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How Can Intercollegiate Athletic Programs Impact the Social Mobility of Black Male Division I College Student-Athletes

Henry Villegas

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How Can Intercollegiate Athletic Programs Impact the Social Mobility of
Black Male Division I College Student-Athletes?

BY

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A.A., Liberal Studies, Southwestern College, 1988
B.A., Social Science Education, Indiana State University, 1991
M.S., Counseling, Indiana State University, 1993

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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My journey began over ten years ago as I embarked on what was a very important goal for me in my life, something that I could not have achieved on my own. First and foremost, I have to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for helping me through and providing me with the drive and encouragement to persist and complete the project. I recall hearing that God provides us all with certain strengths and abilities that are the gifts that He has presented to us and that our gifts to God are what we do with these talents. It is with humility and deep appreciation for all He has given me that I dedicate this project as my gift to God. Whether it came to me while I was sitting in church or on my commute to work, I thank You, Lord, for the timely inspiration You provided me.

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How Can Intercollegiate Athletic Programs Impact the Social Mobility of Black Male Division I College Student-Athletes?

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the lives of former Division I college football student-athletes who were able to overcome disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed in life answering the question “How can intercollegiate athletic programs impact the social mobility of Black male Division I college student-athletes?” The project, using three theoretical frameworks, in particular Ogbu’s theory of oppositional cultures, Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction, and Critical Race Theory, reviewed the experiences of Black Division I male football student-athletes investigating the inner workings of college athletics programs to evaluate whether they truly deliver. The impact of athletic participation on student-athlete success has long been closely tied to the student-athlete development. Through the use of a phenomenological research approach, the experiences of college student-athletes were explored to review the true essences of their respective journeys from poverty to success in life.

Previous findings document a significant impact of participation in sports on factors such as encouragement, success in academics, character development, the acquisition of social capital and mentoring on student-athlete success in college life, and social mobility. The study finds that the experiences as Black student-athletes from low socio-economic backgrounds were different from those of traditional college student-athletes and college students in general in that they both faced challenges and had advantages associated with where they were from and their participation in athletics. Critical to these students success was the fact that they possessed an unyielding drive to succeed and a resiliency evident in overcoming the challenges associated with the population with their determination going beyond their collegiate experience and being firmly grounded in them throughout their experiences prior to athletics and college. The study also found that race still mattered and that it had an impact on the experiences of these students as it pertained to both education and athletics. The implications of the study offer several recommendations for higher education leadership and practitioners that would improve the experiences and retention and graduation rates of Black college students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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Chapter I

Introduction

As evident from increasing Black student-athlete graduation rates, intercollegiate athletics programs have successfully contributed to improving the level of academic achievement of participants, especially those from the disadvantaged segment of the population (NCAA, 2013). College athletics have played an important role in American society by providing a doorway for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter colleges and universities, due largely to their athletic prowess as opposed to traditional predictors such as socio-economic status and education levels of their parents and parental involvement in their education (Person & LeNoir, 1997). This phenomenon, supported by an increasingly emphasized commitment by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to ensure the academic success of all of its student-athletes (Petr & McArdle, 2012; NCAA, 2012), has resulted in a social development program that has achieved a fair level of success (NCAA, 2013). Recent NCAA academic reform measures have resulted in an increased emphasis on initial eligibility standards, the academic support of student-athletes, and increased institutional accountability (NCAA, 2012). Student-athletes are now required to meet higher academic standards for both initial and continued eligibility. When continued eligibility requirements are not met, schools are held more accountable through a standard scoring system Academic Progress Rate (APR), which holds schools more responsible by restricting post-season competition for not meeting pre-established minimum standards. In order to help students meet these higher criteria, most athletic programs have boosted the level of academic support

provided to student-athletes in terms of staffing, facilities, and programming. Increased initial eligibility standards in particular have raised the level of academic expectations for those who aspire to participate in college and professional athletics in what the NCAA hopes will embed academic success into the culture of college athletics. These current structures in college athletics help frame the question: Does participation in college athletics have a positive impact on participant character development, academic success, and overall achievement and success in life?

As a result of recent changes instituted by the NCAA related to increased initial and continuing eligibility requirements, improvements have been made in the retention and graduation rates of student-athletes and, in particular, the graduation rates of Black student-athletes (NCAA, 2013). The most recent NCAA Federal Graduation Rates Report (2013) indicates that 65 percent of Division I student-athletes graduate versus 64 percent of all students at Division I institutions. African American male student-athletes also graduated at a higher rate than did the general Black student body (49 percent versus 40 percent) as did African American female student athletes (62 percent to 49 percent). Given the recent success of the college student-athlete development model, which will be defined in more detail later, and the improvement in student-athlete graduation rates, it can be argued that college athletic programs have played an important role in advancing the social mobility of its participants. This dissertation studies the lived experience of former Black male Division I college student-athletes to evaluate the impact of the collegiate student-athletes' experience and the athletic programs on their educational attainment, success in life, and ultimate social mobility.

Background

Athletics has played an important role in the culture of the United States:

- As a symbol of pride when our local and national teams compete against one another,
- As a source of entertainment as millions attend and view sports on television and the Internet, and
- As a builder of character when woven into our system of education.

Sports and the value gained by those who are involved have long been believed to be associated with

- Positive health,
- Improved likelihood of retention,
- Diversion from problem behavior,
- Creation of social capital,
- Leadership and character development,
- Improved self- esteem, and
- The advancement of self-discipline, time management, team work, collaboration, and socialization skills (Sabo, Melnick & Vanfossen, 1993).

Societal values are also attributed to sporting events, as they provide important opportunities for the community to gather in small venues and major get-togethers to talk and share common experiences at various levels of society (Putnam, 2000). Sports have also been viewed as an equalizer in which skilled and committed students, regardless of their socio-economic status and the educational level of their parents, can excel and

create improved educational and career opportunities for themselves, opportunities especially valuable to those from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds.

Much research in the sports field has been conducted over the past few decades, with a rash of studies (Bend & Petrie, 1977; Picou, 1978; Picou & Curry, 1974; Philips & Schafer, 1971; Sack & Thiel, 1979; Schafer & Rehberg, 1970) taking place in the 1960s and 70s to ascertain whether participation in athletics positively impacts character and educational achievement, with some results supporting the notion and others not. Less research has been conducted to study whether participation in college athletics impacts student development, academic achievement, and career opportunities for those who participate, with even less research being conducted in the last decade.

Though past studies provide valuable clues to the links between athletic involvement and these developmental variables, much has changed in college athletics as, similar to education; it has embraced more of a business model evolving from an extracurricular activity to a multi-billion dollar business. As the business model is incorporated, so is the demand for teams to succeed on the field in order to generate lucrative television contracts, product marketing, and ticket sales. This has resulted in million dollar contracts for coaches and administrators and vast recruitment, which has opened the door for coaches to seek out talented student-athletes from traditionally disadvantaged geographic regions. This has altered the landscape for college students and student-athletes, as traditionally disadvantaged populations are now gaining access to once restrictive educational opportunities. Universities that were once limited to the

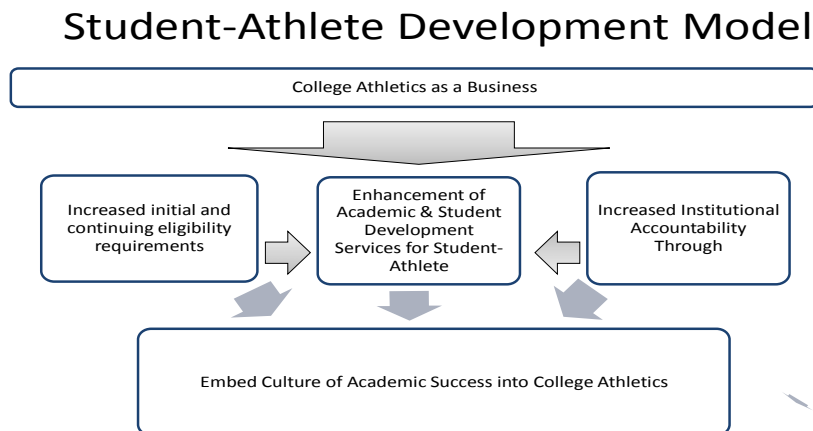
White upper class segment of society are now recognized for the winning football teams, NCAA championships, and the athletic prowess of their Black student-athletes.

Recent academic reform and increased enforcement from the NCAA, the governing body of college athletics, has also altered the landscape as athletic programs are required to ensure that their student-athletes are achieving academically, being retained, and progressing towards degree completion. These mandates do not come without accountability, as institutions that do not meet current standards such as APR (Academic Progress Rate) scores that measure yearly retention and eligibility, are denied the opportunity to compete in championships and the huge pay-offs coupled with them. Changes in the culture of athletics, especially those associated with the business model and the sociological implications of increased recruitment in traditionally disadvantaged areas of the country; require that the notion of athletics as an agent of increased academic achievement and social mobility in its participants be re-examined.

The Student-Athlete Development Model (Figure 1) describes how intercollegiate athletics has been able to impact increased levels of academic achievement of those from the disadvantaged segment of the population in college athletics. College athletics have played an important role in American society by providing a gateway for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter colleges and universities, due largely to their athletic prowess as opposed to traditional indicators such as socio-economic status and education of their parents and parental involvement in their education. This phenomenon, coupled with an increasingly emphasized commitment by the NCAA to ensure the academic success of all of its student-athletes, has resulted in a social development program that

has achieved a fair level of success. Recent NCAA academic reform measures have resulted in an increased emphasis on initial eligibility standard, the academic support of student-athletes, and increased institutional accountability. Student-athletes are now required to meet higher academic standards for both initial and continued eligibility. When continued eligibility requirements are not met, schools are held more accountable through a standard scoring system (APR), which holds schools out of post-season competition for not meeting the mark. In order to help students meet these higher standards, athletics has boosted the level of academic support provided to student-athletes in terms of staffing, facilities, and programming. Increased initial eligibility standards in particular have raised the level of academic expectations for those who aspire to participate in college and professional athletics in what the NCAA hopes will embed academic success into the culture of college athletics. As a result of recent changes instituted by the NCAA, improvements have been made in the retention and graduation rates of student-athletes and, in particular, in the graduation rates of Black student-athletes. The most recent NCAA Federal Graduation Rates Report (2012) indicates that 65 percent of Division I student-athletes graduate versus 63 percent of all students at Division I institutions. African American male student-athletes also graduated at a higher rate than did the general Black student body (50 percent versus 38 percent) as did African American females (66 percent to 46 percent). Given the recent success of the college student-athlete development model and the improvement in student-athlete graduation rates, it can be argued that college athletics have played an important role in advancing the social mobility of its participants.

Figure 1 – Student-Athlete Development Model



College athletics is viewed as a critically important avenue for participants, especially those from disadvantaged and minority neighborhoods, to acquire a college degree. It has also been argued that these student-athletes have been led astray and exploited by the system where coaches have multi-million dollar salaries and the NCAA negotiates billion dollar television contracts (Edwards, 1979; Rhoden, 2010; Harper, 2009; Donner, 2005). Young student-athletes who are perceived to possess athletic talent are often encouraged to pursue sports instead of being supported to study science or engineering and pursue professional careers that allow them to utilize academic skills instead of physical talent. Many student-athletes have been urged to participate in athletics by their parents, teachers, and coaches with the belief that if they do well they can earn a college scholarship and a potential career in athletics. These well-meaning but unknowing counselors often do not see that the student is becoming socialized to focus on sports instead of academic pursuits.

The opposing arguments can be made that many students who are directed towards athletics and away from more scholarly and economically advantageous careers might not be attending college had it not been for athletics and that a college degree or even some college, regardless of the choice of majors, is better than no degree at all. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2013), college enrollment for Blacks has increased from 943,400 in 1976 to over 2.6 million in 2010, and the percentage of Black students enrolled in college has increased almost 5 percent from 9.4 percent in 1976 to almost 15 percent in 2009. The same report indicates that the opportunity for a higher education has similarly increased for all minorities, as Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islanders, and Native American enrollment rates have all increased as well. Though the case is not being made that all growth in minority college enrollment is attributed to minority college student-athlete involvement in intercollegiate athletics, the argument can be made that college athletics has played a significant role in increasing the opportunities made available to minority students to pursue higher education. According to the 2010 NCAA Student-Athlete Ethnicity Report, the percentage of Black student-athletes has increased for both males and females. There are approximately 20,000 more Black student-athletes participating in NCAA college sports across all divisions in 2010 than there were in 1999 with over 68,000 Black student-athletes competing in NCAA College athletics (NCAA Research Staff, 2010).

A gateway has been opened for Black students to pursue a college degree as evident by the 40 percent increase of Black students participating in NCAA athletics from 2000 to 2010 (NCAA Research Staff, 2010), an access that arguably may have still

been open for them without college athletics. For many though, those without the indicators that have traditionally improved the chances of their going to college, such as parental income, parental education, or parental involvement in education, their involvement in college athletics has tremendously impacted their opportunity to pursue a higher education. The encouragement from parents, teachers, and coaches to pursue the student-athlete dream, which is defined in this report as earning a college scholarship, graduating from college, and playing professionally, though some would argue that graduating is not a part of the dream, has made a significant difference in driving Blacks to pursue progressive goals that will ultimately benefit them in life. In many cases, the student-athlete is chasing the dream of a professional sports career similar to their professional role models and along the way has enrolled in college. They have been exposed to the values and culture of higher education and the middle class, have graduated from college, or have at the least completed college coursework. At completion, they have benefited from the exposure and the numerous social and career networks that may have improved his or her lot in life. It is difficult to argue that these students, many from disadvantaged households, have been led to believe a lie and have not benefitted from the experiences of being a college student-athlete.

It has also been perceived that college is the great equalizer in that it does not matter if one's parents went to college, how much money they make, or if you had books in your house when they were growing up. If the student-athlete possesses the skill and can meet the basic academic requirements to be considered a qualifier, then he or she can participate. As these student-athletes compete for a position on the team, the only thing

that matters is if they can beat out the person in front of them, regardless of the color of their skin or socio-economic status. Michael Sandel, in his 2012 book *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, makes the case that much of the experience available in our society can be purchased for a price. Parents can hire individual tutors for their children or have them attend Mathnasium; they can also purchase an express pass so that they do not have to wait in line at an airport, or pay others (often the homeless) to stand in line for them to attend congressional hearings. He argues that there are some aspects of the human experience that should not be for sale. College athletics, it can be argued, is one area that continues to present opportunities to those that are the most skilled and are willing to work the hardest to make the team and compete for a starting position that is not available to the highest bidder. This is one of the aspects of college sports that make it an equalizer, as the opportunity is available to those who have the talent and are willing to work hard. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many other facets of our society and the American dream, which are often restricted to the traditionally advantaged and for sale to the highest bidder.

The issue of Black leadership in sports where the percentage of Black participation rates has been steadily increasing has become a sensitive topic. In college and professional athletics today, Blacks do not necessarily play leadership roles, as the percent of Black coaches is not proportional to Black student-athletes reflecting a larger societal issue that athletics has played an important role in improving. Though these stereotypes continue to exist, intentional action has been taken by college athletics to improve the racial discrepancies found in college athletics, particularly in the area of

leadership. It can be proposed that if you have more Black coaches and Black administrators, then the tendency for racial stereotypes to be propagated would more than likely decrease. The 2010 College Racial and Gender Report Cards, reported by the Institute for Diversity and Ethics and Sports (TIDES), indicated that college athletics has improved in its racial hiring practice. They report that the number of African-American university presidents has increased, the number of head football coaches has increased, the number of NCAA executives of color has increased, and the percentage of African-American student-athletes has increased (Lapchick, 2010).

Structural changes have also taken place in coaches' associations that now boast a Black Coaches and Administrators Association (BCA) formed in 1988 to strengthen employment opportunities and professional development for minorities in athletics. The NCAA has also developed the Leadership Institute for Ethnic Minority Males and Females to address the lack of senior level administrators in college athletics. Hiring practices in athletics also now require departments to actively recruit and interview candidates of color for positions that are considered sparsely represented by ethnic minorities. It is clear that there is much work to be done in this area not only for athletics but for society as well. It is also clear that athletics as a culture has made a strong effort to improve the racial and ethnic imbalances found in the world of college athletics and society at large.

Many believe that college student-athletes are taken advantage of by athletic program for a profit and then tossed aside without the education promised to them once their athletic eligibility has expired. This is an area that has been addressed in the last two

decades by college athletics and the NCAA, which has placed more emphasis on academic demands and support for college student-athletes as a part of its recent academic reform movement. As previously mentioned, the NCAA has set higher academic standards for the academic progress of student-athletes, standards that are more stringent and often non-existent for non-student-athletes. For example, in order for student-athletes to gain the full APR points for their teams, which are associated with a team penalty, they have to meet progress towards degree standards. The standards were developed to ensure that student-athletes were progressing towards their degrees and not simply taking courses and majoring in eligibility. Student-athletes entering their second year of college must have passed at least 24 hours of college credit and 40 percent of their degree requirements going into their third year. This same model has affected coaches' attitudes towards student-athletes and their academic success. Where in the past some coaches perceived student-athletes as mere athletes, they must now view them holistically as both students and athletes due to the accountability measure tied to APR.

Unfortunately, satisfactory progress rules intended to encourage student continue towards their degrees has had the unintended consequence of restricting students from pursuing certain degrees. A student who would like to pursue a particular major that is more challenging may be forced to select an alternate major that works mathematically with the eligibility requirements. The word 'forced' is not used to denote such students are held to against their will but rather that these students have to choose whether they want to remain eligible and compete in their sport or declare a major that will render them ineligible to compete in an activity that they enjoy and which, in many cases,

provides them with the financial support necessary for them to complete their degrees. Therefore, in some cases, the rules developed by the NCAA intended to hold colleges, universities, and ultimately student-athletes accountable to standards of academic achievement have resulted in limiting the academic curricular and career choices for student-athletes.

Colleges and universities have also increased the level of support available to student-athletes during their college experience. Since 1991 NCAA member colleges and universities have been mandated to provide academic support services for student-athletes.

16.3.1.1 Academic Counseling/Support Services. Member institutions shall make general academic counseling and tutoring services available to all student-athletes. Such counseling and tutoring services may be provided by the Department of Athletics or the institution's non-athletic student support services. In addition, an institution may finance other academic and support services that the institution, at its discretion, determines to be appropriate and necessary for the academic success of its student-athletes (Adopted: 1/10/91, effective 8/1/91; Revised: 4/25/02, effective 8/1/02, 5/9/06).

These services generally include:

- Advising support to ensure students are in compliance with NCAA and conference eligibility rules;
- Tutoring and mentoring during hours that accommodate student participation schedules;

- Career development counseling and programming;
- Study halls that are usually mandated for student-athletes, especially those that are at risk or have demanding travel schedules;
- And life skills programming, which provides students with education in areas such as healthy life choices, drug and alcohol education, healthy relationships, and diversity.

In partial response to the regulations and penalty structure instituted by the NCAA, member colleges and universities have placed a great deal of financial emphasis on academic support facilities and staff. Where academic support facilities once occupied a modest group of offices and a small computer lab, many BCS (Bowl Championship Series) schools now offer newly constructed, state of the art, multi-million dollar facilities with multiple computer labs staffed by large advising staffs (4-12), tutoring and mentoring teams, learning specialists, and clinical psychologists. As a result of the recent academic reform instituted by the NCAA, improvements have been made in the retention and graduation rates of student-athletes and, in particular, in the graduation rates of Black student-athletes (NCAA, 2013).

The case can and has been made that the experiences associated with participation in intercollegiate athletics greatly improve the individual participant's ability to succeed in college and in life and, therefore, improve a person's social mobility. Spaaij (2009) defines social mobility as "the movement of individuals or groups between different positions within the system(s) of social stratification... changes in an individual's social position, which involves significant alterations in his or her social environment and life

conditioning” (p. 249). Spaaij’s definition will be used due to its use of the word ‘mobility’ to refer to movement between social systems. Too often the word ‘mobility’ is used to denote upwards mobility, but this definition is appreciated because of its emphasis on back and forth fluidity. There are a complexity of issues related to students’ transition from one social system to another that go beyond simply moving up to the next level. In his book *Hunger of Memory*, Rodriguez (1982) writes of the challenges associated with giving up much of who he was in terms of family relationships, connections with his heritage and the Spanish language in order to become a successful American scholar. He details the key events in his life that signaled his transition to this new way of life, in particular the day that the Catholic school nuns came to his house to speak to his parents about making the English language more predominant in the Rodriguez household. From that time forward, things were very different, as Rodriguez’s English and classroom success became much stronger, and his ties to the intimacy associated with Spanish and family became more distant. The same can be said of many students who, as a result of their education, struggle with moving up from the lower to the middle class. In reference to mobility, it is important to recognize the added social skills and pressures associated with moving from one social class to another while at the same time understanding that one is not better than the other. Simply put, the fact is that one classification, in this case the middle class, has economic benefits and everything that comes with it, which have been traditionally denied to those from the lower class. Social mobility can be determined by using several indicators such as the difference in careers, income, and educational attainment of children versus that of their parents.

Sports is often viewed as a microcosm of life, where student-athletes learn that if they work hard and put their effort into something that it can eventually pay off. It is not automatic, as the student-athlete is also very familiar with the agony of defeat, which can also be a result of their labor. Many students, through no fault of their own, do not possess the same social advantages (parental involvement in their cognitive development, books in the home, parents who went to college, two parents in the home, parents with financial capability to provide them with private tutors, or the social capital to press for their child's academic development in school) that other students possess resulting in a lack of academic achievement and self-esteem that comes from this success. These social advantages are defined as social capital by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, a term that will be more clearly defined and discussed later in the chapter. These same students may possess physical talents that allow them to excel on the fields of competitions and elevate their self-esteem. Similar to talented music or art students, this student feels good about something he or she is doing in school. This talent often encourages students to do better in their academic course work when they see that it can lead to college opportunities that involve academic preparation as well as further development of their talent.

The educator, by focusing on the student's talent, has enabled the student to use the positive feelings associated with success in one area to carry over to success in another area (transference) and build an interest in a college future. This same elevated feeling of confidence can help students be successful as they pursue their college careers and their lives as professionals, not necessarily in athletics, after they graduate. Recent changes in the culture of college athletics has resulted in a model that has become

increasingly focused on student development and academic success, a model which provides students the opportunity to utilize their talents to pursue a higher education and experience success in college and in life. Many college student-athletes, like many college students, enter the college experience ill prepared to face the challenges associated with higher education, challenges that athletic programs are helping students manage with a high level of success. The expectation is that the lessons learned and the model developed by athletics can be investigated to determine potential best practices that can then be used to support all students from similar backgrounds.

