

# Cheating in Sport and Racial Differences in Psychopathic Personality

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Evidence is presented from the NFL (American football), NBA (American basketball), and English Premier League football (soccer) showing that blacks are over-represented among cheaters in these sports and that whites are under-represented. We show that a partly-genetic explanation for these differences is the most convincing. These results confirm the theory of racial differences in psychopathic personality advanced by Lynn (2002).

**Key Words:** Football; Basketball; Soccer; Cheating; Rule violation; Doping.

## 1. Introduction

In this article we examine the theory presented in Lynn (2002) that there are racial differences in psychopathic personality, conceptualized as a continuously distributed trait, such that high values of the trait are present in sub-Saharan Africans (blacks in the United States) and Native Americans, intermediate values in Hispanics, lower values in whites and the lowest values in East Asians. The theory was supported by data showing that these racial differences are present in a number of expressions of psychopathic personality, including drug use, child abuse, marital infidelity and crime. In the present article we test this theory by presenting data for cheating in sports.

The central feature of psychopathic personality is a weak or absent moral sense. The condition was identified by Pritchard (1837) who termed it 'moral imbecility.' The term *psychopathic personality* was first proposed by Kraepelin

(1915) to designate those who are deficient in moral sense but whose intellectual ability is not impaired. A classical study was presented by Cleckley (1941), which described the essential characteristics of psychopathic personality as general poverty of affect (emotion), defective insight, absence of nervousness, lack of remorse or shame, superficial charm, pathological lying, egocentricity, inability to love, failure to establish close or intimate relationships, irresponsibility, impulsive antisocial acts, failure to learn from experience, reckless behavior under the influence of alcohol, and a lack of long term goals. In 1984, the American Psychiatric Association dropped the term 'psychopathic personality' in favor of 'anti-social personality disorder' and in 1994, the American Psychiatric Association (1994) issued a revised Diagnostic Manual in which it listed 11 features of anti-social personality disorder. These are:

- (1) Inability to sustain consistent work behavior.
- (2) Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behavior.
- (3) Irritability and aggressivity, as indicated by frequent physical fights and assaults.
- (4) Repeated failure to honor financial obligations.
- (5) Failure to plan ahead and impulsivity.
- (6) No regard for truth, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or 'conning' others.
- (7) Recklessness regarding one's own or others' personal safety, as indicated by driving while intoxicated or recurrent speeding.
- (8) Inability to function as a responsible parent.
- (9) Failure to sustain a monogamous relationship for more than one year.
- (10) Lack of remorse.
- (11) Presence of conduct disorder in childhood.

A prominent feature of psychopathic personality is cheating, which is used as one of the criteria adopted by Hare (2003) in his scale to assess psychopathic personality. Even those who do not specifically adopt it accept that rule-breaking is a measure of psychopathic personality and this clearly crosses over with cheating, when the rules are broken for some kind of gain. We must emphasize that psychopathic personality is a continuously variable trait that manifests itself in various degrees in "normal" individuals of all races. Only those at the extreme end of the distribution are diagnosed as having antisocial personality disorder. In the present article we examine racial differences in cheating in sport as a test of the theory that there are racial differences in psychopathic personality.

## 2. Method

We examine the incidence of cheating by blacks and whites in high level American football (NFL), basketball (NBA), and in English Premier League football (soccer). We consider data on two kinds of cheating, namely the use of performance enhancing drugs and breaking the rules of the game. These three sports are examined because they are racially diverse and a great deal of information is available about them online. We conducted a visual and biographical analysis of each of the sportsmen in the games to identify their race. We then calculated the percentages of blacks and whites identified as cheaters compared with their percentages among the players.

Statistical significance was assessed with the Pearson  $\chi^2$  test and Fisher's exact test (both 2-tailed), using SPSS 16.0 software.

