement ethos that includes academics. MU's women's athletic program stands out not only because of its well developed technology of control and surveillance, but because this technology is built on the assumption that all athletes who enter the program can and should experience academic and athletic success. Were more athletic departments to be purposefully developed on this basis, we would likely see a nationwide jump in graduation rates among student athletes across races and genders. Midwestern University's women's athletic program is harsh, strict, and not always pleasant—especially for student athletes, but even perhaps for the staff who carry out its mandates. Nonetheless, it embodies successful strategies that may prove useful for those collegiate athletic programs whose leadership has the discipline, faith, and desire not only to facilitate success among student athletes, but to create extraordinary rates of athletic and academic success as their program's norm.

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