Statement of the Problem

A major challenge facing education in the United States today is related to this country's inability to educate the underrepresented segment of society, particularly those from minority groups and the lower socio-economic segment of the population. One of the reasons the United States ranks 13th among all nations in education is due to our lack of success in educating a greater segment of society. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Exam (2009), which compares educational achievement across nations, shows a strong correlation between the best school systems and those that are able to educate the disadvantaged. This is an area where the United States clearly lags behind others despite spending more on education. In the U.S., for example, there is a 17 percent variation in student performance based on the student's background, compared with about 9 percent for Canada. Oddly enough, this is occurring while the U.S. spends almost twice as much on education as other countries, such as Estonia and Poland who have been able to achieve similar education rankings while spending less (PISA, 2009). The

report indicates that though the financial commitment is strong, it has not translated to equal higher education, as the practice of unequal opportunity is continued.

Over the past 60 years in America as the economic academic achievement gap between the rich and poor has continued to increase, the level of educational and social mobility has decreased. Reardon (2011) noted that the high school achievement gap for the poor compared to the rich has increased by 30 to 40 percent over the last 30 years. While the disparity between the affluent and disadvantaged continues to widen, the opportunity for those in the disadvantaged ranks to move up the social ladder and achieve the American dream has also diminished. Over the past 50 years the rate of those who have more education than their parents has decreased from 67 to 40 percent (Hout & Janus, 2011). So where does the widening academic achievement gap and the decrease in social mobility leave students from disadvantaged segment? Unfortunately, it leaves these students right where they were when they started, which does little to help our nation's efforts to produce a skilled workforce and an educated citizenry.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether involvement in intercollegiate athletics improves the likelihood that students will achieve academic success and enhanced social mobility. Involvement in athletics has long been linked to positive health, leadership, and character development, but very little research has been conducted in the new landscape of college athletics to determine if participation in college athletics impacts the educational attainment levels and social mobility of its participants. Student-athletes who are recruited for their physical talents and enter college

athletics disproportionately come from disadvantaged households and are often ill-equipped to face the academic challenges that lie ahead. Structures are put in place both on the athletics and academic sides designed to support the student-athlete through college with the goal being graduation. The coaches provide the opportunity for these student-athletes to develop their athletic talent and the discipline to guide them in creating stronger character and academic achievement. The academic community, which includes instructors and academic support personnel, provide the structure and support that enables these students to develop the necessary academic and social aptitude to allow them to graduate and transition to their professional careers. Athletics has become very savvy in the business of supporting student-athletes through college by providing them with a vast network of academic support, which includes specialized advisors, tutors and mentors, study halls, learning specialists, sports psychologists, and specialized educational programming. The coaches provide the discipline, the professors provide the instruction, and the support unit provides the structure.

But does the program really work? Are the thousands of students that enter college athletics really changed by the experience? It is clear that many students from disadvantaged backgrounds have run through the academic and athletic gauntlet of college athletics and come away from the experience better off than when they entered college. They have gone on to higher paying jobs, earning more than their parents ever made with career opportunities that they could have only imagined. What was the experience of those who made it and went on to a better life? How were those who remained the same different from those who were able to become something more and

how were their experiences different? Note there is no value label on becoming “something more” because more is not necessarily better; it only indicates that they were able to enter into another social class by learning, and to some extent, accepting another set of values. In this sense the term social mobility refers to the ability to move between groups and not simply to another group. Social mobility denotes that the individual is able to move from one social class to another with fluidity, in this case moving from the disadvantaged class to the middle class and back.

This study investigated the lived experience of those who have successfully navigated the college experience and have gone on to successful professional careers in order to help future generations of students from similar backgrounds achieve success in higher education. College athletics, due to the various control levers available, present an ideal testing environment for implementing changes in programming. Athletics can mandate student programming that is often not the case with the general student populations. Athletics is a business, which due to the mandate from the NCAA to improve student-athlete academic achievement, has placed a tremendous amount of resources into student development at a level that the whole campus cannot compete with. What better testing grounds, then, than intercollegiate athletics to evaluate whether their cutting edge measures are successful. They possess the resources (driven by the business model and enhancement of academic support units), the motivation (driven by the NCAA mandate to improve retention and progress towards degree), and teeth (driven by high paid coaches who provide the discipline to keep their star student-athletes in line on and off the field) to complete the task.

The hope is to take the learning from the athletics model of student development, identify the key components, and evaluate whether aspects of the athletic model can be used to serve the general population of disadvantaged students who choose to enter U.S colleges and universities. College and universities today are struggling to retain and graduate their students, especially minorities from disadvantaged households, while athletics is having some success with their model. What is it about the model that works, that does not work? What can be replicated that might be used to help all students from underrepresented populations succeed in college, graduate from colleges, and ultimately gain a professional career?

Theoretical Framework

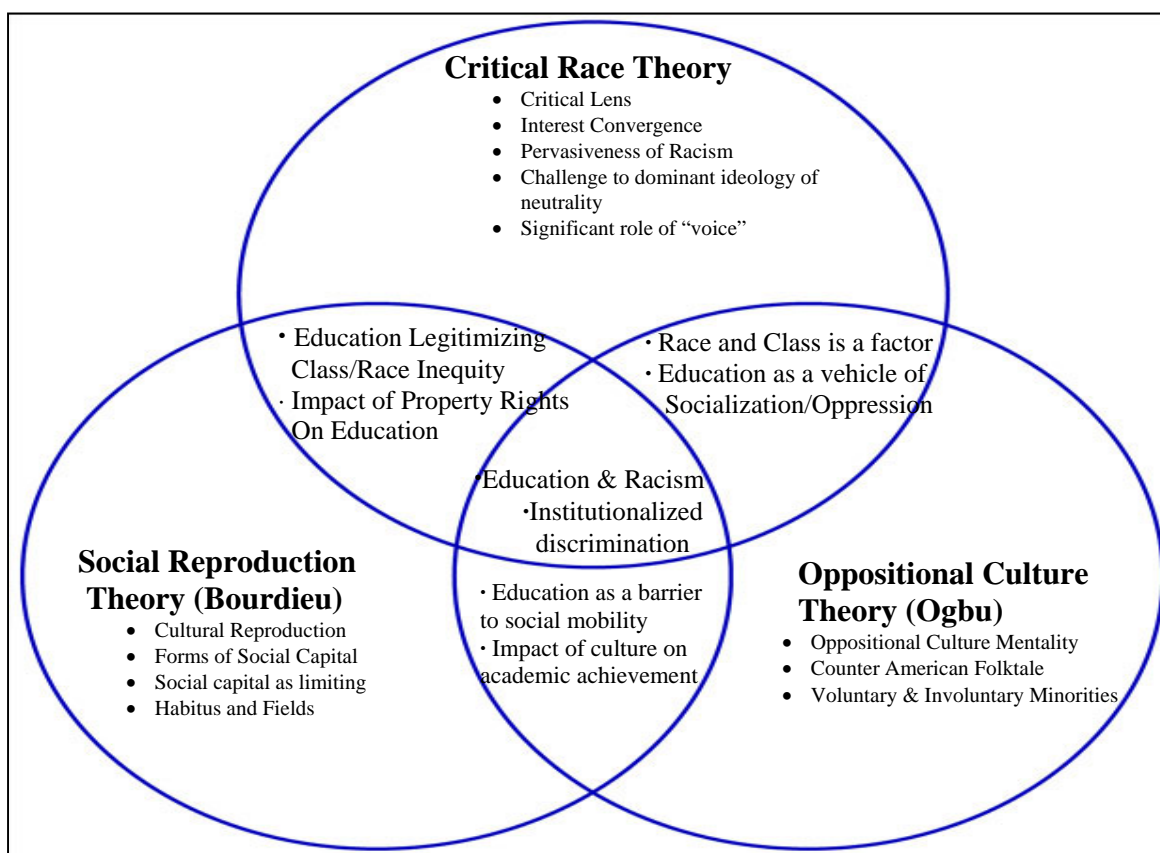
The social mobility of Black male student-athletes by way of participation in college athletics was explored through the use of three theoretical frameworks, in particular:

1. Ogbu's theory of oppositional cultures,
2. Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, and
3. Critical Race Theory.

These frameworks were employed in order to illuminate the phenomenon and the many factors that influence the impact of the experience on the participants. The theoretical framework of a study is often described as a lens through which the researcher in a qualitative study views the phenomenon. Maxwell (2005) describes the theoretical framework as being important in making sense of the various relationships supporting the researcher in connecting information and ideas that may otherwise seem unrelated in a

manner that helps to explain the phenomenon. The conceptual framework for this report was formulated by three relevant theories (Figure 2) that help to explain the social, cultural, and educational context of the study in order to better clarify and understand the phenomenon. In this particular study the experiences of Black male student-athletes was examined in order to determine the influence of the college student-athlete experience on the participants' ability to climb the social ladder and improve their position in society.

Figure 2 Theoretical Framework



Two theorists who closely examine the concept of social mobility and education as they relate to class are Bourdieu and Ogbu. Bourdieu's theory of social capital, which

explores how social capital is created, reproduced, and impacts maintaining the status quo of the dominant class through institutions such as education, is utilized to help analyze the experiences of Black student-athletes and how they are able to escalate from the lower to the middle class. Ogbu's theory of oppositional culture will help to illuminate the challenges faced by these same Black student-athletes as they experience the college environment and transcend their lower class roots. Critical Race theory, which is centered on race and racism, offers a critical examination of society and its institutions, such as education and college athletics, and was used to help bridge the explanations offered by Bourdieu and Ogbu as to the impact of athletic participation on social mobility.

The combined use of multiple theories in qualitative research and the over reliance on theory in general is supported by Maxwell (2005) who believed that a focus on one isolated theory "imposes theory on the study, shoehorning methods, questions and data into preconceived categories and preventing the researcher from seeing events and relationships that don't fit the theory" (p. 46). In order to avoid this type of single mindedness and the reliance on one particular theory, the researcher viewed the phenomenon, the experiences of Black college student-athletes, using the lenses of three inter-related theories that examined race, social capital, and education. Instead of attempting to fit all of the concepts explored into one particular theory, these three inter-related theories (Figure 2) were utilized to help explain and understand the phenomenon being explored.

Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction explores the various types of capital that include economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. He defined social capital as "the

sum of resources, actual and virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.119). This is a unique definition in that social capital is not necessarily portrayed as a positive series of connections as most would perceive it but instead as the unfortunate conduit supporting social inequality and an established closed class system. Bourdieu’s definition proposes that the systems governing the reproduction of social capital are used to maintain the status-quo, in other words sustain the current socio-economic status of the individual and or group, therefore impeding social mobility. In his theory Bourdieu views the systems governing social reproduction as being associated with education and legitimizing class inequality. He viewed student success in educational institutions as being strongly influenced by cultural capital and the characteristics of the high class status of those who possess them.

Bourdieu viewed cultural capital as existing in three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized states. The embodied cultural capital, which is linked to the body, referred to that which was unconsciously engrained in the individual through socialization over generations and not instantaneously. In the embodied states, cultural capital is not necessarily something that can be simply handed over; it has to be acquired over time. This type of capital can consist of the language spoken in and around the family and the expectation and legacies associated with a prestigious private education. He viewed objectified cultural capital (pictures, books, dictionaries, machines) as the material possessions that could be converted into economic gain or symbolic stature.

With regards to education, this can refer to the resources, both real and virtual, that are used to support the student through education, like books and electronic devices such as computers, the Internet, and printers that facilitate the transference of social capital. Institutional cultural capital consists of academic qualifications (i.e., degrees) that can be quantified and compared to others easing the conversion of cultural capital to economic gain and sustaining inequity (Bourdieu, 1986). Due largely to the nature of these forms of cultural capital, Bourdieu viewed those lacking these particular characteristics as being at a considerable disadvantage in regard to the individual's access to and success in school. The cultural standings of individuals from differing social classes entering the educational experience in turn support the reproduction and legitimization of social inequalities utilizing the institution of education.

The use of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction was especially useful in this study as it provided a framework for understanding cultural capital and how it is reproduced and transferred. His theory helped to both explain and understand the phenomenon, namely the creation of social capital in Black college student-athletes, through the same educational systems he refers to in his theory. Black male student-athletes often face challenges in college associated with the fact that they are first generation college students and come from lower socio-economic status families, characteristics directly linked by Bourdieu to social capital. This framework supported the researcher in understanding the impact of these influences on Black male student-athletes' ability to overcome factors that have historically impeded the success of their peers in college.

Ogbu's theory of oppositional culture examines race and intelligence as not necessarily being related to genetics as some have argued but as being tied to the historical oppression faced by Blacks in the United States and influenced by the minority type and how they entered the country. Ogbu (1990) examines two minority types, in particular voluntary and involuntary minorities, which experience and respond to education very differently. Voluntary minorities, such as the Chinese, Panjabi Indians, Mormons, and Jews, are those that entered the country voluntarily with aspirations of increasing their lot in life by taking advantage of the educational and opportunity resources available in the United States. These groups often experience only slight adjustment issues due to the fact that they are able to maintain their cultural identities and the option of returning to their homeland with the added value associated with their cross cultural experiences.

On the other hand, involuntary minorities, which include African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans, are minorities that did not willfully choose to become a part of the new society but were instead forced to become members through colonization, slavery, and conquest. Ogbu argues that these minorities viewed education not as a vehicle through which their future would improve but instead as a means of socialization and oppression associated with their involuntary suppressed state. Individuals in this category tend to experience more problems adjusting to education and perceive the standard practices associated with education in the United States that enhances educational success as "acting White." Ogbu (1990) viewed this dynamic as being linked to why many minority groups were resistant to American education, as

“American involuntary minorities appear to believe that learning certain aspects of White American culture or behaving according to White American cultural frames of reference in certain domains is detrimental to their own culture’s frames, languages, and identities” (p.53). The belief that certain minority groups viewed assimilation into the dominant culture as a threat to their own culture or the “acting White” phenomenon is believed to have a direct negative impact on minority student academic achievement. Ogbu proposed that Black students sabotaged their academic achievement by intentionally underperforming in the classroom and opposing formal education. In reference to the “acting White” phenomenon proposed by Ogbu, Bourdieu would contend that the culprit is not the individual and self-sabotage but instead the system governing social reproduction doing what they are governed to do, which is to restrict social mobility and maintain the status quo.

The “acting White” phenomenon is tied closely to involuntary minorities’ rejection of the American folktale that education leads to economic gain and a better life. Blacks do not necessarily believe that the system works for them and that they receive a different and inferior education, which in turn results in their being less competitive in their quest for higher salaried jobs often reserved for Whites (Ogbu, 1983). In line with this rejection, Ogbu (1987) also believed that involuntary minorities “attribute their poorer conditions to what they perceive as institutionalized discrimination perpetuated against them by the Whites and the institutions, like the public schools controlled by Whites” (p.231). As a result of this oppositional culture mentality, Blacks learned to

develop American counter culture survival strategies such as involvement in athletics, music, and entertainment.

In addition to viewing athletics as a counter American folktale survival strategy, Black college students, and in particular Black college student-athletes, have been criticized by their minority peers for doing well academically, a practice that can be linked to Ogbu's "acting White" phenomenon. Ogbu's theory of oppositional culture provides a useful foundation from which to examine this phenomenon as well as the experiences of Black male student-athletes as they apply to the challenges associated with the racial and cultural transitions in college and through life. This study examined the existence and prevalence of the "acting White" phenomenon in the Black male student-athlete experience to evaluate its impact on their success in college and ultimate social mobility. This study also examined the impact that race plays in the experiences of these student-athletes as it pertains to their view toward education and its role in their success in college and ultimate social mobility.

The third framework through which the study was examined is Critical Race Theory, a lens that critically explores American institutions such as education and the manner in which race and racism impact educational practice, structures, and discourse (Yasso, 2005). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) detail the three central tenets of Critical Race theory as it applies to education:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. Society is based on property rights.

3. The intersection of race and property rights creates an analytical tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity.

The notion that race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States can easily be supported by the statistical data detailing measures from educational attainment, which document that only 40 percent of Blacks graduate from college compared to 67 percent for Whites (NCAA, 2013), and family income that reports that the medium income of White households is 20 percent higher than that of Blacks (Kochhar, Fry & Taylor, 2011). The impact of race on inequality in educational experience and achievement also supersedes the influence of class and gender, as Blacks are found to have lower graduation rates and higher drop out and suspension rates regardless of class and gender (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

The main contention argued by Critical Race Theory is that race still matters, especially when it comes to education in the United States. Though many may argue that race is no longer an issue given the fact that we now have a Black President, Critical Race Theory contends that race is still very much a factor in the equation when it comes to inequality in the United States. In explaining that race does most definitely matter in society today, Tate (1997) pronounces that Critical Race Theory “portrays dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy as camouflages for the self-interest of powerful entities of society” (p. 235). So not only does race matter, but the insistence that race does not matter leads people to believe that everything is okay in the world today and that nothing needs to change: no foul - no penalty, no need to change the rules of the game.

The assertion that U.S society is based on property rights, which include education, is based predominantly upon the notion that democracy in the U.S. is built on capitalism. This same relationship is directly connected to property rights and the current tax structure in the United States, which influences inequities associated with the quality of education and the distribution of resources in many of our educational systems. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain that higher priced or valued property equates to “better” schools as it applies to the types and quality of the curriculums offered, existing resources, and instruction available in our schools. They equate this phenomenon, prevalent in the education of our children, as a denial of intellectual property that delimits what is now referred to as “the opportunity to learn.” This is central to the transference of social capital detailed by Bourdieu, because education is perceived as a critical vehicle for both the transference and production of social capital. Given that property rights are directly associated with the “opportunity to learn,” the same inequalities ingrained in historical racial disenfranchisement and property rights continue to prevail in perpetuating historical inequality in education, limiting social mobility for the traditionally disadvantaged. The spiral continues in the system as Blacks, due to historical inequalities, have less educated parents with lower incomes, which factor directly impacts the aspiration and financial resources necessary for Blacks to attend college (Harper & Griffin, 2010).

A Critical Race Theory tenet related to the transfer of social capital is the concept of interest convergence which, according to Delgado (1995), asserts that Whites will only argue for the advancement of Blacks to the extent that it benefits their self-interests. The

concept is rooted in the case of *Brown vs. Topeka, Kansas* in which it was argued that the case went the way that it did in order to lend credibility to the U.S.'s claim that democracy was superior to communism during the Cold War (Bell, 2000). The concept holds that in viewing any social, political, or economic policy change, Whites will only support the change after first evaluating the personal costs and benefits associated with that change (Harper, 2009). Interest convergence can be linked to the continuation of inequality in education as those in a position of power, those who evaluate the cost and benefits of action based on personal interest of the dominant class, continue to drive educational policy. Specifically, McCormick and McCormick (2012) argue that collegiate football and men's basketball, which are disproportionately populated by Blacks, are unequally structured in a way that benefits White coaches and administrators who benefit financially at the expense of the labor of Black student-athletes who are classified as student-athlete and therefore not able to reap adequate compensation for their talent.

The value of utilizing Critical Race Theory as a lens to view the impact of the Black student-athlete experience in college is that it presents a context for which to critically examine the role of race and racism in exploring the culture of athletics and the historical and current challenges faced by Blacks. As previously noted, Critical Race Theory also helps to bridge the theories of Cultural Reproduction and Oppositional Culture proposed by Bourdieu and Ogbu, providing a critical eye from which to examine the institutions of sport and education in American society. The theories proposed by Ogbu, Bourdieu, and Critical Race Theory build upon each other as they construct a lens through which to view the experiences of Black student-athletes as they relate to how

Blacks perceive education in light of cultural preservation (oppositional culture), the system that governs the transference of social capital (cultural reproduction), and the impact of race and racism on educational practices and systems (Critical Race Theory).

Ogbu contends that race matters and that oppositional forces associated with whether or not Blacks arrived to the country voluntarily frame their experiences as Americans and therefore as students. The “acting White” and self-sabotage concept, in which Ogbu places the burden on the individual as they strive to improve their status in life, has drawn criticism due to its failure to recognize the significant impact of the societal systems in place recognized by Bourdieu and institutionalized racism contended by Critical Race Theory. Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction builds on Ogbu’s claim of oppositional forces by introducing the notion that the imbedded social systems are largely at play in the reproduction of social capital. Bourdieu argued that the cultural capital associated with upper and middle classes are central to a hieratical society based on their high value. He viewed the social structures in place that both govern and protect social capital as being heavily stratified and entrenched with the transference or acquisition of new social capital occurring only through family inheritance or formal schooling (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Critical Race Theory examines the transference of social capital at a deeper level by looking at the role of race and racism as they impact the social structures discussed by Bourdieu. Where Bourdieu places a higher value on middle and upper class capital with the disadvantaged group being perceived as lacking some form of capital, Critical Race Theory argues that the problem is not with any deficit in the individual student but with

the very model. Critical Race Theory critiques the assumption that Black disadvantaged students come to the table with insufficient cultural capital but that they possess valuable cultural community wealth not recognized by Bourdieu. Yosso (2005) in particular argues in support of moving away from a deficit view of examining the cultural capital of those historically marginalized and moving towards a model that values community cultural wealth and the “array of knowledge, skill, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). So where Bourdieu views the possession and transference of social capital as hieratical with the upper and middle classes being paramount, Critical Race Theory argues in favor of a more inclusive view of social capital where additional value is placed on the cultural capital of Communities of Color such as those related to aspiration, language, familial, navigational and resistant capital. Navigational capital, which refers to the skills associated with being able to navigate a hostile environment that does not necessarily value the cultural capital of the historically disadvantaged (Yosso, 2005), is especially relevant to this study as successful Black college student-athletes face similar challenges and are perceived to develop this competency.

Donor (2005) argues in support of the use of Critical Race Theory in examining college athletics as it provides a perspective from which “to better recognize and more fully understand the forces that have constructed a system in which African American male athletes are cheered on the field by wealthy alumni and powerful fans while at the same time denied opportunities to earn the degrees that could lead to wealth and power of their own” (p. 53). For example, the issue of perceived clustering and the choice of

student-athlete majors and careers may be examined to determine the impact of athletics on the process.

From a non-critical perspective, it may appear that Black male student-athletes select certain majors due to time constraints associated with athletic competition. Using the cultural reproduction framework developed by Bourdieu, the question would be related to the impact of race or family influence on this decision. Ogbu, on the other hand, may view the decision as being driven by the student's desire to select a major in line with protecting their cultural identity and resisting the dominant cultures inclination to assimilate and oppress them. When examined more closely utilizing the "critical eye" of Critical Race Theory, the explanation may change when it is determined that mostly Black student-athletes fit into this equation forcing the question as to why this is the case. The combination of these theories framed in conjunction with one another provides the research and the participants with more options from which to examine and frame their experience.