## 3. Results

### *American Football (National Football League: NFL)*

In 2010, 67% of NFL players were black and 31% were white (Wolfey, 2011), and in the year 2000 these percentages were approximately the same (Entine, 2000). In any given season there are 1696 NFL players. 115 NFL players were suspended for drug use between 1999 and 2013.<sup>1</sup> Of those suspended, 21 were white (18%), 93 were black, and one appeared to be Hispanic. Thus, blacks were 80.8% of those suspended for drug use but only 67% of players, a difference that is statistically significant at the  $p = .002$  level (both Pearson  $\chi^2$  and Fisher exact test). In addition, blacks were 76% of players suspended for more than 4 matches, 100% of players suspended indefinitely or for the entire season, and 100% of the 6 players suspended more than once over this period. Thus, on all these criteria blacks were over-represented and whites were under-represented among those suspended for drug use.

We looked next at the 2013 data<sup>2</sup> for players suspended or fined for various infractions (including drug use) either by the NFL or by their teams. We did not include coaches in this analysis. These data are for suspensions and fines handed out for a variety of behaviors including hitting, rough-housing (excessively violent play), taunting and dangerous tackles. Of 245 fines or suspensions handed down over this period, 195 (79%) were to blacks, 34 (17%) were to whites, and the remainder were to those who were mixed, Hispanic, or of unclear race. Thus, the 79% fine or suspension rate for blacks was higher than the 67%

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://www.spotrac.com/fines-tracker/nfl/>

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <http://www.spotrac.com/fines-tracker/nfl/>

of black NFL players ( $p < .001$ , both Pearson  $\chi^2$  and Fisher exact test), confirming the over-representation of blacks among cheaters and rule breakers.

*American Basketball (National Basketball Association: NBA)*

In 2011, 78% of NBA basketball players were black, 17% were white, and the rest were mixed, Hispanic, or of unclear race (SLAM, 2011). In any given season there are between 360 and 450 NBA players. Statistical significance was calculated based on the average of the range. We examined the data for 2013 and up to 21<sup>st</sup> January 2014<sup>3</sup> for those fined or suspended either by the NBA or by their team. We did not include fines or suspensions handed down to coaches or to entire teams. Behavior which was punished included mocking, punching, flopping (an intentional fall in order to call a non-existent foul), fighting, steroid use (one incident, involving a Turkish player), bringing the team into disrepute, and head-butting.

Of the 76 fined or suspended, 88% were black. As they were 78% of players, they were over-represented. Eight out of the 76 fined or suspended were white, approximately 10%, while 17% of players were white. Although only approaching conventional statistical significance (2-tailed  $p$  values .068 with Pearson  $\chi^2$  test and .091 with Fisher exact test), the result shows that whites were under-represented.

*English Premier League Football (Soccer)*

In the 2012-2013 season, 32% (183 players) of the 668 Premier League footballers were black and 66.7% (479 players) were white (Harris, 2012). In the 2010-2011 season, 25% were black and 75% were white (Hattenstone, 2012). In 2006-2007 it was estimated that 12% were black, based on a study of 63% of the players (Kassimeris, 2007, p. 90).

We conducted an analysis of the players handed red cards beginning in the 2006-2007 season and up to the 2012-2013 season.<sup>4</sup> In most cases, a photograph was given next to the name on the website [transfermarkt.co.uk](http://www.transfermarkt.co.uk). Where it was not given we checked online. The red card is the worst punishment that can be given in soccer. The player is sent off for the rest of the game and often suspended for a number of matches. Red cards are handed out for serious fouls and when the player has been 'booked' for an offence after having previously

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: <http://www.eskimo.com/~pbender/fines.html#13-14>

<sup>4</sup> Information available at: [http://www.transfermarkt.co.uk/en/premier-league/suenderkartei/wettbewerb\\_GB1\\_2012.html](http://www.transfermarkt.co.uk/en/premier-league/suenderkartei/wettbewerb_GB1_2012.html)

been given a yellow card (usually for a minor foul or a deliberate handball). The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Premier League footballers receiving 1 or more red cards.*

Season	N (all players given at least 1 red card)	% of all footballers who were black	% of those given red cards who were black	Significance p <sup>1</sup>
2012-13	36	32	42	.075 / .099
2010-11	40	25	37.5	.060 / .088
2006-07	29	12	27	.008 / .016

<sup>1</sup> Pearson  $\chi^2$  / Fisher exact test, two-tailed

Thus, in all three years black Premier League footballers were over-represented among those given red cards for cheating and rule-breaking.

