



The Prevalence of Eating Disorders and Negative Body Image in NCAA Student Athletes

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Introduction

- ❖ As competition in college athletics rises throughout the NCAA, so does the pressure on student athletes.
- ❖ Consequently, the prevalence of eating disorders and negative body image in the NCAA has increased as well.
- ❖ Eating disorders are life-threatening psychiatric conditions with high mortality rates,
- ❖ According to studies, NCAA athletes have a higher rate of clinical and subclinical eating disorders compared to non-athletic students in the United States.
- ❖ This elevated percentage of eating disorders in the NCAA can be decreased through a multitude of interventions.

Community Assessment and Analysis

- ❖ Today, there are a total of 10,586 women's teams and 9,159 men's teams competing in the NCAA.
- ❖ It is not uncommon for members of the NCAA to struggle with their mental and physical well being.
- ❖ 30% of 195,000 respondents to an American College Health Association survey reported having felt depressed within the last 12 months, and 50% reported feeling anxious within the same period of time ¹.
- ❖ These two mental illnesses compromise daily performance, and are highly correlated with other behaviors, such as eating disorders.

The figure below illustrates the fact that eating disorders are more prevalent in NCAA student athletes compared to the population of the United States ^{2,3}.

Population	Percentage of Eating Disorders
United States (young adults)	14.3%
NCAA student athletes	49.2%

Problem in the Community

- ❖ Clinical eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia, and binge eating disorders are a result of body dissatisfaction and a myriad of social pressures.
- ❖ Eating disorders exist in young adults throughout the United States, however are especially apparent amongst NCAA student athletes.

Eating disorders are biopsychosocial illnesses that are associated with multiple health complications. Eating disorders and negative body image are categories of mental illness, however they also have numerous consequential effects on an individual. Mentally, eating disorders are linked to depression, poor self esteem, and other emotional illnesses. Patients with eating disorders also often have suicidal ideation.

- ❖ In a sample of 198 female patients with eating disorders, 43% of them met the criteria for clinical depression⁴.

The adverse physical effects of eating disorders include, but are not limited to the following:

- extreme weight loss or weight gain
- electrolyte imbalances
- impaired cardiac, cerebral, GI, and endocrine function
- poor oral health
- renal failure
- refeeding syndrome

- ❖ Negative body image and eating disorders have high rates among NCAA student athletes for various reasons, but the most influential is the intense pressures placed upon athletes. Research on male and female athletes has confirmed that sociocultural pressures do significantly contribute to the development of body dissatisfaction, dietary restraint, and eating pathology⁵.

References

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- 2) Mental Health and Mental Disorders. (2019, November 13). In *Healthy People 2020*. Retrieved from <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/mental-health-and-mental-disorders/objectives>
- 3) Kato, K., Jervas, S., & Culpepper, D. (2011). Body Image Disturbances in NCAA Division I and III Female Athletes. *Sport Journal*, 14 (1), 1.
- 4) Kennedy, S. H., Kaplan, A.S., Garfinkel, P.E., Rockert, W., Toner, B., & Abbey, S.E. (1994). Depression in anorexia nervosa: Discriminating depressive symptoms and episodes. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 38 (7), 773-782.
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Proposed Solution

- Three levels of nursing interventions to consider as solutions: Primary, Secondary, Tertiary
- Promote health through education
 - Require mental health training programs for coaches and trainers to become familiar with the signs and symptoms of eating disorders
 - Present an educational course that promotes mental health awareness, where student athletes are required to take this course at the start of each year.
- Provide screening surveys pre-season and in-season to every individual who participates on a sports team
 - Two surveys are to be completed to compare how their habits may or may not change when in the peak of their training
- Design rehabilitation programs altered to the individual's specific needs
 - On campus sport psychiatrist partnered with nutritionist to prepare a detailed individual plan containing a brand new diet and mental health services with weekly therapy sessions.

Below is a graph that explains the different categories that effect student athletes pertaining to eating disorders. By promoting this issue, these effecting factors can be addressed and the prevalence of eating disorders in NCAA student athletes.