In viewing the experience of Black student-athletes as they select a major, one theory alone may not provide a sufficient lens from which to view the student's interpretation of their experience. Where Ogbu's theory is grounded in oppositional forces associated with transition and Bourdieu focuses on structural systems as they relate to social reproduction, Critical Race Theory offers the diagnostic race and racism centered approach to examine the experiences of Black college student-athletes. Though each of these theories examines social capital, race, and to some extent racism, they each present a unique perspective from which to examine the experiences of these students.

Research Question

How can intercollegiate athletic programs impact the social mobility of Black male division I college student-athletes?

Sub-Questions:

1. What is the influence of encouragement on participants' likelihood to attend and persist in college?
2. What is the impact of athletic involvement on the academic achievement of participants?
3. How do the lessons learned through sports relating to character impact participants' success in life?
4. How does participation in athletics influence the networks and social capital of participants?
5. What is the impact of mentoring (in its broadest sense) on Black student-athletes, as it relates to academic success, athletic success, and retention?
6. What is the impact of race and socio economic status on Black student-athletes as they experience social mobility?

Limitations of the Study (Validity)

The researcher has been working in student-athlete development for over five years and has preconceptions as to whether the athletics student-athlete development model works due to the fact that he helped frame the model during a time of transition and academic reform in college athletics. The researcher is an insider looking into the world of college athletics through the eyes of student-athletes who have been successful.

Another limitation is that one cannot adequately attempt to tell the story of every Black male student-athlete by interviewing a limited number; their experiences are too diverse to generalize them to the whole Black student-athlete population. In other words, the findings of this study could not and should not be generalized to represent the overall Black student-athlete population. Yet another limitation is the fact that it would be difficult to attribute involvement in intercollegiate athletics and the athletic student development model as the lone factor leading to success in college as there are several other factors such as family environments, parental socio-economic and education status, labor markets, and race and gender that impact student success (Sabo, Melnick & Vanfossen, 1993; Spaaij, 2009).

Delimitations

This study followed a qualitative research methodology involving the semi-structured interviews of 7-10 former NCAA college students-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds who have entered professional careers (not professional athletic careers) and the middle class upon graduating from college. The research involved a descriptive examination of the characteristics and experiences, both positive and negative, of the subjects while they were college student-athletes. Limitation of the study includes focusing on students that have made a successful transition to the middle class and not necessarily those that have not. By only focusing on those that have been successful, the hope is to be able to identify what is happening right. An additional delimitation of the study is that participants in the revenue generating sport of football will be investigated only. Football due to its revenue generating nature, results in participants experiencing

addition pressures associated with the public attention and financial implications of success. Football is also one of the revenue generating sports that tends to recruit and involve a higher proportion of student-athletes who are Black and from low socio-economic backgrounds with experience different from those student-athletes, both Black and not Black, from Olympic sports such as tennis and golf.

For the purpose of this study, only male student-athletes will be examined due to complexities associated with adding gender into the equation. The emergence of women's athletics associated with Title IX and the complexities associated with gender roles in society at large require a scope and examination beyond his study. Due to the lack of Asian and Native American representation in NCAA college athletics (3.4 percent for Asians and less than 1 percent for Native Americans), they will not be included in this (NCAA, 2010). Due to time constraints, only seven to ten individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who graduated from NCAA member institution colleges and universities will be interviewed.

Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative research approach to investigate the shared experiences of Black student-athletes through college in order to answer the research question "How can intercollegiate athletic programs impact the social mobility of Black male Division I college student-athletes?" A phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry was used, which specifically aimed to understand the hidden meanings and the essence of an experience together with how participants made sense of these events. The use of Critical Race Theory is consistent with the phenomenological approach in that it is

insistent on the recognition of the experiential knowledge and “voice” of the individual as opposed to universality. The qualitative phenomenological approach, which explores the lived stories of those who have experienced the phenomenon, is strongly suited to address the value of participants naming their own reality. Seven to ten former Division I Black male student-athletes were selected to participate in the study, in particular, students who have successfully transitioned from college athletics to professional careers. The participants for the study were selected from a variety of institutions using quasi convenience sampling based on the researcher’s existing relationships with sites and individuals that could be easily accessed. The research was based predominately on in-depth interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon with the questioning to include semi-structured interviews.

Every effort was made to conduct the initial interviews in person, but due to the wide geographic distribution of those being interviewed, initial and follow-up interviews were sometimes conducted by phone. It was hoped to gain a better understanding of the shared experiences of Black student-athletes in college through these interviews. Once the interviews were completed, transcripts were analyzed in order to develop a composite description of the experiences of those interviewed. The analysis of the data involved thematic clustering of significant statements (horizons) to determine their meaning. The next step in the process was to develop a narrative description of the student’s experiences and their meaning as determined by the participant. Researcher bias was minimized by bracketing out prior experiences and paying full attention to the experiences as communicated by the participant without judgment. The research plan

outlined was subject to modification and was conducted in a manner that protected the participants and best informs the research questions.

Summary

This study on the experiences of Black Division I male student-athletes investigated the inner workings of college athletic programs to evaluate whether they truly deliver on the promises made to student-athletes. Through a phenomenological research approach, the lived experiences of college student-athletes were explored to review the true essences of the respective journeys through college athletics. The current literature surrounding college athletics was investigated as it pertains to adding to value to the academic experiences, development of character, and impacting the social capital of college student-athletes. The literature review will be followed by an evaluation of the qualitative research methodology of the study that uses a phenomenological approach in which several former Black Division I college student-athletes were interviewed. The final two sections consist of an analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the interviews and an evaluation of the findings followed by a summary and recommendation based on the research. The intention is that the findings will shed light on the Black college student-athlete experience and the current structure of athletic programs in order to determine best practices used in enhancing the academic and social experiences of these students through college. Once drawn out and delineated, these components of the college student development model can then potentially be generalized to enhance the experience of all Black and college students.

Key Terms

Academic Progress Rate - A measure developed by the NCAA whereby institutions, teams, and coaches are evaluated based on student retention and student progress towards degree (eligibility). Each student can earn a maximum of four for maintaining eligibility and retention for the full year. The points are totaled at the end of the year for each team for a score based on a maximum of 1000. The measure holds contemporaneous penalties in that team can potentially lose scholarships and the opportunity to participate in post-season competition based on four year average scores.

Academic Reform- Initiatives adopted by the NCAA to embed a culture of academic success in college athletics. The most recent reform package adopted in 2004 consists of both incentive and disincentive programs. Key measures for academic success are the recently established GSR (Graduation Success Rate), which factors transfer students and is considered more accurate by athletics and APR (Academic Progress Rate). Incentives and disincentives are tied to APR by which institutions are publically recognized for strong scores and penalized (loss of scholarship) for poor scores.

College Student-Athlete Development Model - A model utilized by the NCAA and athletic programs to promote student-athlete development and a culture of academic success among college student-athletes. Based primarily on data accumulated over time, the model is supported by the NCAA's increasing initial and continuing eligibility standards while also increasing academic support provided to student-athletes (Challenge + Support = Growth). The model has been highly effective in increasing retention and graduation rates for student-athletes, in particular Black student-athletes.

Continuing Eligibility - Guidelines developed by the NCAA that stipulate the academic requirements student-athletes need to meet in order to maintain their eligibility for participation and scholarship as they continue in college. These requirements consist of both grade point average and progress towards degree (competing sufficient hours towards their degrees) standards.

Disadvantaged - Individuals from an environment containing factors such as those associated with under privilege (low educational attainment of parents, low income, substandard housing, or from social, cultural, or educational environments that have been historically deprived), which prevents individuals from obtaining the necessary human and social capital for them to transition out of their disadvantaged situation and into an equal position in society.

Federal Graduation Rates - Developed by the Department of Education, this rate measures the percentage of first time full-time freshmen who enroll at a specific college or university who graduate within six years of initial enrollment. The rate does not account for students who transfer in or out of a college or university.

Initial Eligibility Standards - Guidelines developed by the NCAA that stipulate the academic requirement that high school student-athletes need to meet in order to be eligible to participate and receive scholarship to attend college. These metrics have traditionally been based on a combination of both high school grade point averages and standardized test scores.

Life Skills (now Student Development) - Created by the NCAA in 2007 to support the student-athlete development initiative of the NCAA and to enhance the

quality of the student-athlete experience in college. Life skills consist of programming in such areas as community service, career development, drug and alcohol education, healthy relationships, and diversity.

Mentoring - Relationships where more experienced peers and coaches provide feedback and advice to their less experienced protégés enhancing the learning environment, providing them with a critical resource to develop and meet the challenges associated with any endeavor. These positive relationships can also be very beneficial in that they increase intrinsic motivation, promote autonomy and critical thinking skills, not to mention the enhanced feelings of self-value associated with the friendships and bonds with peers and leaders (Watson et al., 2011).

NCAA - The NCAA is the governing body of college athletics responsible for enforcing all standards established by the membership. The governing body of the NCAA consists of member institution presidents supported by a committee structure made up of NCAA institution members. The NCAA national office plays a supporting role in research and enforcement leaving a majority of the leadership responsibilities in the hands of the membership through the described governing structure.

Satisfactory Progress - Measure developed by the NCAA as a part of recent academic reform in which student-athletes are required to meet established progress towards degree and GPA benchmark at predetermined points in their academic careers. Students must pass 24 credit hours by the end of their first year in college; meet 40 percent of degree requirements by their fifth semester, 60 percent by their seventh semester, and 80 percent by their ninth semester of college.

Social Mobility - Spaaij (2009) defines social mobility as “the movement of individuals or groups between different positions within the system(s) of social stratification...changes in an individual’s social position, which involves significant alterations in his or her social environment and life conditioning.” The ability of individuals to move upwards or downwards in status based on wealth, occupation, education, or some other social variable.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

In viewing college athletics as a source of social mobility for its participants, it is important to see the connection between involvement in intercollegiate athletics and the academic success of those who play college sports. Due to the structures that have been set up and can be found at both the high school and college athletics levels, students cannot participate in sports without meeting minimal academic expectations.

College athletic programs driven by business related incentives have developed a student development model that includes increased initial eligibility standards, as well as enhanced academic support and consequences for non-compliance. The model has been successful as noted by continued increases in NCAA student-athletes' graduation rates. The most recent NCAA Federal Graduation Rates Report (2013) indicates that 65 percent of Division I student-athletes graduate compared to 64 percent of all students at Division I institutions (NCAA Graduation Rates, 2011). The model is also out performing expectations, as many student-athletes come through the college gates with lower test scores, class rankings, and GPAs than their non-college athlete peers (Shapiro, 1984). The case can be made that college athletics have served as a social change agent, allowing a path for those who have been historically disenfranchised to enter and matriculate through higher education. Given that athletic programs have found a successful system for supporting student-athlete academic achievement, are there components of the model that can be used to help all college students succeed in higher

education? It is clear that athletics programs have allocated increasing amounts of resources for a model that seems to work for their population. As previously mentioned, the systems for education in the U.S. are not having the same level of success, most notably with students from disadvantaged households. Athletics, to the contrary, has had success in graduating these same students, as illustrated, for example, by its 50 percent Black student-athlete graduation rate compared to 38 percent for all Black students in college (NCAA Graduate Rates Report, 2011).

Americans generally contend that participation in athletics is a good thing and that it contributes to success in life and academics (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Siliker & Quirk, 1997, Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Rees & Sabia, 2010; Bend & Petrie, 1977), character development (Phillips & Schafer, 1971; Picou, 1978), and career opportunities for the poor and minorities (Sabo, Melnick & Vanfossen, 1993). According to the literature, much of the influence of athletics participation has been connected to:

1. Increased student-athlete encouragement to pursue higher education,
2. The influence of athletics on improved academic performance,
3. The psychological impact of athletics on student-athlete perception of self and goal directedness,
4. The impact of athletics on building social capital and the influence of mentoring, and
5. The influence of mentoring associated with their athletic experience.

The literature review will focus on these five areas and their impact on influencing Black student-athlete success through their education and social mobility as measured by success in their professional careers.

Athletics and Encouragement

Students who participate in athletics at an early age and who are able to achieve success or find participation to be something they enjoy have a tendency to be encouraged by others to continue to participate and pursue athletics as a potential activity in college and as an imaginable career. The literature has shown two oppositional views as to the effect of this influence, as some scholars recognize the value of the encouragement while others contend that it can be counterproductive.

Beamon (2010), for example, in her national study of former Black Division I student-athletes from revenue generating sports, found that sports tended to be overemphasized in the socialization process of Black males, holding that Blacks were more encouraged to pursue sports as a career and that more emphasis was placed by Black parents than White parents on athletics as opposed to academics. A study by Funk (1991) conducted at UCLA found that Black families were four times more likely than Whites to view participation in college athletics as leading to professional athletic careers. The study found that Blacks tended to push their children towards pursuing athletics as a career to the point that it discouraged them from exploring other areas and or fields of interest.

Other researchers contend that the encouragement that student-athletes receive to pursue athletics as a means to an education as opposed to an end is a positive thing. Picou

and Curry (1974) conducted a study of over 700 high school senior male student-athletes and non-student-athletes reviewing the impact of encouragement on both Black and White students. He found that student-athletes from disadvantaged and Black households tended to receive more encouragement from teachers, coaches, and parents to go to college than non-student-athletes. Bend and Petrie (1977) came to the same conclusion for all student-athletes, adding that as a result of this encouragement they aspired to attend and succeed in college at a higher rate. Specifically, they found that elite athletes were almost twice as likely as non-athletes to attend college (81percent versus 56 percent). What some have chosen to neglect is the fact that sports have long been considered a part of the curriculum not simply for the physical aspects of participation but for the valuable leadership and teamwork characteristics that are developed through these activities similar to those gained through participation in music and/or art.

The very nature of sports has made participation by Blacks, especially those from disadvantaged systems, very attractive. These students have traditionally come from backgrounds that, due to historical inequalities in respect to education, have left them in a position where they are searching for an avenue of success in life that does not involve a system, in this case education, which possess historical inequalities. Ogbu (1990) holds that this is the reason why many Blacks and other involuntary minorities resist education and instead chose to pursue careers in such areas as music, athletics, and entertainment which are viewed as accessible alternatives. According to Ogbu, many of these minorities feel that if they accept and buy into the dominant cultures notion of education, they are

essentially “selling out” and in some way denying their own cultural identity in what he refers to as the “acting White” phenomenon.

Historically, students from various groups, working class Whites included, have been discriminated against in one way or another and often discouraged from attending college due to their backgrounds or lack of preparation. Some students who enter college may come into the experience pursuing a professional career with some achieving this goal and others not. A majority of them, according to the most recent NCAA graduation rates, will leave the experience with a college degree placing them at an advantage over those who do not have a degree.

Athletics and Academic Success

The research linking the connection between athletic participation and academic success is also mixed with data both supporting and rejecting the polarity of the relationship. Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, and Hagendorn (1999) found that involvement in college athletics had a negative impact on students’ cognitive development, especially for football and basketball players, as they progressed through college. Their study of four-year college sophomores and juniors at various Division I colleges and universities focused on the results of the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL) longitudinal study that reviewed factors affecting learning and cognitive development. Others such as Mahoney and McCormick (1992) and Gayles and Hu (2009) found that those in revenue-generating sports such as football and basketball tended to perform below their athletic and non-athletic peers. Mahoney and McCormick (1992) attributed much of the inequality in academic achievement to the large time

demands placed on participants in football and basketball, noting that the poor academic achievement as measured by poor grades took place during the playing season and that performance tended to level out during the off season. Gayles and Hu (2009) collected data from the Basic Academic Skills Study (BASS) used by the NCAA to assess student-athlete interest, attitudes, and academic skills for over 400 Division I college freshmen from 21 different institutions. Based on the evaluation of the data from the assessments, they attributed the lack of academic success of the student-athletes from the revenue generating sports to their limited engagement with athletic non-high-profile athletes and students in general.

While some of the impact can be attributed to the demanding commitment required for involvement in intercollegiate athletics, the disparity between athletes and non-athlete cognitive development still exists. An explanation for the disparity between high-profile sports and low-profile sports' academic achievement can be found in the attributes of the athletic sub-cultures. The culture of high profile sports such as those in football and men's basketball, which also tend to be more diverse in regards to socio-economic status and race, is different from the culture of other sports. According to the 2010 NCAA Ethnicity Report, men's basketball (60.9 percent) and football (45.8 percent) are the Division I college sports that have the largest Black student-athlete participation rates (NCAA Research Team, 2010). The subculture of revenue generating sports may not value academics as highly and have a more isolated nature due to the extreme visibility and scrutinization of its participants (Pascarella et al., 1999). Edwards (1979) argued that due to inequalities in academic preparation and lack of academic emphasis by

athletics personnel, Black student-athletes do not graduate and are disproportionately funneled into non-academic majors, such as physical education. He contends that coaches force these under-prepared student-athletes into easier majors in order to help them maintain their eligibility and protect the institution's investment. He viewed athletics as the culprit and Black student-athletes as victims who are being taken advantage of by the system in order to maintain the institution's interest, the teams winning percentage, and the coach's career.

Others have found that participation in athletics is not detrimental to a healthy academic career but instead supports academic success. Researchers have found that athletes actually made better grades than their non-athletic peers (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Siliker & Quirk, 1997; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Rees & Sabia, 2010). Bend and Petrie conducted a national longitudinal study of high school seniors from 1960 to 1965 using data from the TALENT National Data Bank to review student grades and aspirations to attend college (1977). The quantitative evaluation determined that the difference in academic performance was most pronounced for student-athletes who were from disadvantaged backgrounds, who tended to fare better than those from disadvantaged backgrounds who did not participate in sports. These findings suggest that Edwards (1979) may not have been off the mark in his essay implying that educators were supportive of Blacks in education as long as they were athletes and not necessarily in college for the purpose of acquiring a profitable academic based education.

This notion can also be linked to concept of interest convergence detailed by Delgado in the discussion on Critical Race Theory. Similar findings were presented in a

quantitative study of Michigan State University student-athletes from 1950 to 1980 (Shapiro, 1984), which examined the graduation rates of male football, basketball, baseball, and hockey student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Admission figures from those periods indicated that 50 percent of student-athletes were admitted through special admissions processes due to their lack of academic preparation compared to 3-4 percent of the general student population. During the same time frame, student-athletes were found to have graduated at about the same rate as non-student-athletes who had been admitted in accordance with the typical admission standards. In other words, student-athletes were out performing the model by graduating at the same level as their non-athletic peers and above the level of expectation. Shapiro (1984) attributed much of the academic success of student-athletes to the high level of academic support that student-athletes are provided along with the breaks that student-athletes are often provided by college instructors.

Much of the disparity in the findings regarding the link between athletic participation and academic achievement can be explained by the heterogeneity of the student-athlete population. Some student-athletes, regardless of their sport, enter college ill prepared to face the challenges associated with higher education; some come from disadvantaged and low socio-economic households while others were more privileged; some are motivated and driven while others lack those same qualities. In most cases, the only thing that student-athletes have in common is the fact they compete in college athletics. The fact that some studies have shown the correlation between athletic participation and academic achievement to be positive and others have found it to be

negative indicates that there may not be a clear answer as to whether or not there is even a correlation. Involvement in college athletics is characterized by other aspects that may also influence the role of participation on academic achievement, such as the fact that sports practice takes a tremendous demand on the schedules of its participants. The NCAA currently limits practice time to 20 hours per week, but this often does not include time that student-athletes spend viewing film, rehabilitating injuries, and participation in community service. Athletic participation has also been linked to increased motivation, self-discipline and self-esteem in its participants resulting in what Rees and Sabia (2010) refer to as “positive academic spill over.” To some extent these contradicting effects can have an equalizing impact or may have an overall positive or negative impact depending on individual student-athletes and how they are able to handle the challenges associated with college athletics. This argument brings back the challenges associated with examining the student-athlete population as a homogenous culture.

Both Spaaij (2009) and Sabo, Melnick and Vanfossen (1993) noted that it is difficult to attribute increased social mobility specifically to athletic participation due to the impact of many other factors such as home environments, education and socio-economic status of parents, labor markets, and race and gender. With regards to the impact of sports participation on academic achievement, character development, and social capital, their influence was also found to be affected by the type of sport, individual versus team sport, and revenue generating versus non-revenue generating (Bredemeier & Shields, 2001), and the gender of participants (Rudd & Stoll, 2004). The case was made that sports, due to its complexity and the existence of unique sub-cultures,

could not be viewed as a homogeneous entity. The unique make-up of the college student population that serves to enhance the experience of college student-athletes also makes it very difficult to reach conclusions about the population and their experiences as a whole.

Athletics and Positive Character Attributes

Athletic participation has also been connected to positive character attributes, such as increased self-esteem, motivation, drive, goal directedness, and self-discipline of participants. There are two distinct definitions of character that are found in the descriptions of the impact of participation in athletics on the development of character attributes. The first definition and the description held by scholars is the moralist view of character that associates character with honesty, fairness, respect, compassion, and ethical behavior (Shields & Bredemeier, 2001; Pries, Krause & Beach, 1999; Doty & Lumpkin, 2010). The second definition, the description used most often by those in the field of athletics such as coaches, administrators, and participants, is associated with the character attributes of resilience, self-confidence, commitment, team work, drive, dedication, mental toughness, and work ethic (Rudd, 2005). This definition, labeled as social character, does not necessarily appear in the Standard English dictionary and is the description used most commonly by those associated with athletics, including parents of participants. Since the focus of this study was not on the moral and ethical decision making process of student-athletes, the emphasis was placed on the social character definition, which is more closely associated with student development.

Social character traits closely linked to the personal development of participants have been attributed to enhanced peer status associated with being a star athlete on the

team and the transference of self-esteem associated with athletic success to academic achievement (Rees, Roger, Howell & Frank, 1990; Phillips & Schafer, 1971). Phillips and Schafer (1971) also cited that participation in athletics helped student-athletes develop certain transferable skills, such as a strong work ethic, mental toughness, persistence, and commitment to excellence that carried over to the students' work in the classroom. Coaches and advisors play a very important role in helping students, especially those lacking a history of academic success, to see the connection between how success on the field ties to success in the classroom. Picou (1978) suggested that the heightened self-esteem associated with sports impacted not only educational aspirations but also attainment. Student-athletes tend to have higher aspirations regarding attending college due to their participation in sports, although perhaps not totally due to a previous knowledge of the expectations of the educational experience that awaits them. This was re-affirmed by Rees, Roger, Howell and Frank (1990) who found that student-athletes had increased positive attitudes towards school and believed in the value of participation in athletics as a means of pursuing a college degree and securing employment. They also confirmed that these students did not necessarily intrinsically value education, perhaps due to the same absence of social capital associated with the lack of understanding of the educational experience suggested earlier.