#### 4. Discussion

Obviously, unethical conduct is common in sports amongst players of all races. However, the results of this analysis of cheating by players in the American National Football League, the American National Basketball Association, and English Premier League all show that blacks are over-represented among those who cheat, and that whites are under-represented. These results are as predicted by the theory of racial differences in psychopathic personality advanced by Lynn (2002). There are several possible alternative explanations of the results that need to be considered.

First, we may wonder whether the supposed black-white difference in average intelligence (blacks: 85, whites, 100) (see Lynn, 2006) could be the main cause of the differences in anti-social behavior, including cheating in sports. Cheating is an expression of psychopathic personality, and many studies have found there is no significant relationship between psychopathic personality and intelligence (Dahlstrom, Lachar and Dahlstrom 1986, p.243; Gladden, Figueredo and Jacobs, 2008; Harpur, Hare and Hakstian, 1989; Hart, Forth and Hare, 1990). However, some studies have found that forms of cheating are negatively predicted by IQ. For example, Williams et al. (2010) found statistically significant differences between the personalities of students who cheat and those who do not, based on asking students, whose identities were protected, if they had cheated (engaged in plagiarism) and when they last did so. Cheaters were lower

in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (i.e. higher in psychopathic personality, as defined by Lynn, 2002). In addition, they replicated other research (e.g. Cizek, 1999) finding that those who cheat are lower in intelligence than those who are honest, independent of the kind of personalities they have.

However, it has been noted that black-white behavior differences cannot entirely be explained by intelligence differences, as when blacks and whites are matched for IQ and age differences then the kinds of behaviors highlighted are reduced but they still remain significant. Thus, for example, when matched for IQ and age, US blacks are still 1.5 times more likely to engage in crime than are whites. These differences cannot be put down to poverty because Hispanics when matched for IQ with blacks (they have higher IQs than blacks on average) experience worse poverty than blacks but are lower on the other measures of psychopathic personality than blacks (Lynn, 2002, p.306). Moreover, this argument is question-begging because one must ask why blacks, with the same IQs and age, are poorer than whites, a phenomenon shown in Lynn (2002, p.306).

An obvious answer is partly-genetic personality differences between races, which have been demonstrated to exist in a number of studies (Rushton, 1990, 1995; Lynn, 2002). If it is averred that the difference is due to racial discrimination, it can be countered that numerous interventions to raise the social status of American blacks have had little impact meaning this is most unlikely (see Levin, 2005). Moreover, various studies have shown that socioeconomic status (when analyzing over many generations and combining different measures) is in the region of 0.75 heritable (e.g. Clark, 2014) and that differences in personality between blacks and whites would predict greater black poverty, so this argument would rely on an improbable coincidence.

Secondly, we may wonder whether the black-white difference in migration history could explain some of the race differences, because there are studies showing that migrants differ from those who stay behind in personality traits (e.g. Paulauskaite et al, 2010). This would not explain the black-white differences in the two American games because most blacks are not immigrants but have been present in America since the late seventeenth century, having been brought to the USA as slaves from West Africa. In Britain, most of the black population immigrated after World War II between 1949 and 1962, and most black players in the twenty-first century are the grandchildren of these. We consider it unlikely that these are more psychopathic than those who remained in the Caribbean, where psychopathic personality indexed by crime rates is approximately two or three times greater than in Europe (Rushton, 1990, 1995). Moreover, psychopathic personality is generally agreed to be composed of low Conscientiousness and low Agreeableness (Lynn, 2002). Research indicates that

migration is predicted by relatively high Conscientiousness (e.g. Paulauskaite et al, 2010). This would lead us to predict that British blacks would have lower psychopathic personality than Jamaicans, and this appears to be the case.