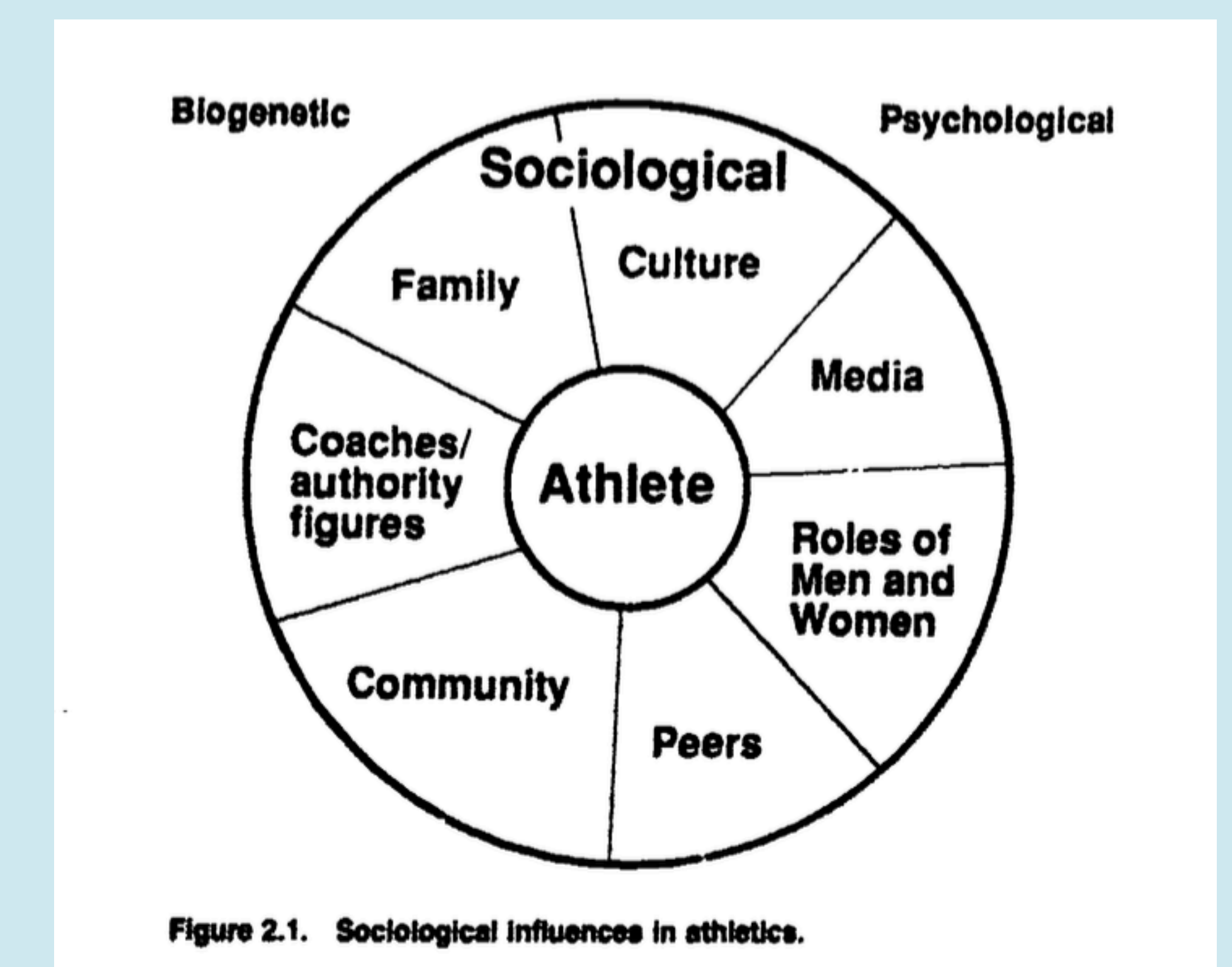


Figure 2.1. Sociological influences in athletics.