Students can only be successful in college if they aspire to and choose to attend a college; they cannot graduate from college if they do not enroll in college. Some may also aspire to attend college without being fully aware of exactly what they are aspiring to achieve, given that they may not be fully aware of the expectations. Other students

come into the college experience perceiving college as a spring board for their professional athletic careers and along the way realize that education presents them with the most reasonable opportunity for a better life. They do not all reach that conclusion, but they cannot achieve the goal of a college degree without first aspiring and attending. The aspiration in many cases comes from the encouragement they receive from others to pursue athletics beyond their high school careers, which many students, especially those from disadvantaged homes, may not have received otherwise. Picou (1978) found that Black students who were strongly encouraged to attend college for athletic-related reasons, whether they were predisposed to attend college or not, tended to have higher aspirations to attend college than non-student-athletes. Half the battle to achieve any goal in life is often tied to having the right level of motivation, and based on the research it appears that student-athletes have been found to have higher levels of motivation to attend and persist through college, providing the right carrot to lead the student-athlete to and through a very demanding and rewarding experience.

Participation in athletics has also been associated with the notion that student-athletes are less likely than their non-athletic peers to be involved in disciplinary issues. Involvement in athletics has traditionally required that student-athletes be in good academic and conduct status in order to participate. In addition to academic requirements, student-athletes are required to meet certain behavioral conditions that generally involve abstaining from deviant and anti-social behaviors such as drinking, involvement in fighting, and activities that violate the law. In most cases student-athletes who wish to maintain their eligibility to participate in athletics follow these guidelines or risk being

suspended or dismissed from their team. Segrave and Hastad (1984) concluded in their study of the relationship between athletic participation and delinquency that student-athletes were significantly less likely to be involved with delinquent behavior than non-athletes. They also noted that urban youth, as well as athletic participants from both low and high socio-economic status groups, tended to be less involved in delinquent behavior as well. Their results also indicated that student-athletes in high profile sports exhibited more delinquent behavior than individuals in minor sports. Student-athletes may fear their failure in adhering to the rules will result in disciplinary action from their coaches. Student-athletes may not only fear discipline but also a disruption of the relationships they have developed with their coaches. These positive relationships that student-athletes have with coaches have been strongly linked with a reduction of anti-social and an increase in pro-social behavior of student-athletes (Davidson & Moran-Miller, 2005; Rutten, Biesta, Stams, Schuengel, Dirks & Hoeksma, 2005). Coaches, due to the very nature and demands of athletics, have an opportunity to develop closer and strong relationships that often go beyond the coach/student-athlete relationship in sports. Student-athletes often view their coaches as mentors and individuals who take a personal interest in them and their lives, placing them in a position to exert additional influence when it comes to making personal decisions, a concept that will be more closely defined in our discussion on mentoring.

Related to these qualities seemingly linked to participation in athletics is the notion that athletics build character. Long time NCAA legendary basketball coach John Wooden made the case that athletics did not build character but that it revealed it

(Jamison & Wooden 1997). More often than not, participants have these positive attributes within them coming into the experience, characteristics that are displayed on the field of competition. Shields and Bredemeier (2001) explain that positive characteristics displayed by student-athletes should not be attributed to their involvement in sports and that athletics merely presents the opportunity or the arena for the expression of these attributes that the participants bring to the experience. Videon (2002) confirms this in her analysis of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) where she found that many of the positive character attributes associated with athletic participation are found among athletes because better students tend to pursue sports activities and not that they improve due to their involvement in athletics.

Whether the moral or social definition of character is used has also impacted whether or not researchers agree that sports in general build character. The same dichotomy that was found in regard to the impact of athletics on academic achievement has been found in regard to which type of sports promote and discourage moral character development in its participants. For example, Beach, Krause and Priest (1999) found that student-athletes who competed in team sports fared lower on moral and ethical character tests than student-athletes who competed in individual sports, indicating the existence of variant sub-cultures within sports. Much of the difference may be attributed to the role of revenue generating sports, such as men's basketball and football, which Bredemeier and Shields (2001) found scored lower on character development assessments. They had conducted two linked studies that compared data from participants' responses to hypothetical questions regarding moral dilemmas. The first study sampled 100 high

school and college male and female basketball players followed by the subsequent study that included 20 swimmers. When they compared basketball players' scores to non-student-athletes, student-athletes scored lower than non-student-athletes. When swimmers (individual and non-revenue generating sports) were factored in, the scores showed no difference. Two inferences can be drawn from this, one being that the sub-culture of high profile sports is very different from that of non-revenue generating sports, the other being that student-athletes should not be grouped into one homogenous culture.

One only needs to take a look at the difference between budgets of high profile and low profile sports to see that the two are very different. For example, in the state of New Mexico spending on college football and men's basketball totaled a little over \$22,000 for the year 2010, accounting for almost half of the total spending for all of the state's athletic teams \$48,000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). From the differences in recruiting to the weight training and athletic training resources provided to revenue versus non-revenue generating sports, it is clear the attention provided each of these sub-groups is different. Another dissimilarity was found between male and female student-athletes in regards to whether or not participation in athletics encouraged character development. In addition to supporting the case that college athletes who participated in individual sports scored higher on character development tests than team sport athletes, Rudd and Stoll (2004) also found that females scored higher than males. The same analysis that was made for spending on revenue generating versus non-revenue generating sports can be made in regards to spending on women versus men in college athletics, as expenditures for men's college athletic programs in New Mexico

almost doubled women's expenditures - \$30,000 for men versus \$17,000 for women (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The case can definitely be made that money spent on particular teams appears to negatively impact character development in college student-athletes. Again, the complexities associated with the variability in who competes in college athletics and the various sub-cultures that exist as well as the characteristics associated with these sub-cultures make it difficult to ascertain the impact of college athletics on character development. As previously mentioned, it is also important to recognize the two different definitions of character (moral vs. social) and that some of the traits associated with character development may not necessarily be related to social mobility, which is the focus of this study. Doty (2006), for example, closely associates character in sports with respect to how one treats and regards others, which refers to doing the right thing in any given situation. These moral qualities are important, and it is these qualities paired with characteristics, such as increased self-esteem, motivation, drive, goal directedness, and self-discipline, that are linked with persistence and graduation in college and the benefits associated with a college degree.

Athletics and Social Capital

An important aspect of the link between participation in athletics and social mobility is the opportunity to develop connections that student-athletes are able to establish as a result of sports. The term social capital is described by Putnam (2000) as connections developed between individuals and the rules of reciprocity and trustworthiness that derive from these relationships. The phrase "it is not so much what

you know but who you know” could not be more appropriate as it applies to education, social mobility, and an individual’s capacity to acquire a quality education. Social capital is critically linked to socio-economic status, as one’s ability to gain access to quality opportunities of upward mobility is tied to who is currently in one’s network. If an individual is not familiar with someone who has climbed the ladder of success through education, it is clearly more difficult to succeed in life through the processes that have been accessed by those who are familiar with how to work the system that has traditionally allowed them to succeed while excluding others. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu characterized the concept of social capital in more restrictive terms than Putnam. Bourdieu viewed social capital as the accumulation of resources that exist as a result of an individual’s or group’s association with strong networks that have been institutionalized through these connections and as inherited from the past and transferable only through progressive, slow moving effort. Bourdieu’s concept of capital, what he defined as accumulation of labor, is rooted in the normal practices of inequality and social closure that he viewed as being legitimized by education (Bourdieu, 1986).

Research has found that the relationships developed through participation in athletics have played an important role in improving participants’ social capital. Bourdieu (1986) himself viewed sports participation as an effective tool for building social capital and promoting upwards social mobility. Phillips and Schafer (1971) cited that student-athletes were able to increase their social mobility through their association with others who had stronger and more developed social networks when compared to those who did not participate in athletics. Due to the team nature of sports, student-athletes who work

together, strive together, and are often disciplined together develop close bonds that expedite the development of relationships between team members. Based on their study of over 1200 10th grade male student-athletes and non-student-athletes in New York, Schafer and Rehberg (1970) maintain that often these relationships benefited those with limited social capital, as they were able to develop close relationships with individuals who possessed heightened levels of social capital as displayed by positive educational attitudes and aspirations. These associations that would have been limited without the connections developed through sports go a long way in supporting those with limited social capital in making the connections necessary to succeed in life after college.

Day and McDonald (2010) noted an important characteristic in the link between social capital and the make-up of these relationships as they pertained to Black and White college football coaches in their national quantitative study of almost 400 Division I football coaches. Connections are invaluable for everyone in finding jobs, and Day and McDonald found that the nature of the relationships impacted their value. They found that coaches who developed heterogeneous systems of networks tended to gain more promotions as coaches; specifically, they determined that coaches who were connected with more individuals outside of the traditional Black networks of coaches were more successful in moving up the career ladder in athletics. This is especially noteworthy due to the fact that many former student-athletes follow career paths in athletics, and they begin the development of these networks through participation in college athletics. In her book that develops a theory on social structures of social capital, Lin (2001) supported these findings adding that the disadvantaged groups tend to benefit more from the

development of diverse social connects due to their lack of access to the “good old boys” network that had been previously restricted to Whites. Restriction to homogeneous networks has been found to limit the individual’s networks to those who possess constrained social networks themselves, regardless of the volume of these connections. Consequently, it is not necessarily about the number of individuals in one’s network but more importantly exactly “who” is their network.

In addition to the networks developed within their teams, student-athletes also enhance their social capital as a result of the exposure they receive through participation in college athletics. College athletics has grown to become very popular in our society, as almost 21 million viewers watched the NCAA Basketball Tournament in 2012 (Fixmer, 2012), and over 50 million fans attended college football games at over 600 NCAA schools in 2011 (Johnson, 2012). College student-athletes gain a type of celebrity status both locally and nationally, which often helps them make connections that allow them to initiate and advance their professional careers after college. In his historical study of baseball players, Riess (1980) found that the notoriety gained by these athletes resulting from their playing days in college helped them gain access to public positions and offices. They also found that companies who felt that they could benefit from the exposure of hiring a big name athlete in areas related to sales and real estate would often recruit former baseball players. The value of these networks and contacts associated with student-athlete notoriety was also seen by Day and McDonald (2010) as invaluable, since these contacts often provided former student-athletes information on opportunities and allowed the contact to exert their influence on those that made hiring decisions. The

significance of these relationships was enhanced, as these beneficial connections conferred their social status upon the beneficiary, therefore elevating the reputation of the student-athletes as they entered the job market and moved up through their careers. Many Black student-athletes from disadvantaged households have been historically restricted from access to these valuable networks which, as a result of college sports, they now have accessed. Athletics plays an important role in helping student-athletes bridge this important gap as they transition from a low socio-economic status to the middle class.

Athletics and Mentoring

Mentoring has also been closely connected with the ability of student-athletes, in particular Black student-athletes, to succeed in college due to the challenges associated with being a Black student-athlete. As previously noted, Black students in general do not graduate nor are they retained at the same rates as their White peers in college. The college experience is often very different and difficult for Black student-athletes. Comeaux and Harrison (2007), who developed a conceptual model to explain Division I student-athlete success, found that Black student-athletes often experienced less interaction with professors, an important factor in measuring student engagement, which is highly linked to retention and graduation. The lack of these valuable connections and relationships also limits the opportunity for educational development associated with faculty mentoring. Some of this can be attributed to the time demands associated with being a Division I college student-athlete where the commitments of practice, weight training, film review, and athletic related physical rehabilitation often limit the amount of time student-athletes have available to develop relationships with faculty (Benson, 2000).

These same barriers often also leave Black student-athletes feeling socially and institutionally alienated or isolated (Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). In their study of racial micro-aggression within an academic setting, Black student-athletes expressed feelings of being invisible in a culture where faculty often maintained lower academic expectations of them due to their minority status. Several students in this study indicated that these assumptions from faculty and peers often arose from preconceptions associated with their perceptions of how Blacks entered the institutions, namely affirmative action. The defense mechanism for these students often becomes the act of separating themselves and limiting their interactions with faculty and peers. This phenomenon is often exacerbated for student-athletes, who are perceived to enter the institution through special admissions at higher rates.

Melendez, (2008) who investigates the experiences of Black football student-athletes at predominately White institutions, found that these experiences are heightened for male Black student-athletes due to the social isolation and extreme constraints connected with the commitment of Division I athletics. Additional challenges faced by Division I Black student-athletes arise from the dumb jock stereotypes that lead student-athletes to internalize these beliefs (Harrison, 2008). In a study of the Black student-athlete experiences during the recruitment process, Harrison found that the stereotype of Black male student-athletes being perceived as athletes, as opposed to students, and majoring in eligibility to be prevalent. He goes on to raise the concern of the impact of these stereotypes on the academic development of future Black student-athletes not only in college but as these students progress in their careers. It is clear that Black student-

athletes face unique challenges as they enter higher education, challenges which Division I college athletic programs focus time, energy, and resources to address.

The research supports the notion that mentoring has been found to be both intentional and prevalent in Division I college athletics. Mentoring works to counteract many of the challenges associated with the isolation and alienation that Black male student-athletes often face in college. Watson et al. (2011) found that student-athletes in all sports are continually giving and receiving mentoring from their peers and coaches. Watson suggested that these relationships, where more experienced peers and coaches provide feedback and advice to their less experienced peers enhancing the learning environment, provide Black student-athletes with a critical resource to meet the challenges associated with being student-athletes. These positive relationships can also be very beneficial in that they increase intrinsic motivation, promote autonomy and critical thinking skills, not to mention the enhanced feelings of self-value associated with the friendships and bonds with teammates and coaches that result from these relationships (Watson et al., 2011). Sauer et al. (2012) found that college student-athletes scored higher on their reception to mentoring and their likelihood and ability to mentor others when compared to non- student-athletes. Melendez (2008), in his study of the Black college student-athlete experience at predominately White college campuses, contends that Black mentors (faculty, staff, and coaches) who are willing and available to work with student-athletes play a critical role in helping them with deal with the challenges associated with the “isolation gap” that many Black college student-athletes encounter.

Student-athletes, due to their heightened notoriety in the community, also have increased accessibility to community representatives and alums who can potentially serve as mentors. Melendez (2008) found that Black student-athletes, who were inclined to be recruited from different geographic areas, tend to feel both alienated and threatened in their new college communities. He believed that student-athletes would especially benefit from developing connections with community members in order to help them feel less alienation and anxiety. The research suggests that college student-athletes are taking advantage of the mentoring resources that are made available to them and that these resources impact their ability to adjust to and succeed in overcoming challenging environmental factors (Carrodine, Almond & Gratto, 2002).

Having established that Black male student-athletes face unique challenges in college and that they are more likely to participate in mentoring as college student-athletes, how does the research support the notion that mentoring actually helps student-athletes succeed in college? Melendez's (2006) study of freshmen and sophomore student-athletes noted that they have increased levels of intentional support including mandated mentoring programs, which helps explain student-athletes' higher scores on academic adjustment and institutional adjustment when compared to their non-student-athlete peers. Mentoring, in particular, supports students in establishing bonds not only with others who are in a position to help them succeed in college but also with adjusting to their new environments and the institution, bonds that help explain the higher institutional attachment scores reported by Melendez (2006). These connections are even

more valuable to student-athletes given the challenges they face, challenges that are even more prevalent during the adjustment from high school to college.

Pearson and Petitpas (1990) suggest that the transition is even more demanding for student-athletes in college due to identity issues, inexperience with transition, lack of supportive relationships, and the resources needed to cope with this critical transition. With regards to the social context of the transition, they maintain the value of student-athletes developing responsive, supportive relationships provide them with the emotional, material, and informational support needed to make a successful transition from high school to college. Person and LeNoir (1997) linked these relationships, in particular those with African American faculty, coaches, and campus staff and administrators, as a key element in the retention of African American student-athletes, concluding that students feel better about their institutions when they are able to connect with faculty and others as role models. These relationship are essential to mentoring, which by nature pairs the incoming, less experienced student-athlete with a peer, coach, alum, community member that is more experienced and in a strong position to provide students new to the environment with the emotional, material, and informational support they need to make a successful transition and to succeed in college.

The literature also identified characteristics associated with mentoring that are most beneficial to participants. Carter and Hart (2010), in their study of athletics and mentoring, saw Black student-athletes identify providing guidance, serving as a role model, possessing relational characteristics, and providing constructive criticism as characteristics associated with defining mentoring. In her quantitative analysis of the

impact of mentoring on Black male student-athletes at predominately White institutions of higher education, Kelly (2010) identified mentor availability, honesty, being supportive, trustworthiness, guidance, patience, transparency, openness, firmness, and genuinely caring about the mentee as a person as qualities that protégées associated with mentoring relationships. In both of the studies the relationships appeared to go beyond simply providing advice and being available, as the mentor expressed a sincere interest in the mentees allocating the appropriate time and energy to providing support and assistance during challenging times. Black student-athletes in Division I college athletics are provided support from multiple areas ranging from coaches, athletic trainers, strengths coaches, academic advisors, and other athletic and campus services providers, which are in most cases paid to help student-athletes grow, develop, and succeed as college student-athletes. What is most evident from the experiences of the students in the described studies is the fact that effective mentors go beyond their paid or required duties in supporting these student-athletes through college and in life.

Mentoring of college student-athletes has also been found to expand beyond success in college and into the personal and professional success of college student-athletes who feel more comfortable with mentoring relationships. Sauer, Desmond and Heintzelman (2013) observed that college student-athletes, when compared to non-student-athletes, were more open to mentoring, were better mentors, had higher levels of emotional intelligence - all ultimately resulting in higher levels of personal and professional success as measured by salaries and career satisfaction. The study highlights the impact of mentoring on the lives of college student-athletes not only as it impacts

success in college but also as college student-athletes learn to develop openness to mentoring and the supportive relationship that can be beneficial for a lifetime.

The coaching relationships associated with college athletics appear to expand beyond the playing fields and into the personal lives of student-athletes as they begin to see the value of these relationships and actively seek out support from those that are in a position to help them succeed. Bimper, Harrison and Clark (2012) found that Black student-athletes at predominately White institutions were able to compete academically in part due to the cultural capital they were able to develop through the relationships found in the supportive community associated with athletics. Many would most likely assume that athletes, due to the machismo associated with the ruggedness of sport, would have a tendency to feel that they can do it all on their own, but the research suggests something different, as student-athletes have been found to be more likely to seek out and benefit from supportive relationships through mentoring. This supports the argument that participation in college athletics may not hinder adjustment and college success but actually supports students in making successful transitions through college and in life.

Summary

The literature reviewed documents in a considerable effort to understand the impact of factors such as encouragement, success in academics, character development, the acquisition of social capital, and mentoring on student-athlete success in college, life, and social mobility. The impact of athletic participation on student-athlete success has been closely tied to the student-athlete development model introduced earlier, in that student-athletes have additional academic resources provided to them paired with more

stringent academic requirements for both initial and continuing eligibility. The model is suggested to play an important role in the academic preparation and achievement of college student-athletes, therefore, facilitating social mobility. Much of the research conducted on the relationship between athletic participation and student development has been limited to the late 1960s and early 1970s when the current model did not exist. Many findings prior to this are both interesting and surprising, given that they reflect a different culture from what currently exists in college athletics for example, those associated with low graduation rates of college student-athletes noted in some of the earlier claims (Edwards, 1979; Beamon & Bell, 2006). The research, though seemingly dated, is of practical value to this research in that it provides a foundational body of literature on the impact of participation in athletics on student development in the absence of more current studies. Another reason for the lack of recent research in the area of the Black student-athlete experience in college is due to the increased Black participation rates and improved Black student-athlete graduation rates has lead society to believe that there are no issues, a belief resulting in a lack of interest that will be challenged using a Critical Race Theoretical framework. This research, using the phenomenological qualitative method, investigated the lived experiences of former Black student-athletes to determine the impact of participation in college athletics in the areas noted (encouragement, academics, character development, and social capital) as they perceive them in this new era of college athletics.

Chapter III

Methodology

College student-athletes from many different regions and home situations often share a common experience that involves balancing the academic, athletic, personal, and social aspects of their lives. They come from diverse places - from the country club regions of the far northeast to the disadvantaged inner city neighborhoods of the Deep South - with academic preparation, parental involvement and income as varied as the places they call home. Yet they share a common experience that has changed throughout the last two decades as the NCAA has increased the academic requirements for athletic competition in college and upgraded the level of academic support available to these students during college. This has occurred during a time when the United States has relinquished its one-time role as the world leader in education, due in part to our nation's inability to educate those from disadvantaged backgrounds. College athletics has, during the same period, developed a model that has experienced success in educating those from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular Black students who make up a little more than 30 percent of the entire college student-athlete population (NCAA Ethnicity Report, 2011). Given that Black students are able to succeed and graduate at a higher rate as student-athletes (54 percent vs. 44 percent according to the 2012 NCAA Graduation Rates), what is it about the experience that enables these Black male student-athletes to succeed and graduate at a higher level across the nation?

The numbers reveal that Blacks are succeeding at a higher level, but the quantitative data does little to explain why they are succeeding or provide an

understanding of the experiences of Black male student-athletes as they matriculate through college. Qualitative research can provide an insight into the experience of the Black student-athlete in order to provide a better understanding of the impact of those students' interpretations of what is happening in terms of their increased success in college. Through intensive interviews, this researcher gained a better understanding of the shared experiences of Black male student-athletes in college. This chapter will present information on how this particular qualitative study was conducted, including the role of the researcher, the selection of subjects, the methods for data collection, how the data was analyzed and will conclude with a discussion on ethical consideration and flexibility of model development.

Role of the Researcher

I am a former Division I scholarship college football student-athlete who attended a four-year institution and a junior college prior to completing my academic and athletic career at a Division I AA institution in the Midwest. I completed an undergraduate degree in Social Science Education and intended to coach and teach in high school, having been a former high school football, wrestling, and track student-athlete. Upon completion of my undergraduate degree, I began working as a graduate assistant in the academic support program for student-athletes while completing a master's degree in counseling. During that same time, I also worked as an assistant football and wrestling coach at a local high school, eventually becoming the head wrestling coach after completing a master's degree. Upon the completion of the degree, I began my professional career in 1992 as a full-time athletic academic advisor, a position held until

1994 when I became the director of the academic support program for student-athletes at the same institution. During my time in the field, I have been very involved in cultivating programs to support student-athlete development both at the institutional and national levels having served on the NCAA Life Skills Program development team. Through the work of NCAA Life Skills Development Team, the NCAA was able to create a broad range approach to student-athlete development by implementing programming in areas such as drug and alcohol education, healthy relationships, freshmen year experiences courses, and leadership and career training.