Thirdly, it might be suggested that black and white players are recruited from different social classes, with the blacks coming from lower socioeconomic status, and that this explains why blacks are more likely to cheat. We consider this to be extremely unlikely. All of the players assessed are extremely wealthy and so it is improbable that the black players have any greater incentive than the white ones to cheat. But, more importantly, there is data indicating that all top players in the NBA, for example, are from relatively wealthy backgrounds regardless of their race. Stephens-Davidowitz (2 Nov 2013) looked at the probability of playing in the NBA in relation to county of birth. He found that 27.9% of black and 30% of white players were born in the richest 20% of counties, 26.2% of black and 30% of white players were born in the second richest 20% of counties, 15.4% of black and 20% white players were born in the 'middle' counties, and 12.9% of black and 10% of white players were born in the second poorest group of counties. 17.5% of black players and 10% of white players were born in the poorest counties. The black players are significantly above the black average on many measures of social status. For example, 41% of the black players were illegitimate compared to 60% of blacks in the general population, and 16% were born to mothers under the age of 20 compared to 20% of other blacks. Unfortunately, equivalent data are not given for whites.

Thus, although the white players may be slightly less likely to be from poor backgrounds than the black players, the difference is relatively small. 54.1% of the black players and 60% of the white players were from the richest 40% of counties.

We would expect the social range of black NBA players to be broader than among whites because the modal West African body type is more adapted to basketball than the modal European body type (see Entine, 2000). This would lead to there being far fewer Europeans than blacks in the NBA, but Europeans might be able to compensate for their deficient physical qualities, to some extent, through intense practice and perseverance, which would be predicted by the relatively low psychopathic personality characteristic of Europeans (Lynn, 2002). Lynn (2011) has demonstrated that high social status is predicted by intelligence and good moral character (low psychopathic personality), the latter having a heritability of between .50 and .66. So, the fact that the black and white players are from relatively similar backgrounds would strongly imply that racial differences in cheating significantly reflect racial differences in psychopathic personality, which are significantly heritable. However, it is accepted that part of the

explanation may be that genetic black superiority in basketball ability allows a slightly wider range of personality and socio-economic traits among black than among white top-level players. However, as noted, it is extremely improbable that this is the entire explanation as the socioeconomic backgrounds of the players are relatively similar.

Fourthly, another alternative explanation might be to argue that persons of African descent in the US and UK grew up and continue to live in societies that offer an uneven playing field, where white skin is privileged and those of African descent are assumed to be inferior. When legitimate routes to social status are blocked, it might further be argued, it is rational (and adaptive in an evolutionary sense) to turn to violence and cheating. There are a number of problems with this line of argumentation. Firstly, there is a large body of evidence that it is inaccurate to claim that there is an uneven racial playing field in the UK or the USA. African-Americans, for example, are represented in different prestigious professions, such as medicine, as their IQ profile would predict. Indeed, they are slightly over-represented (see Levin, 2005). Secondly, there could be no possible rational benefit to rule breaking which would not benefit winning the game and would almost certainly be noticed and punished, such as swearing at the referee. This would be a sign of impulsivity, a measure of psychopathic personality.

Thirdly, if this counter-argument were accurate then we would posit that African-Americans were widely regarded as 'inferior' in 1900 but this is the case to a much lesser extent today. Accordingly, we would expect that the level of crime and violent behavior among African-Americans would show a consistent decrease, especially since the rise of political correctness and anti-racism. But this is simply not the case. For example, homicide involving a gun showed a marked increase among blacks between 1999 and 2009 (Planty, 2011), and it is implausible to argue that the average white American became 'more racist' to blacks over this period. Fourthly, if this argument were accurate it would be true of other 'marginalized groups' such as women. However, their level of violent crime is far below that of men and an obvious explanation is that they are lower in psychopathic personality and thus less likely to break the rules or be violent (Nettle, 2007). Indeed, it might be argued that US society regards white people as inferior at basketball when compared to black people. White people experience an 'uneven playing field' in the world of basketball, so they should be over-represented among cheaters. Fifthly, such an argument would seem to put the evidence of higher black psychopathic personality down to mere coincidence in terms of understanding cheating in sport. As such, this alternate explanation is extremely implausible.



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