I come from a lower socio-economic background in inner city San Diego and have been deeply influenced by my experiences as a college student-athlete. I believe the experience provided me with opportunities and support that would not have otherwise been available had I not been a college student-athlete. Having originally enrolled at a Division I institution in San Diego out of high school as a non-student-athlete, I did not feel connected to the institution even though the resources were clearly available. During that period I worked part-time off campus before leaving the institution in good academic standing to attend a junior college that had recruited me to play football. Junior colleges in California do not provide athletic scholarships to student-athletes per policy. I played junior college football for two years before being recruited and awarded a scholarship at a Mid-Western Division I AA institution. Having experienced four separate institutions as a Hispanic non-student-athlete and a student-athlete at predominately White institutions has provided me with a unique perspective and understanding of the experience of each group. The fact that I have also worked in student-athlete development for over 20 years

has given me an insider's perspective on the experience of Black male student-athletes at two separate institutions. My experience in counseling, having completed a master's in counseling, has also allowed me to gain an even deeper perspective, having had the opportunity to gain very private information about the lives and experiences of many of the student-athletes I have worked with.

With over 20 years of professional experience in the field and the prior 6 years' experience as a college student-athlete and graduate assistant, I have a strong understanding of the phenomenon researched, which is the impact of Division I college athletics programs on the social mobility of Black male student-athletes. Though not as a Black student-athlete, I have experienced social mobility as a result of my experiences as a student-athlete. I perceive that the experiences, most notably those associated with academic support and mentoring, social capital, and the leadership and life lessons from sport, have had a positive impact on my success in life.

Approach

Phenomenology is an approach that aims to uncover the hidden meanings and the essence of an experience together with how participants make sense of these. Essences are objects that "do not necessarily exist in time and space like facts do but can be known through essential or imaginative intuition involving interactions between researcher and respondent or between researcher and text" (Grbich, 2007, p. 84). Maxwell (2005) thought it important to explain the type of study and the reason that a specific approach to qualitative inquiry was selected. Given that the research is attempting to gain insight into the common experience shared by Black male student-athletes from disadvantaged

backgrounds as they progressed through college, the phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry was utilized. As previously discussed, the student-athlete populations are very diverse, and it is challenging to attempt to perceive them as a homogeneous group. The fact that we focused on the Black male student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds does help somewhat, but even these parameters made it difficult to make any generalizations about the population. What this does allow is the narrowing of the focus in order to research the meaning from these students who share a common student-athlete experience.

It was anticipated that these students would have both unique and vast experiences. A phenomenological study helped focus on what these student-athletes have in common as they experienced the phenomenon which, in this case, is participation in college athletics. Work was completed to “develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) through data collection and analysis. The essence was critical here as it portrayed the very core of the experiences, bracketing out anything outside of the content and the meaning of the experience from those who are undergoing the phenomenon first hand. As required of the phenomenological research process, the focus was strictly on the experiences of the participants as they perceived them with all interpretive rights being restricted to them. In other words, the researcher was most interested in the participant’s view of the phenomenon and how the individual interpreted the experience of being a college student-athlete. The research in phenomenological studies is objective and subjective; subjective in that they rely on the individual’s interpretation of the phenomenon and

objective in that the individuals are part of a group that shares a common experience (Creswell, 2007).

Participants and Sampling

“Decisions about where to conduct your research and who to include (what is traditionally called “sampling”) are an essential part of your research methods” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 87). Fundamental to phenomenological research is the fact that all participants in the study experienced the phenomenon being investigated, which is the reason why only former Division I, male, Black student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds were involved in the study. As recommended by Creswell (2013), individuals who can “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (p. 156) were selected for the analysis. It was not only important for individuals in this case to have experienced college athletic participation, but the individuals needed also to be open to discussing the phenomenon and capable of communicating the experience in a manner that allowed the research to distill meaning and understanding from the experience of the subject. Grbich (2007) viewed the experience and the meaning of the experience, “the memories, feelings and multi-visual pictures associated with that thing” (p. 85) as both being important as they are joined together to compromise the whole.

The participants for the study were selected from a variety of institutions using the sampling strategy described by Creswell (2013) as quasi convenient sampling, which are tied to ease of access and data collection. This method was selected based on the fact that the researcher had existing relationships with sites and individuals that can be easily

accessed. Some of the participants came from the university where the researcher currently serves as the head of student development for student-athletes. Other participants were selected from a Midwestern university where the researcher previously played college football and served as the head of athletic academic advisement. These two institutions were selected because they provided high levels of academic support to student-athletes as indicated by measures such as increased graduation rates, APR scores, and grade point averages for student-athletes. Additional participants were selected from two additional Division I institutions where the researcher was familiar with those in the field who have also provided high levels of support to student-athletes who will help recruit subjects for the study. The researcher drew from a total of four institutions in order to provide for a wide sample of institutions and a wide range of student-athlete experiences in Division I athletics. A recruitment letter was developed and as sent to student-athlete service providers whom the researcher was familiar with in order to recruit former student-athletes for this study. The potential research participants were then contacted and asked to complete a brief survey used to determine if the candidates were a good fit for the study. The researcher made certain not to select participants with whom he currently had a relationship or can exert any type of power over them (Creswell, 2007). Participants consisted of individuals who completed their bachelor's degrees and have gone on to professional careers that place them in better economic situations than those of their parents. The intention was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon based on the experience of those who achieved increased social mobility. The sampling can likewise be considered criterion based sampling in that participants

needed to be former Division I Black male student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds. As mentioned, a brief informational survey was conducted of the participants prior to the formal interviews to determine whether they had experienced upwards social mobility as exemplified by increased educational attainment, improved employment or salaries when compared to their parents.

The researcher was cognizant of the fact that the terms ‘academic mobility’ and ‘social mobility’ are unique and that one does not necessarily follow the other. Bourdieu makes this distinction in stating that economic capital can potentially be used to secure social capital but that the embedded nature of much of social capital takes time, often several generations, in order to be transferred. Following this distinction is the notion that an increase in education does not necessarily follow an increase in economic capital or social mobility. Examples of this can be found in the millions of Americans who have academic credentials who are under employed (Vedder, Denhart & Robe, 2013). Exception to this rule can also be found in the other direction in self-made individuals such as Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, and Henry Ford, founder of Ford Motors, who did not possess much in terms of a formal education but secured high paying jobs and economic capital in specialized fields due to unique talents. No conclusion are arrived at that either educational attainment or economic capital result in the promotion of the other, only that the individuals selected for this study had in increase in one or the other in conjunction with their experiences as student-athletes.

Data Collection

Seven to ten subjects were interviewed using an iterative approach, which Grbich (2007) describes as “involving a series of actions of data collection which is repeated until the accumulated findings indicate that nothing new is likely to emerge and that the research question has been answered” (p. 20). The process of collecting and analyzing data in order to gain meaning is continued with the researcher focusing on the phenomenon as interpreted by each subject.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher bracketed out personal feelings or preconceptions associated with his understanding of the phenomenon. In his book, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, (1994) Clark Moustakas uses the concept of “Epoche,” which translates from the Greek as “to stay away or abstain from,” in this case judgment by the researcher. He places extreme emphasis on the importance of the exclusion of all personal interpretation as foundational to phenomenological research. He describes Epoche or bracketing as the laying aside of all prejudice, biases, and preconceptions about the phenomenon and approaching the research with a “purified consciousness” in order to truly investigate the experiences of the subject. Moustakas states that bracketing allows the researcher to view the experience in a fresh perspective, challenging the researcher to “create new ideas, new feelings, new awareness and understandings” (p. 86) as opposed to projecting his own thoughts onto the participant. This is critical to phenomenological research, as it permits new learning as opposed to the recycling of current literature on the issue and the researcher’s understanding of the experience. The blocking out of the researcher’s perspective and the presentation of the

empty room in the research, and particularly in the interviews, provided the open door for new knowledge to enter and fill the room with fresh ideas and insight on the phenomenon. Creswell (2013) cautions that the total blocking out of these types of preconceptions is almost impossible for the researcher in qualitative research, “because interpretation of the data always incorporates the assumptions that the researcher brings to the table” (p. 83).

As recommended by Creswell (2013,) the investigation was based predominately on in-depth and multiple interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, in this case participation in a college athletic program. The method used for questioning involved semi-structured interviews. Maxwell (2005) notes the value of having a tentative plan laid out for certain aspects of a study while leaving room to focus on the participant’s experience of the phenomenon as the interview progresses. The semi-structured interviewing method provides both a good starting point for the interview and comparability between subjects with the flexibility to follow the feelings and emerging insight of the participant. Every effort was made to conduct the initial interviews in person, but due to the wide geographic distribution of those being interviewed some initial and follow-up interviews were conducted by phone. An attempt was made to set up the interviews in a quiet environment free from distractions where the interviewee felt comfortable and at ease responding to the questions and sharing feelings about the experience. Since the interviews were audio-taped, it was also important that the setting be free from background noises or distractions that could potentially negatively impact the ability to hear and transcribe the interview. Once the interview was transcribed, the

respondents had the opportunity to review the transcription and related notes to insure accuracy and to determine if the notes were a true representation of what the participants communicated and meant by their comments. The participants were also provided with the opportunity to add to or detract from their original responses and or statements.

The subjects' identities remained confidential throughout the process, as it was not essential to the research purpose. The subjects' names were not used in any of the transcripts, as subjects were identified solely by pseudonym. The primary investigator has a background in counseling and is trained in recognizing and responding to subject discomfort. The questions were not intrusive and were intended to inform and not to prod into deep seated issues or concerns. Any potential identifiers were removed from the audio recorded transcriptions and notes as the subject was identified by pseudonym throughout the process. After the research was completed and submitted, all audio-tapes associated with the study were destroyed. All identifiers associated with the participants including names, email addresses, and all other potential identifiers were also destroyed. Any text found within the transcriptions that may potentially identify the participant were carefully screened and removed as well. Storage of transcribed interviews, scanned consent forms, and any data associated with the study were stored in the VPN tunnel registered to the researcher. Recording associated with the study was secured in a locked cabinet in the locked office of the researcher located on south campus. The VPN tunnel was terminated at the completion of the study as well. Participants had the right to withdrawal from the study at any time.

Data Analysis

The in-person interview was audio-taped and then transcribed leaving room for the researcher's reflection and comments. Once the communication was transcribed, the process described by Moustakas (1994) as horizontalization in which every possible significant statement made by the respondent that is relevant to the topic with each phenomenon having equal value in the research, was conducted to discover the essence of the statement. Moustakas describes the boundless nature of horizons, stating that "We can never exhaust completely our experience of things no matter how many times we reconsider or view them" (p. 95). For this reason it was imperative that the researcher bracket out his experience and pay full attention to that of the respondents and how they are experiencing the phenomenon, focusing on every statement that is related to the research, and then holding off judgment until the data were analyzed. Once all of the horizons were recorded, the researcher revisited the responses and cleaned up comments that were irrelevant to the topic, repetitive, or overlapping leaving only the base horizons (Moustakas). To some extent the research also utilized memorandums that are recommended by Maxwell allowing for reflection on methods, theory, or purpose of the researcher. These were recorded through the process in order to assist the researcher in addressing problems or making sense of issues that arose, as well as allowing for the laying out of concepts that may need to be developed further. These memos were captured in a separate journal.

The next step in the analysis of the data involved the thematic clustering of the horizons in order to determine their meaning. Maxwell (2005) refers to this process as

organizing the statements into categories that share a common substantive or theoretical meaning. “Organizational categories function primarily as the bins for sorting the data for further analysis” (p. 97). These categories are more operative as they are a part of the process of setting the stage for interpreting the meaning of the statements when they are grouped in a manner that simplifies the researcher’s ability to arrange and organize basic themes or concepts. For example, a common theme that arose during the interviewing process was the role of the coach as a source of motivation for the subjects to complete their academic course work. Thematic clustering allows the researcher to gather all statements made by the respondents that relate to this experience in order to develop a case for the notion that this is an important factor in the respondent’s academic success. At this point though, the researcher refrained from making judgment as to the value of the phenomenon and was only placing the statements in the appropriate bin for later analysis.

The next step in the analysis of the data was the development of what Moustakas (1994) describes as the textural account of the experience. This description begins with the Epoche (bracketing) and going through a process of returning to the thing itself, in a state of openness and freedom, facilitates clear seeing, makes possible identity, and encourages the looking again and again that leads to deeper layers of meaning. In the process of explicating the phenomenon, qualities are recognized and described; every perception is granted equal value, non-repetitive constituents of the experience are linked thematically, and a full description is derived (p. 96).

The focus in this part of the process was on developing a narrative explanation of exactly what was experienced and the meaning that the individual assigned to the

phenomenon. This was accomplished by breaking down the transcripts into significant statements and then organizing them thematically (Creswell, 2013). Where clustering focuses on the organization of the ideas, developing textural descriptions is the actual written account of what was experienced by the respondent.

Paired with the textural description is the structural description, which is the narrative associated with the context of the experience that in this case is Division I college athletics. This pairing is viewed by Creswell (2013) as describing how the respondent experienced the phenomenon in terms of setting, situation, or conditions or how the experience came to be. In this step the researcher looked at all potential meanings, interpretation, and perspectives using what Moustakas (1994) called imaginative variation, which involves a search for meaning using imagination through the use of differing frames of reference, viewing the phenomenon from various perspectives, roles, functions, and positions. In this particular study the researcher viewed the experience in light of educational benefits, adjustment and transition, social networking, and the role of mentoring or coaching. The researcher then used the textural and structural descriptions to compose a synthesis of the two into the “essence” of the experience in what Creswell defined as the essential, invariant structure focusing on the shared experience of the respondents. All experiences can be said to have common root structures regardless of the subject. For example, fear - whether it of heights or spiders - is rooted in an essential feeling that all can understand. Regarding the essential, invariant structural description, the narrative allows the reader to walk away having a better understanding of what it is like to experience that particular phenomenon. In this

particular study, the goal of this narrative was for the reader to come away with a better understanding of what it felt like to be a Black college student-athlete.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research differs from validity in quantitative research in that much of the work is done after the research has begun as opposed to the latter in which the research beginning is critical. Validity evaluates whether the research measures what it is intended to measure, and in this case, the research is intended to capture the essence of the experience of the Black male college student-athlete to determine the degree to which the experience impacted their ability to increase their individual social mobility. Validity would thus evaluate the degree to which the researcher accurately captures these experiences. A key concept of validity in qualitative research is described as “validity threat” or how might the conclusions arrived at by the researcher be wrong

Maxwell (2005) discusses two key validity threats: researcher bias and reactivity. Researcher bias refers to the notion that researchers place their own beliefs and preconceptions into the research, in particular in the selection of the data. An example of this would be researchers selecting data that fits their preconceived ideas on the phenomenon as opposed to allowing the data to speak for itself in conveying the experience of the participants. Reactivity is described by Maxwell as the influence of the researcher on the setting or the individuals selected for the study. He goes on to note that it is impossible to totally eliminate the influence of the researcher in this area due to the fact that the research and the subject are both a part of the world being studied.

In order to prevent the impact of reactivity in the inquiries, the researcher selected subjects from different regions and not simply individuals who he believed would support any notions that he might have on the experiences in question. Though the researcher may be familiar with some of the subjects, they were not selected based on any preconceptions as to whether or not they may or may not support his views. The researcher also was careful in the development of his initial and subsequent queries to not use questions that would lead the respondents in any particular direction but rather asked open ended questions that allowed the subjects to describe the meaning from their encounters as they experienced and interpreted them. With regard to researcher bias, the study was approached with the intention not of being right or supporting a point but instead of better understanding the phenomenon. Maxwell makes the point that critical to validity in qualitative research is not necessarily bias but instead the integrity of the investigator. The researcher in this study was committed to the phenomenological process with the goal to investigate the experiences and the interpretation of the participants in order to understand the phenomenon with the ultimate purpose of using the finding to support student success in higher education.

The processes earlier described as bracketing and horizontalization served a vital role in minimizing researcher bias. Bracketing supported the setting aside, as much as possible, any preconceived experiences in order to focus on the experience of the participant. The fact that the researcher was cognizant and understanding of the precepts and value of phenomenological research played a strong role in supporting the minimization of researcher bias in the study. Specifically, memorandums were utilized in

order to capture personal interjections to include opinions, ideas, or personal interpretations of the phenomenon. The memorandum served as a holding tank for these ideas providing a placeholder for the research to contain personal impressions of the concepts explored by the participant. The use of memorandums aided in protecting the validity of the research by providing a mechanism to interject personal thoughts without tainting the expressed experiences of the participant. By utilizing horizontalization, the researcher made certain to include a listing of all significant statements related to the subject, viewing all topics as equal and reserving judgment. This process ensured that the researcher included all ideas and not necessarily only those that supported any conscious or subconscious notions that he may have related to the experience being studied. Creswell (2013) supports the use of what he described as negative case analysis in order to minimize validity threats in qualitative research. Very few concepts in this world are absolute, which makes it important to note cases that contradict main themes proposed by the study. These negative examples were discussed by the researcher in order to provide a more realistic assessment of the phenomenon.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which the conclusion the researcher makes about the data is consistent over time. Joppe (2014) defines reliability as “The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study... and if the results of a study can be reproduced” (p. 1). Critical to reliability is whether the participant’s answers to the questions posed by the researcher are consistent over time. Along the same lines, reliability is also measured by whether or not

participants provide similar responses when asked the same question. Maxwell (2005) suggests the use of respondent validation or “member check” as a mechanism for soliciting feedback from participants on your data and conclusions. The research utilized member check by presenting the respondents with the opportunity to review the transcribed notes related to the interviews to insure accuracy and to determine if the notes were a true representation of what participants not only communicated but also meant by their comments. In addition to clarification, the participants were also provided with the opportunity to add to or detract from their original responses and or statements. The measurement of this consistency or what can be referred to as stability was also recorded in memorandums and taken as evidence in the study. Maxwell (2005) cites that participant feedback is just as valuable as information presented in their initial interviews and that both should be included in the data.

Another tool for the research to address reliability is intercoder agreement, which Creswell (2013) refers to as the utilization of multiple coders to analyze the transcripts to ensure the stability of responses. Such a review involved the use of an outsider to review the transcriptions and their coding in order to seek agreement on the various codes and themes to provide the researcher with another perspective as to whether they are using appropriate labeling for the codes and themes and whether the statements provided were assigned the correct code. In this study, the researcher worked with a reviewer who reviewed the transcriptions and prescribed coding in order to provide external evaluation of the interpretations arrived at by the researcher during the coding process. The coding

process is highly subjective, and the use of an external reviewing can be especially useful in assuring the reliability and stability of assigned themes and codes.

Summary

The proposed qualitative study was intended to answer the research question “How can intercollegiate athletic programs impact the social mobility of Black male Division I college student-athletes?” and utilized interviews in order to collect data from former Black male student-athletes on their views of their experience. The phenomenological approach to this research was most suited to answer the research questions due to its deep rooted focus on the experiences and feelings associated with the phenomenon by the participants. The research was conducted within a one year window in order to maintain the freshness of the topic and the opportunity to successfully follow up with the participants. The plan outlined in the proposed research was subject to modifications in line with the recommendation made by Maxwell (2004) that the plan be constructed as tentative, allowing the researcher the option for substantive revision as necessary throughout the research process. The proceeding chapters provide a detailed description of the research findings and recommendations for program implementation and further research.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Introduction

This study addresses the question: How do intercollegiate athletic programs impact the social mobility of Black male Division I college student-athletes? The literature indicates a connection between academics, character development, social capital, mentoring, and participation in college athletics that can be linked directly to success in areas that impact social mobility. The relationship between them has been determined to be positive by some and negative by others. For example, college student-athletes have been found to have been encouraged more than their non-student-athlete peers to attend college by their coaches, parents, and teachers (Picou, 1978; Philips & Schafer, 1971). This same encouragement has led these students to attend college at higher rates (Philips & Schafer, 1971), which places them in a very strong position to succeed in life and increases the likelihood of their social mobility. Participation in athletics has also been linked to positive academic achievement of student-athletes in college (Schafer & Armer, 1968; Phillips & Schafer, 1971; Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Silliker & Quirk, 1997; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Rees & Sabia, 2010), while other studies suggest a negative impact (Pascarella, E., Truckenmiller, R., Nora, A., Terenzini, P., Edison, M. & Hagendorn, L. 1999; Sage, 1998).

The impact of athletic participation on academic achievement has been closely tied to the student-athlete development model that will be introduced later in this chapter in which student-athletes have additional academic resources provided to them, paired

with more stringent academic requirements for both initial and continuing eligibility.

There are other characteristics developed through participation that seem to enhance the student-athletes' ability to succeed in college and in life, most notably those associated with heightened character.

Though the relationship between character development and sport has been shown to be influenced by the type of sports student-athletes participate in (Bredemeier & Shields, 2001), the case is made that involvement in sports leads to such characteristics as increased motivation, self-esteem, and self-discipline of participants (Phillips & Schafer, 1971; Picou, 1978), which influence success and social mobility. Sports have also been associated with the expansion of the social mobility of participants in regards to supporting the development of valuable connections that help them succeed through college (Schafer & Rehberg, 1970; Phillips & Schafer, 1965; Lin, 2001; Bourdieu, 1986) and in the enhancement of their networks once they graduate (Reiss, 1980; Day & McDonald, 2010; Bourdieu, 1986). These links have been proven to play an important role in the development of social mobility in college student-athletes.

Mentoring has also been closely connected with the ability of student-athletes, in particular Black student-athletes, to succeed in college due to the added support provided to assist them in overcoming the challenges associated with being a Black college student-athlete.

The student-athlete development model, which emphasizes increased initial and continuing eligibility standards, increased academics support, and sports as a catalyst for academic and personal success has not been closely examined yet due to the fact that it is

a recently emerging phenomenon. Some of the research conducted on the relationship between athletic participation and student development has been limited to the late 1960s and early 1970s when the current model did not exist. Many of the findings prior to this are both interesting and surprising given that they reflect a different culture from what currently exists. For example, the low graduation rates of college student-athletes noted in some of the earlier claims (Edwards, 1979; Beamon & Bell, 2006) reflect a time before graduation ratios were tracked or enforced. Some of the earlier findings, especially those attributed to Black student-athletes, are quite different from those that can be found today. In 2011, 55 percent of Division I Black male student-athletes graduated compared to only 28 percent the 2004 class (NCAA Research Staff, 2013).

As noted by both Spaaij (2009) and Sabo, Melnick, and Vanfossen (1993), it is difficult to attribute increased social mobility to athletic participation due to the impact of many other factors, such as home environments, education, and socio-economic status of parents, labor markets, and race and gender. The case was made that sports, due to its complexity and the existence of unique sub-cultures, could not be viewed as a homogeneous entity. The unique make-up of the college student population that serves to enhance the experience of college student-athletes also makes it very difficult to draw conclusions about the population and their experiences as a whole. From formal interviews, the connection between the literature and what is occurring in the lives of Black student-athletes will be explored with the realistic expectation that there are no definitive findings that can be applied across the board. A search was conducted to find instances where real-life experiences of the participants support the literature and others

where these experiences contradict or lead to the discovery of gaps in the current literature.

This chapter will present a background on the researcher as well as a detailed description of the participants in the study, followed by a description of the research methodology applied to the data analysis. The data and results will then be presented using a thematic format structured around the five themes of the study: athletics and encouragement, athletics impact on academic achievement, athletics impact on character development, athletic impact on networks and social mobility, athletic impact on mentoring, and other themes not anticipated by the research. The structure of the analysis will consist of a detailed description of significant information from the interviews followed by a discussion on how the experiences of the participants compared with the literature.

A pilot study was conducted prior to this research using a smaller, limited sample. A process was employed that was consistent with the formal procedure used in the current study to gain a better understanding of the process, to confirm the current structure in regards to the themes associated with the research question, and to identify new questions that may further inform the research question. As a result of the pilot study, the research identified several additional questions that were added to the formal study in order to fill gaps that were discovered once the data was analyzed. In addition to the new questions, a new important theme was also found that had not been included in the initial study. It was determined that participants in the pilot study displayed a strong appreciation for the significant roles that key mentors had played in their lives - far

beyond the initial scope of their formal roles and the roles previously imagined for them as encouragers and agents of increased social capital. It was also realized that mentors took a personal interest in the lives of these student-athletes, roles that these individuals considered to be very impactful in reference to their personal success. As a result it was decided to add mentoring as an important theme in the study, a decision that was confirmed by the amount of literature located that documented the critical role of mentoring in student-athlete success.

The Researcher

I am a former Division I scholarship college football student-athlete who attended a four-year institution and a junior college prior to completing my academic and athletic career at a Division I AA institution in the Midwest. With an academic background in social science education, counseling, and educational leadership, I also served as a high school football and wrestling coach for several years. I began my professional career in student-athlete development in 1992 and have worked full-time in the capacity of leading academic support units for student-athletes since 1994. During that time I have been very involved in improving programs to support student-athlete development both at the institutional and national levels, having served on the NCAA Life Skills Program Development Team, the N4A Executive Board, and the N4A Professional Development Institute. I am from a lower socio-economic background in inner-city San Diego and have been deeply influenced by my experiences as a college student-athlete. I believe the experience provided me with opportunities and support that would not have otherwise been available had I not been a college student-athlete. Having originally enrolled at a

Division I institution in San Diego out of high school as a non-student-athlete, I did not feel connected to the institution even though the resources were readily available. Having experienced four and two-year institutions as both a minority non-student-athlete and a student-athlete at predominately White institutions, I have a unique perspective and understanding of the experience of each group. My knowledge in counseling, having completed a master's in the field, has allowed me to gain a deep perspective into the lives of student-athletes, having had the opportunity to gain very private information about the lives and encounters of many of the student-athletes with whom I have worked.

With over 20 years of professional experience in the field and the prior 6 years' experience as a college student-athlete and graduate assistant, I have a strong understanding of the impact of Division I college athletics programs on the social mobility of Black male student-athletes. Though not a Black student-athlete, I have experienced social mobility as a result of personal incidents as a student-athlete. I recognize that these events, most notably those associated with academic support and mentoring, networking, and the leadership and life lessons from sport, have had a positive impact on my success in life. I have chosen to study the impact of college athletics on the social mobility of Black student athletes in order to support practice and policy to enhance the experiences and success of Black college student-athletes. I have served as the student investigator of this study, conducting all of the interviews in person or over the phone, as well as coding and analyzing the data recorded and transcribed from the interviews.

Description of the Sample

Kenneth¹

The first participant played college football at a Southwest Division I institution in the mid-1990s and had a very successful athletic and academic career returning to the same institution to complete both his undergraduate and graduate degrees within a reasonable timeframe. Originally from the Deep South, the former student-athlete struggled academically, as his secondary and junior college education had failed to adequately prepare him for college. From a low socio-economic farming background where hard work and faith in God was prevalent, the participant was deeply influenced by his mother and coaches to play football and to gain an education. The former college student-athlete chose to remain in the area where he earned his degree and played football instead of returning to his roots in the South. He is currently employed as director of services at a local high school.

Frank²

The second participant is originally from the Midwest and played football in his home state after a successful high school athletic career. Originally a non-qualifier (meaning that he did not meet the NCAA initial eligibility requirements needed to participate in his first year), the participant worked hard to make up the ground left when his high school education did not adequately prepare him for the required standardized

¹ Kenneth is a pseudonym; the participants in the study have been assigned names in order to protect their anonymity.

² Frank is a pseudonym; the participants in the study have been assigned names in order to protect their anonymity.

tests used in part to meet NCAA Division I initial eligibility requirements. The participant valued education from an early age knowing that it would be the key to his success in life. He came from a rough area and was the first in his family to earn a college degree. A true leader, he aspired to use his experiences to help others make it out of their less-than-promising situations. Influenced by his mother who would hold him accountable and out of athletics for not taking care of his academics, the participant completed both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the same institution. He went on to a successful career in college athletics and then pursued his passion in the ministry where he currently serves as a youth pastor. He was recently married and is expecting his first child this year.

*Devin*³

This participant is from the Midwest and went from his home state two states over to attend a Midwest Division I institution after transferring from a small Division II college. He was encouraged by his brother to play football in high school and after a successful career was influenced by his coach to attend his alma mater after a visit when things did not work out with his initial college choice. Although he did not take academics seriously in high school, athletics kept him grounded and out of trouble until he began to take academics more seriously in college. An injury his junior year led him to reorganize his priorities, and he began to focus more heavily on his education. He went

³Devin is a pseudonym; the participants in the study have been assigned names in order to protect their anonymity.

on to earn a master and Ed.S. at two different mid-western universities before returning to his home state where he pursued his career in judicial affairs and education. Prior to graduate school, the participant did an eight-year stint in the military, which helped support his graduate education.

Felix⁴

The fourth participant is from the inner city in the Southwest where both of his parents worked blue-collar jobs. The fourth child in a family of five, his parents divorced when he was a child resulting in his living with his mother. His family frequently moved due to economic situations. Academically, he was the product of a poor school district that often lacked the fundamental resources necessary for academic growth and success. He began playing football at the age of seven where his father was his biggest fan. He continued to excel in football, earning a scholarship to a large high-profile BCS school where he started as a true freshman. He had a successful college career that provided him with an opportunity to play professionally. He was challenged scholastically in college as he dealt with the transition from a low resource high school to a private research institution, having the drive and aptitude but lacking the academic preparation. He successfully completed the transition and went on to earn both his undergraduate and master's degrees from the same institution. After playing professionally for a few years,

⁴Felix is a pseudonym; the participants in the study have been assigned names in order to protect their anonymity.

he realized that professional football was not his best option. Returning to work in college athletics, he has moved up steadily in his department at his alma mater.

*Sidney*⁵

Participant Five is from the Deep South and grew up in a low-income, two-parent household with two sisters. He was the first from his family to graduate from college. His father earned a college scholarship in football as well but was forced to return home early to help support his family. Raised in a household where academics were important, Participant Five knew that athletics were his key to opportunities that would allow him to achieve success in life. The participant had never really struggled academically and never really found the academic side of school too challenging.

Struggling in college primarily due to the culture shock associated with leaving home to attend college in the Southwest, he was greatly influenced by a mentor whom he met as a result of playing college football. This mentor was his lifeline during the tough times in college, encouraging him on several occasions to return to college to complete his degree even after his eligibility had been exhausted. Sidney also had his first child back home while he was in college, which made being away from home all the more difficult. Eventually he graduated from college and after struggling in a tough economy upon graduation by holding several low paying jobs, he now has high level employment in the railway industry.

⁵Sidney is a pseudonym; the participants in the study have been assigned names in order to protect their anonymity.

*Sam*⁶

Participant Six is from the East Coast and played football in the Midwest at a Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) institution. He was the first in his family to complete a four-year college degree and is currently employed as a football coach at his alma mater. Influential in his opportunity to play college football on an athletic scholarship was the relationship between his high school athletic director and the college football coach at the institution where he would eventually attend and graduate. He was a strong student in high school and scored well on the SAT, which paved the way for the athletic scholarship and college football career. Very appreciative of the opportunity athletic scholarship provided him, he made the most of the opportunity both athletically and academically. He made valuable connections during his football playing career that helped him land his first job after his college career as a director of operations intern, which eventually led to a chance to be a full-time assistant football coach. Sam felt the connections that he made through college athletics were instrumental in his career and in helped him become the person he is today.

*Charles*⁷

This participant is the most financially successful of those interviewed. Originally from the inner city on the West Coast, Charles was raised in a single parent household

⁶ Sam is a pseudonym; the participants in the study have been assigned names in order to protect their anonymity.

⁷ Charles is a pseudonym; the participants in the study have been assigned names in order to protect their anonymity.

having to deal with many of the challenges associated with coming from a low income family (evictions, getting cars reposed, having to sleep in car). He went on to earn an athletic scholarship at a Northwest institution where he never really struggled academically or in any other area in college outside of the basic life skills, such as balancing a checkbook, associated with his upbringing. He viewed an athletic scholarship as his way out of a bad situation and an opportunity to distance himself from a rough start in life.

At one time aspiring to play in the NFL, he changed his focus in college to becoming a business leader and entrepreneur. He began his professional career in medical sales climbing up the ladder with each opportunity being better than the last, eventually starting his own company followed by another and another. Motivated by a strong drive to succeed and make money, he was destined to never have to return to the life that he had growing up. Today Charles is very successful business venture capitalist responsible for the startup of several small companies in the northwest where he attended college and played football.

Athletics and Encouragement

The participants in the study came from distinct circumstances, yet all shared the common experience of being first-generation college students and having parents who encouraged them as young men to go to college and pursue an education, even though they had little understanding of the systems and what it would take for their sons to succeed in college, a place they themselves had not attended. The reason behind the

encouragement from others varied. Frank recalled the strong sense of pride that was behind the support from his extended family.

To my family I think it was a new experience for them, because my immediate family didn't have anyone go to college. Then to play college athletics was like a pride type thing. I had a cousin that was incarcerated in a prison right down the street from our campus, and that helped him through the 15 years that he was in the penitentiary, because he had a cousin that was playing maybe 45 miles away from where he was locked up. When I came to visit him, it was one of those puff your chest out type of things, and you know this is my little cousin, and he sent pictures, and he was just in the newspaper type thing. That helped him, and I think that helped my family because some of my cousins tried not to make the same mistakes that some of my other family members made, because they had somebody that was doing something positive they could look up to now.

Sidney experienced this same sense of pride from his family who used him as an example to symbolize change.

They (my family) were very proud of me. They kind of used me as a poster child for the family. Like I say, a lot of them didn't really change, but because of some of the people I used to hang around with and different things, they may not have thought I would have made it as far as I made it, doing that.

In this case the pride went beyond the pride in the individual's accomplishments and into the student-athlete's function as a role model for others, presenting the possibilities available beyond the neighborhood, opportunities that those younger in the family could

perhaps take advantage of in their lives. This may have the unintentional effect of perpetuating what Edwards (1979) described as the acculturation of Blacks into sports, where Black youth are encouraged from a young age to pursue athletics not only as an activity but as a major in college and perhaps even as a career. This was a concern to Edwards, because he believed that this acculturation discouraged Blacks from pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) related majors or professional careers that allowed them to utilize academic skills instead of physical talent.

Another reason for the encouragement from parents for the student-athletes involvement in athletics was that family members and parents in particular viewed the athletic scholarship as a way out of the neighborhood and their ticket out of a bad situation. Kenneth, for example, saw the opportunity as something that the Blacks in his home state in particular could rally around.

Yeah, (family) they pushed it (participation in athletics). It was big especially for Black individuals in (my home state); this was the ticket out of the situations that we grow up in. I'm pretty sure it's like that for a lot of kids in, um low income situations. You know when people see that you have the talent to be successful, as an athlete they rally around you and make sure that they do everything possible so that can give you the opportunity.

Sidney made a connection between encouragement, race, and socio-economic status driven by the desire for improved economic status.

I just think that's part of the Black culture though. They just feel that's one thing that they really try to stress is sports, if you're athletic enough. They've worked

their whole life, and they don't want you to necessarily work your whole life.

They want you to have it a little bit easier than they had it.

Charles viewed the dynamic as being associated with not only his ticket out but a way for a better life for the entire family.

That was my mom's ticket to get out the hood. Of course she's going to support it.

That was probably one of the main reasons. She was thinking I'm gonna make her rich too because of my athletic ability which, a lot of parents think the same thing.

Sidney shared a similar experience when family, coaches, and friends first saw the athletic potential in him, potential that could provide the opportunity for a better life.

I was encouraged by my family, coaches, and friends, because I wasn't just an average athlete. I was pretty good at it, and they just said... I guess they had the same type of vision that I had. They saw something in me that could actually get me out of the situation that I lived in.

Interestingly, here is the notion that the student-athletes were not necessarily encouraged until others perceived that they were not just "average athletes" and as having potential. The same was the case with three of the other participants. Kenneth noted the change in high school.

My athleticism during my high school career um kind of helped. It did help me out a lot, because now I got the focus on me, saying you know this kids got potential, you know what I'm saying, to go somewhere. So you know people are rallying around me to try to help me to get to that next step in life.

The attention was also very noticeable for Felix, who noticed a big change in the way that others perceived him after his success on the playing field.

When it became realistic that I was going to go to college and that I was going to graduate high school early and actually leave and attend college, that's when I saw the big change as far as like support from teachers and administrators and people from the neighborhood trying to pitch in and help. Up until that point, up until probably my junior year, I was just a... No one was really invested besides my father.

Felix perceived a similar increase in attention from teachers when he started to make college recruiting visits.

From that standpoint, teachers, after I'd taken my visit I'd get back, they would talk to me, ask how did it go. Even my math teacher, she was... she went to school with, I can't remember which player it was, professional football player. She would say yeah, she knew how the schedule is and just prepping me so I know what I was getting into. I think from that standpoint I think everybody was on board with being supportive and helping me in any way that they could.

Frank noted that the encouragement came both from his athletic prowess and his academic achievements combined, revealing a relationship between possessing both pieces of the equation and encouragement even when it appeared that he would not make it to the professional level.

I thank everybody in my life. At a young age a lot of people seen my potential because of the grades I was making in school and then the progress that I was

making in sports. They pushed me going to the next level even when it didn't appear that I would be able to go. My mom always pushed 'Get your education, get your education, get your education, go to school, get out the neighborhood. My friends did the same thing.'

Encouragement for this student-athlete seemed to carry over into his educational goals allowing him to transition from a joint athletic and academic focus to an educational focus driven by a strong desire to improve his economic situation. The phenomena of encouragement and support increasing as it becomes clearer that the student-athlete has academic potential is not totally surprising. In fact, Bend and Petrie (1977) arrived at a similar conclusion when they discovered that elite student-athletes were almost twice as likely as non-elite athletes to attend college. For several of the participants it was clearly noted that the attention, encouragement, and support began to appear once it became evident that they could potentially have the opportunity to advance their athletics involvement to the next level.

Another trend that emerged from the participants was that sports were an important part of their families and that in some cases they were following the family tradition and the footsteps of either their parents or older siblings. Felix followed the path that had been laid by both his older brother and sister, which created a culture of athletics in the family.

Started playing football around the age of seven, really took to it. My father, he was really big into sports as far as youth sports and using sports as an outlet. So I kind of took to football, played several different other sports. Had an older, my

older brother actually received a scholarship; my older sister actually received a scholarship as well. I had a couple examples of what football could possibly do for me at a young age, so I just kind of followed that track of my older brother who received a scholarship. Just played football. My mother, again, just living with a mother, we struggled quite a bit with Section Eight and welfare and things of that nature. Just took a liking to football. I think I got planted early on, got recognized as pretty good at the sport, and then, you know, somebody give you a couple compliments, it kind of keeps you going, kind of just keeps stoking that fire.

He went on to describe how the culture of sport in the family served as a source of family bonding, motivation, and accountability.

It was huge. Growing up, I established that dream of mine early on. It's a part of the household as it relates to sports. That's one of the few times in the Black family and Black neighborhood that you can kind of come together. (Watching the) Super Bowl was you're always together, you always celebrate, you always watch it, you always dream, the young guy dreaming of possibly playing that game. For me knowing to play in that game one day, I had to take care of my school work, to get a college scholarship, to go to college. It was a part of that step. It was a part of the process to get there, was college.

For Devin sports and family was not a part of his family's culture but did become a part of the next generation as he adopted the family/sport focus due to his participation in college athletics.

It (sports) was very important to me because I played it. To my family, not so much. All they knew was I was in college. Now for me and my son now, it's more important for me and him and us. It's probably different in my family because I was a student-athlete. I know what it takes to be a student athlete. I know what it means to be a student-athlete. For my son, who's involved in sports and wants to go to the next level, we're very involved with his academics and his athletic ambitions. I want him to succeed, regardless of what he chooses to do. But unlike my parents and my father, my mom died back in '93, so she was, they weren't that very much involved as, unlike me and my wife with my kids. It's like a flip side now. It wasn't important for my family, but it's important for me, but the flip side now, now that I'm an adult and my life has started, it's just because it's important for me and my child and my wife and my brothers, because they're all, we're all involved in athletics right now.

Another dynamic that emerged from the participants was the ideas of sports not only being encouraged but pushed by family, friends, and coaches. Kenneth noted that his high school coach pushed him in order to prepare him for what would be expected at the next level.

As a high school student, it wasn't a reality of a mine to go to college because of the situation I was in with my family and things like that, but um as I started going through that process, and like I said it was um very important people throughout that process that I attached myself to, to uh gain a confidence that I needed to go through college. And they even, these individuals, they were

pushing me, see what I'm saying, like my college coach, Coach (Smith), you know he pushed me, he worked me like a dog, the dogness out of me. He made sure that I was going to do what I said I was going to do and, you know, be a man of my word.

The push in this case went beyond the preparation for the physical aspects of college athletics but was symbolic of the work, effort, and mindset that it would take to succeed at the next level. Sidney had a similar experience recognizing the important role that the encouragement played in his life.

They pushed me. They stayed on me. Sometimes they were tougher on me than I was on myself. I have to thank them for that too, because sometimes you just need someone to... You just need some encouraging words sometimes. You need to know that somebody's behind you. There's no better feeling to know that you're doing something, and you have people that support it.

In some cases, as previously described by Frank, the encouragement was evenly distributed towards both the academic and the athletic focus. In other cases the focus was all athletic. Felix explained that success in the classroom was never really encouraged in his household.

My family never stressed academics. We never... They never talked about it. Honestly, it was just me working with my high school coaches knowing it was important to keep my grades up. In my house it was no disciplinary action for getting a certain grade or not passing a class. It was none of that. It was more the

Saturday night games and watching them opposed to the academics. Yeah, academics was absent.

Though academic responsibility and success were not prevalent in the home, there were others, in this case the high school coach, who played an important role in emphasizing the need for an academic focus in the student-athlete's life, a resource that may or may not have been available had the participant not been involved in athletics. This touches upon the significant role of mentors in the lives of student-athletes, a topic that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

As previously noted, Sam and Felix explained how teachers did not necessarily take an interest in them as students until it became obvious that they would have collegiate athletic opportunities symbolizing the emphasis of athletics over academics. The question could be asked: Where was the increased attention and support prior to the student becoming a prospect? The fact that teachers only took a personal interest in the activities of these student-athletes in the study supports the claim of Critical Race Theory and the concept of interest convergence which, according to Delgado (1995), asserts that Whites will only argue for the advancement of Blacks to the extent that it benefits their self-interests. The concept holds that Whites will only support the change after first evaluating the personal costs and benefits associated with that change (Harper, 2009). The assertion is made that the teachers only began to take an interest in these students when they perceived the acquisition of a heightened level of status in the community for the "production" of high profile student-athletes who often returned to their humble

beginnings with loaded checkbooks, with supporting school building and equipment funding.

With regards to encouragement, Funk (1991) found in his study of UCLA student-athletes that Black families were four times more likely than Whites to view participation in college athletics as leading to professional athletic careers to the point that it discouraged them from pursuing other areas or fields of interest. For some of the participants in the current study, the push from family and friends to secure an NFL career was latent, but for one particular participant it was not. Frank explains that

So many people put it in my head that it was NFL or bust. That was something that was echoed in my head throughout my life. Go to the NFL and everything will be taken care of. It was not until later on in my teenage years when people started telling me to have a plan B, C, and D if the NFL doesn't work out.

For others, the encouragement was not towards the NFL but instead towards other athletic career fields. Kenneth felt most comfortable about pursuing a major and career in athletics because he had become so accustomed to being around athletics that it was the choice that made most sense.

Yeah, so when I got my master's in sports administration ... I got that because, in a sense, I was kind of following the crowd. I wanted to get my, my masters in exercise science, but I didn't have any prerequisites for that, so I couldn't get into exercise science, and so I kind of stuck with sports administration, um, because everything was already worked out, uh, and I wanted to do well in that program,

and so I stuck it out. I've seen that as an opportunity for me to become a defensive line coach.

Felix viewed his career track similarly, feeling that the connections that he had made as a student-athlete placed him in a good position to go into athletics as a career.

I think athletics... puts you in touch with a lot of people. From especially as a football player, you're on teams of 72, 80 to 100 guys a year... I did an internship with the football team actually after I was done playing to start myself as a director of football operations intern, which then turned into a job when there was movement. I was able to get that job and start in the career path at Division 1 level, which that is a big part about being a Division 1 athlete. You can get experience in Division 1 athletics... I was able to get myself from being an operations guy to on the field. From the field now I've started actually getting into coaching, and then I felt that I liked coaching. At first I was thinking all I want to do was administrative, but then I got a part of the coaching in me being a young, young man I felt, well, I should take advantage of being able to possibly move around the country, see different places, try out different parts of the country. I stuck to coaching and got involved in that and just worked my way up from a restricted earning guy to deep to a graduate assistant, and then eventually I was a full-time receivers' coach. I went full-time from defense to offense to a full-time coach here.

Frank felt the pressure but resisted, not wanting to fall into the trap of being single minded in pursuing a professional football career.

I wanted to prove so many people wrong. I never was the type of person that listened to the advice of people and then tried to apply that to my life. I didn't want to walk around with blinders on where somebody said you either go to the NFL or you gone be in the streets.

Devin considered a professional career in football as more of a dream and not something that was emphasized by others.

I wasn't socialized to play for a career. I just had that dream to play at the next level, maybe the NFL, but once the realization came when I injured my knee and broke my wrist, injured my knee in my junior year, turned around and broke my wrist in my senior year.

An area found in the literature that the current study somewhat supports is the notion voiced by Ogbu (1990) who held that Blacks tended to resist education and pursue careers in such areas as music, athletics, and entertainment that were viewed as accessible alternatives. Though a few of the participants in this particular study chose athletics as a college and professional career, the evidence of any type of resistance to education was not present. In fact, the contrary was actually evident with each of the participants embracing academics and viewing education as being critical to their success in college and in life. Ogbu (1990) also suggested that minorities often feel that if they accept and buy into the dominant culture's notion of education that they are essentially "selling out" and in some way denying their own cultural identity in what he refers to as the "acting White" phenomenon. None of the participants of this study bought into this phenomenon, though they did experience being "hassled" on occasion by Black peers for

doing well academically. The participants responded to the harassment in a way that was indicative of their success in college. Felix almost fell victim to the phenomenon before catching himself and regrouping.

It's funny because you find yourself... and I faced it for a split second, was dumbing myself down to fit in. I remember this one class we were taking Statistics 121, and I was in there with six football players, all African Americans. Five of the kids out of one hundred, I think they got like 22s on the test. I got an 85. So when they came around everybody was like 'Man, this class hard. Hey man, what'd you get?' Everybody was sharing their test scores, and I didn't share mine because I didn't want to be perceived in a different type of way. I didn't even share my score, but then I quickly got out of there. I'm like, 'You know what, I'm not putting myself on these guys' level.' But yes, for a split second, I did.

Sam viewed the harassment as teasing and perhaps more of a compliment as opposed to anything negative or intending to bring him down.

Most of them just hanging out no books, no nothing, and I always had a book bag on. You get that for being, it's mainly when you're younger, but I think people start to realize there's nothing wrong with being smart. Yeah, I've got the guys kind of joking with me about it, but I don't think anybody's ever really looked at me differently or anything. I don't think it was necessarily a negative connotation. It was more of a people just like, 'Man, I can't... I don't know how you do it,' one of those things, or my roommate would come in and see me studying late at night. He'll leave out the house, come back in, he's like, 'Hey, man, you're still

studying?’ He said, ‘Man, I been went to sleep.’ That’s the type of stuff, and most people and years later you don’t really know it until afterwards. People recount the fact that they may have seen you studying or may have seen you just really trying hard and trying to get the grade that you want. To me, it was more of a positive thing and that’s maybe just because of the people that I was around or surrounded myself with.

Kenneth experienced the same pressure but viewed it as an opportunity to pull away from the crowd.

Once they recognized that you were uh smart or you have a certain talent, either one they’re going to try to take advantage of you. ‘Oh, he thinks he’s smarter than everybody else’s or whatever. He thinks he got it all together.’ No, because you start to pull away.

Frank expressed that he needed to have a strong mind in order to resist the pressure to under achieve.

I was told that I was the smart guy, the goody two shoes, several times. Several names were thrown out, and if you’re not a strong minded individual, you can allow that to hurt your success because you start listening to the negative from your critics, and you don’t want to be the smart guy anymore. You’re comfortable being dumb, so you dumb everything down now. Instead of getting an A+, you’re comfortable getting a C+, which is passing, but it puts you in the same level as your peers when you should be excelling above your peers... For whatever reason, if it was self-motivation or if it was something going on at home, they will

take, in my eyes that which is a success, and try to belittle it because they didn't have the self-motivation to be able themselves to be able to reach that level.

Though each of the participants expressed being given a hard time for doing well academically, none of them internalized the ribbing or succumbed to the influence to underperform, which may be what sets them apart from those students who were not as successful. It appears that the pressure in some form did exist and that according to Charles, race may have been a factor.

Black people as a culture are messed up. Everything is always a competition.

Other races don't compete with each other like in a negative way. It's like instead of working together on how can we build businesses, it's like how can my rims get bigger than yours. It's stupid stuff like look at my shoes. Like nobody cares about your shoes. It's just like trying to outdo people that you should be networking with and growing as a culture not because people should tell you to but just because it makes a better environment for a kid to be able to network with each other.

The current study seemed to agree with the literature in the area of the Black student-athlete participation in athletics and encouragement as well. Beamon (2010) found that sports tended to be overemphasized in the socialization process of Black males, which was a consistent trend found in the experiences of the participants in this study. What Beamon's quantitative analysis did not show were the reasons behind why student-athletes were encouraged or socialized to participate in athletics. The analysis of the current data showed that these former student-athletes were encouraged by the sense

of pride that participation in athletics helped to create within families that were often struggling with economic and personal circumstances.

Encouragement was also driven by the fact that participant supporters often viewed involvement in athletics as a means to a better life, providing a way for them to improve their current socio-economic situations. Participants noted that encouragement and support was directly related to their success on the field as opposed to their work in the classroom, supporting Beamon's (2010) finding that more emphasis was placed by Black parents than White parents on athletics as opposed to academics, and that elite student-athletes were more likely than non-elite student-athletes to be encouraged to attend college (Bend & Petrie, 1977).

Athletics and Academic Achievement

The literature has shown that athletics have been attributed to academic success and has negatively impacted academics for college student-athletes. Several studies concluded that student-athletes made better grades than their non-athletic peers (Darling, Caldwell & Smith, 2005; Silliker & Quirk, 1997; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Rees & Sabia, 2010). Other studies determined that the impact was most pronounced for at-risk student populations. In particular, Bend and Petrie (1977) determined that the difference was more significant for student-athletes who were from disadvantaged backgrounds, who tended to fair much better academically than those from disadvantaged backgrounds who did not participate in sports. Similar findings were presented in a study at Michigan State University (Shapiro, 1984) whose admission figures indicated that a greater proportion of student-athletes were admitted through the special admissions process due to lack of

academic preparation, with these same students graduating at a similar rate as the general student population.

There is a general consensus among the respondents that Black student-athletes tended to do well academically and that some of their success in the classroom was due to the lessons they had learned on the field. Kenneth believed that his competitive nature on the field carried over to the classroom.

As an athlete, one thing that you hated, that you hate is to get beat by something... So I manage my time to where I can go to the student support services and get English teachers or whatever to correct my assignments that I need to correct and get them done and turn them in on time. And that's how I whooped that assignment.

Devin believed that his academic skill set was not limited by the education he had received prior to college and that the same tools that he used to improve on the field could be used to improve academically.

How many times do I have to be in the gym to get strong to make sure that when I go out on Saturday morning to go play football... and that's the same thing I did with my tutors. I said, 'Show me how to get this stuff done...' and that's what I did; I went and got coaching just like I did out on the field.

Felix also noted that his experiences in athletics often carried over onto the classroom, especially when things were going well on the football field.

I remember when I had a good game, those times I made sure I went to class.

Those were the times I made sure that I had my assignment ready, because I knew

like if the teacher noticed or the kids in the class, they going to notice, you got an interception and didn't have your paper written ... the little stuff. I knew I did something rough I made sure I was on top of my stuff. But it made it easier to... It made everything easier. When I was excelling in school, it was easy to stay up a little later and cram for that test.

In the case of the student-athletes in this study, they were all successful in the classroom as well as after college in their professional careers, so it is expected that their performance was higher than other student-athletes and students in general. What is notable in the data is the expression by the participants that what they had learned on the field impacted their success in the classroom in spite of the various challenges they faced in adjusting to college life.

A common theme that arose from the data was the notion that student-athletes had to face additional challenges that were unique to their experiences as low socio-economic Black student-athletes in college, challenges they faced and which at the end made them stronger. Kenneth stated that some of the resistance that he met was due to prejudice because of the fact that he was Black and underprepared academically.

Prejudice, you know what I'm saying, certain people, when you looking for help and stuff like that, they see you coming, they say, 'I can't help you.' You know, 'I don't want to help you.' And they don't say 'I don't want to help you,' but, you know, they make excuses why they can't help you, you know, when it comes to getting your academics done. I've dealt with stereotypes where people say that, you know, especially about going to grad school, they say that we're (student-

athletes) privileged. You know, we...um, that, that we don't work hard, and we're lazy.

Frank experienced similar treatment during the admissions process.

Before they even meet you, they have a certain image in their mind about you. I had to prove a few people wrong coming in, like the admissions counselor that told me that I couldn't go on to business because I had deficiencies in math and a few other things, and they was basing that off of test scores, not necessarily who I was as a person.

Sidney had a similar experience in his dealing with professional staff and faculty on campus.

As far as advisors and instructors go, now there were sometimes that you had those instructors that sometimes whether it was they had an athlete who just wasn't doing right. Some of them had, how would you say, not necessarily a prejudice, but they judged you when they see an athlete. Sometimes I would feel like if I don't have to tell the instructor I'm a football player, I'd rather not until I had to hand him that piece of paper that said, 'I'm going to be gone on this day, this day, and this day' for football games.

He also noted that professors on occasion had labeled him but then were surprised to discover that he was a bright student.

Some of them (professors), some of them that were Caucasian they were fine with African-American students. You didn't really care, but sometimes they became surprised if you were intelligent like if you kind of answer questions and things

like that where you try to engage, because sometimes they see you're an athlete, so most of the time you're probably in sweat pants. You're in all your stuff because you're coming from workout. You had to lift, things like that, so some people, not all, don't perceive you as being able to necessarily contribute to certain discussion. The top of the ladder was like it catches them off guard.

Kenneth expressed the existence of profiling by the school system due to the fact that they were Black football student-athlete.

Yes. Right now, working in my current profession is one of the things that we struggle with. We profile kids right out the gate: African American, Inner City, from such and such. We automatically say, 'Okay, that kid needs a IA.' 'That kid, we're going to put him in this course.' Just stereotyping them out the gate. Myself, I think I needed it, but I knew I was stereotyped coming in. I was from Inner City high school, first generation mother's side college kid. I mean, they had every resource ready to go for me. It had nothing to do with... nothing other than I was a Black football player, I believe.

In this case of profiling, the offense placed the student in a strong position to receive support; in the other cases mentioned, the participants viewed the challenges associated with improper labeling as obstacles that needed to be faced and overcome.

Regardless of the end results of the profiling and prejudice experiences of these student-athletes, it is evident from the interviews that race still matters in this country's institutions, including education and intercollegiate athletics, one of the main contention of Critical Race Theory. In explaining that race does matter in society today, Tate (1997)

believes that Critical Race Theory “portrays dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, meritocracy, as camouflages for the self-interest of powerful entities of society” (p. 235). So not only does race matter, but the suggestion that race does not matter leads people to believe that everything is okay in the world during the current age and that there is nothing in need of correction. The concept described by Tate recognizes the presence of a flawed sense of meritocracy or “meritocracy myth” in that the individual’s effort, abilities, attitudes, and character do not necessarily equate to success in life or in the case of the cultural capital that facilitates educational attainment (McNamee & Miler, 2004). The experiences of the participants as they entered and progressed through college suggest that the system, in this case higher education, did not recognize their effort, resilient nature, positive attitudes, and character in assessing their ability to be in and succeed in college. Instead, those associated with the institutions chose to look at the color of their skin and the fact that they were college student-athletes as they evaluated them throughout their college experience. The color of the participants’ skin appears to have neutralized the expected impact of those qualities the individuals brought into the college experience creating barriers to their success in college, which they were nonetheless able to overcome.

Perhaps the biggest argument made by those in the position of privilege is that these students are receiving a scholarship and an education, which somehow makes the offense acceptable. The argument could also be made that college athletics presents a high percentage of opportunities for Black student-athletes to play college football, gain an education and a better life for themselves, but the fact that the opportunity is provided

does not negate the examples presented supporting the notion that race and prejudice are still very much a factor in America and its foundational institutions, including education and sports. By claiming that there is not a problem with race in college athletics, Critical Race Theory holds that this validates the reasoning behind not taking corrective action to remedy the fact that race is still very much an issue today, maybe not as prevalent as in the past, but still an issue.

Student-athletes are also different from general students on campus due to the fact that they are required to satisfy higher academic standards that are centered on maintaining satisfactory progress towards their degrees as well as certain GPAs. Sidney noted that these higher standards served as a challenge that impacted performance and options.

The big challenge was being a student athlete. I think student athletes, they had very high standards. Student athletes have way less time to study. They have way less time to really just expect... Really just set out to be a straight-A student. He also noted that professors often placed additional pressure on students in their classes who were student-athletes.

I may have met more professors that made student athletes work harder than anybody else. They just wanted to let you know that we're not going to give you something just because you're a student athlete. I've seen... We had some star players before that were academically ineligible because they weren't going to let you goof off and think you were going to get the easy road just because of football.

An additional challenge that came with being a student from a low socio-economic status was the lack of resources in the participant's secondary education system, which was often very well defined, especially for Felix who expressed a notable difference in the resources that were available to him coming from the Inner City and then attending a private research institution.

School-wise, I felt like I was so under-prepared coming to college looking back on it. I never typed. I never cited a paper. I never knew... I didn't know what a syllabus was. It was just homework, assignment, and test in high school and the SAT test... standardized test... I feel like my high school was a joke. I was let to skate by at the high school level and then when you get to college you got to compete at the highest level academically with people that's prepared, with people that that's what they do, you know, kids that been groomed to go to college and be successful. I feel like I was a very talented athlete, and they just dropped me in the environment and that was a lot of catching up to do. I don't think that I was prepared previous to college. I think that what was different for me is I had some raw skills, some comprehension skills, some reading skills, just some raw skills that I could work with and can polish up at the collegiate level

Sidney believed that he was prepared academically for the experience but due to the demands of his sport lacked other skills.

I actually went to college prepared. I was pretty gifted in the classroom. I took the ACT only once. My score was 23, so as far as... I was prepared for college, as far as the coursework, but I wasn't prepared to be a student athlete. It was very hard

being a student athlete at a Division I level, because it's really football and school. That's your whole life. You really don't have time... If you want to excel, you don't have time to do anything else.

Charles similarly was prepared academically but lacked life skills that he need to succeed in and beyond college.

Yeah. Educational preparation, I was prepared mentally. It wasn't that college was ever really hard for me with the exception of statistics, which was a class I just had trouble with... More I wouldn't say that it was educational preparation that I was lacking, it was more of a lifestyle preparation that I was lacking, almost to the fact like I didn't know how to balance a checkbook. I didn't really know how to manage money. That's the preparation, like the traditional life in general. It had nothing to do with education though.

These students each described lacking what Bourdieu described as objectified cultural capital or the material and physical resources, real and virtual, which is used to support students through education. Examples of these resources include books and electronic devices such as computers, the Internet, and printers that facilitate the transference of social capital.

The lack of cultural capital placed these students in clearly disadvantaged positions in making the transition in and through college. Critical Race Theorists contend that this inequality is based on the United States' system of property rights where the current tax structure secures better equipped schools and instruction in higher priced and valued taxed regions. They equate this phenomenon, prevalent in the education, as a

denial of intellectual property that delimits what is now referred to as “the opportunity to learn.” So when Felix experienced the lack of the educational resources, such as a computer and the Internet, he was actually being denied the opportunity to learn that was afforded to those in the more affluent property tax regions. This is central to the transference of social capital detailed by Bourdieu, because education is perceived as a critical vehicle for both the transference and production of social capital. Given that property rights are directly associated with the “opportunity to learn,” the same inequalities ingrained in historical racial disenfranchisement and property rights continue to prevail in perpetuating historical inequality in education, limiting social mobility for the traditionally disadvantaged.

The findings of Shapiro (1984), who attributed much of the academic success of student-athletes to the high level of academic support that student-athletes receive along with the breaks that they are often provided by college instructors, was supported by those in the study. The student-athletes interviewed believed that the academic support received played an important role in their success. Devin noted that study hall provided him with the structure that helped him succeed.

The thing that I think that helped me achieve and succeed in school was resources that the universities and colleges provide. State, they provide a lot of different resources like study hall for athletes. That first year, or first two years that I was there, I was in study hall. That in itself pressured me to do what I was supposed to do in school. That is what helped me, and when I took advantage of those opportunities I got better intellectually. That allowed me to be able to either do

what I need to do to keep from being placed in a situation that I don't need to be in.

Sam recognized that the specialized support was more targeted and often went beyond what the regular support services on campus could provide.

We had an academic success center, which pretty much was geared towards student-athletes because your regular academic advisors, they know classes and things you need, but it's hard for them to understand your schedule. They may schedule you for a whole bunch of classes and a night class and not have any idea that you're up at five something that morning getting workouts in and doing this and trying to find time to eat. You have to have a different support, support system. That's as an athlete in general if they're different from a normal college student.

The resources the participants in the study described often went beyond the general academic support provided by the institution's athletic department and into the significant role that their athletic academic advisors played in aiding their academic success. Frank noted the importance of the relationship, given that he came into the institution not meeting the initial eligibility requirements.

In college, I was a Prop 48. I needed a lot of help, and they were able to be there to be able to support me, to help me during those first couple of years of college. We had a plan from day one. We had a relationship with our advisors when some other people would just have a once a semester interaction with their academic counselor. Like I had meetings weekly, sometimes daily with my advisor to be

able to make sure I was staying on track as far as graduation and to make sure that my grades were up to par.

Felix, who is now an athletic advisor, described the impact that his advisor had on his success.

The Academic Coordinator guy that was working at my current position now was one of the biggest reasons that I was able to get through that freshman year, having no technical typing skills and not knowing what a syllabi was and those types of things. It was the resources. The Student Athlete Development Department that was put into place to tutor us, instructional assistance, the people that walked me through the process until I was able to walk on my own and eventually thrive.

The academic advisor in Frank's life helped lay the foundation during his freshmen year for his success through college.

I think the foundation that was laid my freshman year. I had a great academic advisor, academic staff that pushed all of us, even though we had to spend 10 to 12 hours in study hall, but that prepared us for later on. We was able to come in and talk to them about degrees, and with me I had to graduate in four years, so I had to be able to do a lot of things on the front end to prepare me on the back end.

The common thread among the advisors that supported these student-athletes was that these individuals took a personal interest in their lives as they guided their support. Sidney describes this particular culture that was prevalent in his athletic department.

I just think being a student athlete, a lot of the culture, a lot of the administration, they really care about the student athletes. If they care about the student athletes, they make sure to get the right people in the right places. They make sure that tutors are available. They make sure if you're slacking, there's mandatory study halls. They make sure that not only that you're trying to excel in sports, they try to make sure that they prepare you for life.

Participants also noted that on occasion they received additional support from instructors, supporting Sharipo's (1984) contention that student-athletes received special consideration from instructors that supported their academic success. Kenneth recalled an instructor that had helped him when his academic career was on the line.

I needed to pass some classes to either come to the (university); there was only one professor at a junior college that allowed me to take the classes that I need um to be able to come to (the university). So you know he didn't have to do anything, because school is over. It's the summer time, summer break. Everybody is ready to go home. And the guy, the professor, he stayed and said, you know, I need to take this class, get this English class out of the way, this history class out of the way, and then if everything works out, you know, I'll be able to come to (the university).

The participant also expressed that he had been shown favoritism by a professor due to his recognition as a student-athlete.

When you have a university, the truth about it people show you favoritism. You know, especially if your name is up on a billboard somewhere. They recognize

you and stuff like that. A Black athlete, you know what I'm saying, it comes with the territory. You know, in a sense you become like a celebrity. You're going to get certain privileges. You're going to get certain preps, um you gonna get special attention. At times when things need to get done, you know um professors work with you a little bit more than maybe some of the other college students. It was just what it was - the nature of being on campus being an athlete.

Devin recalled receiving special consideration from his professor, because the instructor realized that he was putting in the effort both in the class and representing the university on the field.

The professors know you're an athlete. They know the challenges that you're involved in. They know that you have practices, and you have all these athletic demands. That kind of helped me that they know that I'm an athlete. I know there was one quarter I should have failed one class, but I didn't. The reason why I didn't is because I did everything else that I was supposed to do. They may have looked at me as, okay, he's an athlete, he's trying, he's in class every day, he's doing his work, he's turning his papers in. That in itself meets up in the middle, so you can come to a compromise. Say you know what, rather than fail this student, I'm going to find other reasons why to pass this student. When you have more positives than negatives, then that's when you know this student deserves a C. He doesn't deserve to fail. You know, I really like this kid. This kid's really doing what he needs to do to succeed.

The combination of services, programs, and personnel were prevalent in the college experiences of the student-athletes interviewed and were expressed as being important contributors to their academic success. The interviews support the finding of Shapiro (1984) that academic resources and support from instructors played an important role in their academic success. The interviews also add that the students' athletic academic advisors also played a key role in their success in college. These advisors often took a personal interest in them and their academic success and were an important part of the academic resources that were made available to them as student-athletes.

Gayles and Hu (2009) attributed the lack of academic success of student-athletes from the revenue generating sports to their limited engagement with athletic non-high-profile athletes and students in general, something that the participants in this study supported. Though these student-athletes performed well academically, they faced the isolation noted by Gayles and Hu. Sam noted the sense of isolation coming from the fact that he was a Black student-athlete from a different region.

In the beginning it was a little uneasy in a sense. I stayed with my own guys, like I came out here with someone else from (my home state). We played the same high school teams, so we hung out together a lot or I stayed around the football team, the guys I really knew. I didn't ... It wasn't really necessarily open, I should say. I was closed off and stuck with what I knew in the beginning.

Kenneth expressed that he felt that deficits due to his socio-economic background and race impeded the opportunity to engage with the academically elite even on his own team.

I can see this person - he got his stuff together, like it was one captain on the team uh (Joe Student), I always looked up to him. He's a genius, smart, and had it together, you know what I mean? I always wanted to hang out with (Joe Student). I wanted to be like (Joe Student). He was that guy. You know what I'm saying? He got a 4.0 GPA, always doing stuff like that. But you know what I'm saying, me and my position, I knew I couldn't be around him as much as I wanted to. Because its, it's that race thing. And me personally, I was intimidated by it. Not to say because he can talk the talk and walk the walk, and he can speak the language, you know, so he can socialize with the right group of people. That wasn't my background. That wasn't who I was. But that's who I wanted to be. But it's a wall there, you know, that you just, just like I said with racism, is it just a line you don't cross. And I was intimidated by him. That's just what it is.

Felix experienced similar isolation but associated the phenomenon with the demands associated with his sport.

Outside of football and academics, whatever little time I had to myself, I kind of wanted to keep it to myself. Football was just so time consuming, and it didn't afford you to do some of those other things, a part-time job or getting into clubs. I know some people are able to do it, but no, I never could find nothing else I wanted to give up myself for. As I always say, you have the football requirements, you have the academic requirements, and if you want to be good at either one, you're probably doing more than a normal student athlete is doing. You got five classes and you got one tutor. To get an A, you really got to read on

your own. You got to go to office hours, so that requires more time. You want to be a better football player, you got to do extra. You got to wake up early and do the workouts on your own. Your days eat up so much just with time, whether it's mandatory time or voluntary time on your own, toward the academics and sports.

Regardless of the reasoning, each of these student-athletes experienced limited engagement and feelings of isolation due to their athletic participation, a phenomenon that the literature associated with lack of academic success.

As Felix noted, time demands played a critical role in limiting his engagement on campus and with other students, something to which Maloney and McCormick (1992) also attributed much of the inequality in the academic achievements of participants in football and basketball. Sam noted that the lives of student-athletes were very different from what the typical student was experiencing.

Being a student athlete and it makes you add some responsibility. It gives some discipline because your day is different from everybody else's. Your day may start at 5:30, but it may not end until maybe 11 o'clock at night, sometimes 12, if you didn't know what you had to study. In there between you've got to find the time to catch a nap between workouts and all that.

Sidney felt that the time demands restricted his academics by limiting the type of courses he could take.

Being a regular student, you could just sign up for the classes that you wanted to sign up, in the timeframe that you wanted them to be. You can actually space them out, if you want one class and then three hours later another class. Our

agenda was already pre-set with everything we couldn't do. There were classes that we couldn't sign up for at this time or that time.

Sam also felt the time demands limited his option in regards to his major.

If you really want to be an engineer, that's a lot of work. That's a lot of classes you got to take before you can start the program. There's no time to be a student-athlete, in that sense, and take those types of classes. If you have someone who comes from a different background who had a better situation as far as their school, maybe not because they're more apt to be able to handle it. That's, if you can get what I'm saying, it just depends. It's dependent upon their situation.

Sam expressed having a similar experience regarding athletics limiting his major due to the time demands of his sport.

It's because of demands of the major because you're in-season time and even your out-of-season time that's one thing that's about athletics. It's an off season, but off season only says hey, you're not playing any games. There's less hours that you're mandated to be around the staff, but if you want to be a good athlete, if you want to be a great athlete like most that get involved in athletics, you're always going to be putting in some more time anyway. I think the demands, the demands of being an athlete it does steer some, not all, but it does steer some away from their majors. Mine, not so much. I was able to get it done. Now it took me an extra summer because I had to do a 12-week, 480 hour internship that I couldn't necessarily do in the summer prior to my senior year, because I had summer workouts and I also had to work a job so that I can be around in the summer so

that I could work out in the summer where I could feed myself and pay my rent so I could get ready for a season.

Kenneth believed that he was directly influenced by those in athletics to take the path of least resistance.

Because you choose these classes, you go with the flow. You go with the status quo. You stick with what's simple because, you know, for one, you don't know no better. I mean, you wanna do better... Like for me, I was stuck with easy courses through college cuz this is what I was told to do. I struggled with classes. I struggled with classes and everybody knew I struggled with classes because of the junior college that I went to and my GPA and stuff like that coming out of junior college, and then also my GPA coming out of high school. People knew that I, that some of these tough classes, I just couldn't handle it, cuz I didn't have the mentality or the traditional background for none of these classes.

The time demands associated with participation in a high profile college athletics teamed with the fact that these student-athletes often came from backgrounds that left them less prepared to manage the demands of Division I college athletics in this study impacted the student-athletes options for the majors they eventually selected. This phenomenon supported the assertion made by Edwards (1979) that Black student-athletes were funneled into non-academic majors due to their lack of academic preparation and lack of academic emphasis by athletic personnel in order to help them maintain their athletic eligibility and the protect the institutions investment.

Kenneth also explained that he took easier classes because it was “what he was told to do” fitting into a pattern of higher education and athletics that some officials hold Black student-athletes to lower academic expectations based on preconceived notions of intellectual inferiority based on race and athletic standings. This also ties in closely with the athletic business and the NCAA continuing eligibility models that lead athletic academic support staff in recommending academic schedules that follow a path of least resistance for student-athletes in order for them to maintain their eligibility and be able to compete for their teams. There are also constraints associated with the stigma of sub-cultures of certain sports’ participants, specifically football and men’s basketball, which have been connected with not valuing academic or intellectual success (Sperber, 1990).

Holding students, whether based on race or socio-economic status, to low academic expectations was coined by President George W. Bush during his speech to the NAACP in 2000 as the “soft bigotry of low expectation” (The term is attributed to his speech writer Michael Gerson). The statement presents that school/teachers hold students who are poor and/or Black to lower expectations, because they do not believe that these children can achieve high academic standards (Bush, 2000). The same can be said of school personnel, in referencing the participant, who tell student-athletes to take easier classes so that they can pass and maintain their eligibility for competing. The convergence of these various influences on student-athlete development presents a strong example of the intersectionality of race, class, and participation in athletics on the experiences of Black student-athletes, where the composition of the interrelations of the influences in totality on the Black student-athlete experience is greater than the impact of

the influences (race, socio-economic status, participation in athletics) individually. In defining intersectionality, Belkhir and McNair-Barnett (2001) explained that the impact of race and class could not be examined independently due to the complexity associated with the lives, issues, identities, and experiences of individuals that could not be prioritized. The barriers experienced by the participants in the study should therefore not be viewed as challenges associated with being Black and from low socio-economic background but instead as an outcome of their interactions that are often exacerbated due to the fact that they reinforce each other.

The fact that student-athletes receive a different education and are not afforded the same educational opportunities available to the general student populations also supports the concept of interest convergence identified earlier in the reasoning behind student-athlete encouragement by their teachers. In the case of the student-athlete experience and the time demands of college athletics restricting participant's course and major options, Critical Race Theory proponents could argue that these students are being exploited for their athletic abilities, what they contribute to the success of the institutions' athletic teams, and the popularity of college athletics nationally. The interest convergence argument would hold that these youth from disadvantaged backgrounds are only being recruited and provided a college education because they bring notoriety and success to their schools in an environment where college football is highly viewed by not only colleges but by the nation at large providing a considerable revenue stream. Certainly there are pockets of society that take a strong interest in helping urban youth improve

their lot in life but probably not to the tune of the \$2.7 billion that college athletics provides in scholarships each year (NCAA, 2015).

Linked to the connection between academic achievement and participation is the belief that student-athletes, in particular student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds, have greater aspiration to attend college, a notion that was supported by Bend and Petrie (1977). The qualitative data from this study portraying the lived experiences of the participants presents the reasons behind why these students were driven to accomplish what was a very important goal for them and their families. Charles explains the drive inherent in his mother, which provided the extra motivation.

It was a high priority, very high priority. It was no nonsense. It was you'll get your ass beat if you don't get your homework done. I think it's because she really wanted us to have the best opportunities because of the situation we were in. She wanted us to get out of it and knew that if we were intelligent we'll be able to figure a way out. She really is a big part of my success today, and she's always had that entrepreneurial spirit that I've been basically showered with my whole life. Now I have the entrepreneurial freedom to do whatever I want to do.

Sidney experienced that same influence from his parents who viewed sports and academics as the way to a better life.

Growing up, we didn't have much... My parents, they always implemented, 'Get good grades. Get good grades in school,' and I was pretty gifted in playing sports. I knew the only way out for me was to excel in the classroom and also athletically.

The aspiration to attend college and the use of athletic participation as a reward linked to taking care of academics for Frank came from his parents as well.

I always had my parents, well my mom that pushed me to get my education.

Anything less than straight “As” were punishment worthy I guess. In order to be able to participate in athletics, I had to have my grades. So my mom pushed me as far as getting my grades, but without a college degree or knowing what it takes to get to college, standardized test wasn't pushed on me as much as it should have been. Growing up in the environment I grew up in, I love it because that's one of the things that pushed me to be able to keep kids out of that environment.

For Sidney the drive to attend and graduate from college came more from a sense of pride and not letting his family down.

I had sisters; my sister, she graduated with her associates'. I had a couple in my family that had their associate's degree, but no one had a bachelor's degree. It's just something that I'm just proud of myself, because like I said, I had so many people depending on me, so many people that knew I was going to get it done. If I didn't get it done, I don't think I could have went back home and faced them, because I would have known that I'd completely disappointed them.

Whether it was family pride or the drive for a better life, each of the participants in the study were able to utilize the inspiration and go on to achieve success in their lives.

This section on academic achievement reviews the link between athletic participation and student academic performance, engagement, major selection, academic support, and time demands. For the most part, the lived experiences of the participants

confirmed the finding presented in the literature with a few exceptions. The most glaring gap in the literature is related to the quantitative nature of most of the research found on the impact of athletic participation on student-athlete academic achievement, as most of the qualitative findings failed to explain the reasons behind the various relationships. For example, the current quantitative research in the field can tell you that students from disadvantaged backgrounds make higher grades and aspire to attend college at a higher rate than their peers who did not participate in sports, but it can only guess as to the potential reasons behind the phenomenon.

Other gaps that were found in the literature include the significant need for life skills education for Black student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds. It was clear in the analysis of the data from this study that these particular students lacked and were in need of this type of training to not only support their success in college but ultimately in life. Another significant gap found in the literature involved the prevalence of transferable skills that student-athletes gained from their experiences in athletics and were able to transfer to their success in the classroom, for which the literature offers very little explanation.

The literature also offers very little exploration of the relationship between student-athlete academic achievement and religion. The impact of religious beliefs and values on their success in college and in life was mentioned by several of the participants in the study, a notable influence that came up more than once with several of the participants. A final gap in the literature that was noted was the lack of any research on the impact of language or vocabulary on the academic success of student-athletes.

Kenneth in particular noted that the vocabulary associated with his native geographic region and not necessarily intellectual endeavors impeded his academic transition to college.

Language, terminology, I mean when you kind of look at the college setting it's like, it's like you know picking up a whole new language. It is. And that's exactly what it is. It's like learning to speak a whole new language; it's like learning to um carry yourself in a totally different way, because now you have to be seen as a professional, even at this level at what you do. So you're expected to um carry yourself as such... So, you know I say coming and picking up a whole new language is a challenge, it was a challenge for me. Because I'm from the South I muffle when I talk. I don't speak clearly all the time, and I use a lot of slang and stuff like that. People are looking at me, they are like, 'Who is this kid'" You know, like one time I had an interview me and (my teammate). We did an interview and um the guy asked me a few questions and I gave him my background as I'm doing right now, and at the end of the interview um the guy said, 'What did he say?' Oh he said, 'You think that's going to be a tough act to follow?' and (my teammate) shared a giggle, but personally I don't know what that means. That kind of, in a sense, not to say it crushed me, but that let me know that you know what I'm saying? These people don't even understand who I am. They don't know where I'm from, that don't have no clue, you know. And I felt like a total idiot because I didn't know how to talk the talk. I didn't know how to talk professional. I didn't know how to use certain words and grammar and stuff

like that to, you know what I'm saying, sound intelligent. When I'm talking on the radio, or doing the interview, you know. So you know I just came out me being me, from the country talking slang thinking everybody talked this way, but it wasn't like that. Very different. From that interview I knew I was in totally different world.

Athletics and Character Development

Phillips and Schafer (1971) cited that participation in athletics had helped student-athletes develop certain transferable skills such as a strong work ethic, mental toughness, persistence, and commitment to excellence, which carried over to the students' work in the classroom. They also stated that some of these traits have been attributed to the enhanced peer status associated with being a star athlete on the team, as students who felt good about themselves due to their success in sports produced positive results in the classroom as well. The participants in the study communicated that the lessons learned in athletics carried over to support their success in the classroom; in particular, Kenneth believed athletics helped him create a strong understanding of how to improve based on the model he used in athletics.

I struggle writing papers. I struggle um you know in my grad assistant course. Doing you know 10 page papers, 11 page papers. Uh I just didn't know how to make certain grammar corrections and things like that. I didn't have any knowledge by how to get it done, but just because I didn't have any knowledge on how to get it done I wasn't going to let it whoop me.

The hard work associated with athletics seemed to be the key to success in the classroom for Devin, as he explained how it carried over.

It's just like going to coaches if I'm not as strong in the weight room or what not then the coach will show me how to get stronger. What I need to do? What repetitions, what weight do I have to lift...? And that's the same thing I did with my tutors. I said show me how to get this stuff done. So when it comes down to me passing my midterm or final exam, you know what I'm saying, I can come in there with confidence and knock it out of the park.

As cited by Phillips and Schafer (1971), participation in athletics had helped student-athletes develop certain transferable skills such as a strong work ethic, mental toughness, persistence, and commitment to excellence - an experience that several of the participants expressed. Charles felt that athletics helped him develop a competitive edge that carried over into other aspects of his life.

You don't like to lose. That is what it comes down to. You don't like to lose. If you don't lose ever, then you may lose in life. Either when you lose, like after that football game what do you do? You fold up, you rest up, you find out how to get better, how you can do it better the next time. Normal people like non-athletes they don't always think that way. When they lose, they crumble.

He also believed that athletics taught him how to push through boundaries in life.

What I would say to college athletes, what they have is the ability to push boundaries based on the things they've gone through. Working well under pressure, being able to dust yourself off when you lose and get back up and come

back strong, these are all certain things that mold an individual to become what they become, but sometimes that happens subconsciously. They don't know what they're doing. It's just the way they're programmed to do it. They start to become programmed a certain way to where they hate losing with a passion.

Devin believed that athletic participation helped him develop the resilience needed to face the many setbacks that occur in life.

Yeah, because when you get knocked down, you get back up and you don't quit on a play. Kind of like some of the fundamentals of sports. The fundamental philosophy of sports does tie in with the fundamentals of your life. It's just not there. It's just a wall, it's a barrier. But if you've got the desire to get there, you're going to find a way to get there. Once you get there, athletics is going to facilitate your ultimate success, because when you think about the philosophy, the philosophies of sports, for example, you get knocked down, you get back up. You learn how to take a hit. Don't give up on a play.

Competing in athletics also allows participants to develop tough skin and the ability to deal with the various pressures and challenges in life, according to Kenneth.

I link both of those together (academics and athletics), because you're going to get a certain amount of pressure from each position. So as a Black man, you're going to get pressure. As an athlete you're going to get pressure. So when you combine those two together, are you built to deal with those pressures? And I don't see a lot of athletes, especially African American athletes, that have real

tough skin. You got to have real tough skin to deal with uh, to deal with the beast.

That's the animal.

It is evident from the experiences of these participants that athletics played an important role in helping them develop the skills that were critical to their success in life, hard and not soft skills that were critical in helping them deal with challenges and breaking down the barriers associated with their disadvantaged start in life.

The participants in the study exhibited resilience and an edge associated with their strong work ethic and determination linked with their unfailing will to succeed in a challenging environment displaying a very different type of capital, which the Critical Race Theorist defined as cultural capital of Communities of Color. Critical Race Theory argues in favor of a more inclusive view of social capital, where additional value is placed on the cultural capital of Communities of Color such as those related to aspiration, language, familial, navigational, and resistant capital. Navigational capital refers to the skills associated with being able to navigate a hostile environment that does not necessarily value the cultural capital of the historically disadvantaged (Yosso, 2005) and is especially relevant to this study, as the participants were each successful in college and in life in defiance of the challenges and opposition they all had to face. Several of the participants noted that their resilience, work ethic, and high aspirations were ingrained in them from a young age, situations fitting appropriately into the descriptions of cultural capital described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) as not being something that could be simply handed over but instead being acquired over time and consisting of a wide range of spoken language, manners, preferences, and orientations. The participants' success in

college and life can be traced back to these character traits that were linked to their high aspirations and ability to navigate a challenging environment, traits not often valued and recognized by the dominant culture.

Segrave and Hastad (1984) concluded in their study of the relationship between athletic participation and delinquency that student-athletes were significantly less likely to be involved with delinquent behavior than non-athletes. They also noted that urban youth as well as athletic participants from both low and high socio-economic status groups tended to be less involved in delinquent behavior as well. Their results also indicated that student-athletes in high profile sports exhibited more delinquent behavior than individuals in minor sports. The participants in the study, who are from high profile sports, both support and refute elements of these findings in reporting that they were less likely to be involved in disciplinary issues due to their participation in athletics. Sam believed that he had more to risk by getting into trouble than his non-athletic peers.

I think I felt like I had more to lose than anybody else. That was my premature realization. When I was younger, did some things, didn't necessarily get in trouble for it but I start to realize, hey, I have more to lose than this next guy, and we all have been in this position. I had more to lose as far as my education. I'd be kicked out of school. I could lose a scholarship for getting in trouble. If a regular college student gets arrested, you're going to have to pay some fines, you're going to have to go to court, those types of things. But those types of instances can charge me away from actually if the court feels that they wanted to, I could lose a scholarship over.

Sam also felt that athletics kept him so busy that he did not have the time to get into trouble and that he paid more attention to where he went and who he associated with.

For me, I think athletics gave me... it gave me, grounded me in a sense of giving me, I know I got practice these days. I'm only going to go hang out these days, and when I do that I'm going to go to certain places because I know what type of crowds are around and where I'm least likely to get in trouble.

Devin believed that sports and not necessarily school also kept him off the streets and away from the wrong people.

I didn't kind of really take academics seriously. I was able to, sports kept me in school. It kept me off the streets, it kept me from getting in trouble, it kept me from engaging in behaviors that I wouldn't normally do, so sports kept me grounded and focused because I enjoyed it, the sport that I enjoyed, and it kept me from engaging in those activities that were considered negative... Being an athlete, once I got to college, I just made sure I stayed around the right people. My sisters kind of talked to me about preparing me for college once I got to that level. I was just smart about who I hung around with. I didn't really get in much trouble.

Frank explained that the motivation for him staying out of trouble was the fact that he did not want to let his teammates down.

Oh man, that was the key. If I got suspended, I couldn't play. If I couldn't play, I let down in basketball 12 to 15 other people, in football 30 to 50, and in track the same amount. That was one of the things that kept me level headed. I never

wanted want to disappoint my teammates by making a bad decision in school that caused me to be suspended and not being able to play.

Felix was more driven by the fact that he wanted a better life than the one he was coming from and did not want the opportunity he was given to slip away.

In high school I think that... I really believe that I had a tough go at it. I looked up, my mother was a bus driver, my father was a cab driver. We was moving apartment to apartment every, almost every three months. For me, I just wanted something different and it didn't matter what it took. I was willing to change my situation... I had the opportunity I wanted to make sure I didn't let it slip through my fingertips.

Student-athletes may also avoid delinquent behavior because it may disrupt the relationships they have developed with their coaches. These positive relationships that student-athletes have with coaches have been strongly linked with a reduction of anti-social behavior and an increase in pro-social behavior of student-athletes (Davidson & Moran-Miller, 2005; Rutten, Biesta, Stams, Schuengel, Dirks & Hoeksma, 2007).

Coaches have an opportunity to develop strong relationships that often go beyond the coach/student-athlete relationship in sports. Student-athletes often view their coaches as mentors and individuals who take a personal interest in them and their lives placing them in a position to exert additional influence on student-athletes when it comes to making personal decisions. Sidney considered his coaches more of a second set of parents or “in loco parentis” who had behavior expectations as well.

Yeah, it (athletics) actually did (keep me out of trouble), because you have ground rules. Your coaches, most of them, they're really like your parents away from home. Some of the same values, the same things that they have, the coaches have. They try to make sure that you stay on the straight path, and if you don't, you will get punished, maybe suspended from a game. You may not start anymore, you may lose your position. To me, that was just a way of taking something away that they know you love, and by doing so, more times than not, you'll do the right thing.

Sam explained that he did not want to ever be in a position where he had to give his coach a bad report.

For myself it was I didn't want to be that guy to have to go tell coach, 'Hey, I got in trouble for doing this or I got this citation or that.' I think for me it was I wanted to be... for me, I wanted to be different. I didn't want to be the African-American athlete getting in trouble.

Felix explained the relationship he developed with his coach that made him more accountable.

Yeah, and actually my coach was one of such that he'd tell you what you got to do and if you don't do it, that's on you. In my high school class, we had... my senior class had 12 kids offered Division I scholarships. Myself and another guy that went to JUCO was the only two that went to college. It wasn't like a hand held thing. It was just more of an ownership on yourself. We're going to give you the knowledge, and you make the best decision that you can make.

The relationships that these participants developed played an important role in impacting the decisions that these student-athletes made, a phenomenon that will be further explored in the later discussion on the role of mentoring in these individuals' lives.

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden made the case that athletics did not build character in participants but that instead revealed it (Jamison & Wooden, 1997). The current study supports this belief, as most of the participants maintained that they possessed many of the positive attributes associated with athletics prior to their involvement in athletics. Shields and Bredemeier (2001) explained that the positive characteristics displayed by student-athletes should not be attributed to their involvement in sports and that athletics merely presents the opportunity or the arena for the expression of these attributes that the participants bring into the experience. Videon (2002) confirms this finding that many of the positive character attributes associated with athletic participation are due to the fact that better students tend to pursue sports activities and not due to their involvement in athletics.

Devin supported these findings, stating that he possessed the ambition and drive prior to his experiences in athletics and that what was needed were the skills.

I just had that ambition and that hunger and that drive to do what I had to do to make it. That I didn't have the tools and skills but I had to go out and find those tools and skills, once I found them, I used them and used them to the point where I bettered myself. Desire, yeah. I look at it like this. If you have the ability, the desire, and opportunity, you'll make it. You'll achieve whatever you set your mind out to do. But if you lack one of those, you won't succeed. I don't care what you

go after, you ain't going to. You will not succeed... I was there. I was on a mission to want to graduate, to be the only Black male in my family to graduate.

Frank expresses that he had always valued education and that the drive came from his desire for a better life for him and his family and not necessarily something that he gleaned from athletics.

Education was always important to me. I always had a dream of what I wanted to do, and I always had an inner drive of where I wanted to be in life. If I look back over it and I look at the people that seen me grow up, no. I knew from day one that I wanted to go into business. I actually wanted to be... I guess I could say from the age of 13 I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a sports agent, so I started doing research early. I knew I needed to have a business background. I need the business administration, accounting. I knew I had to go to law school and all that good stuff. That was something that I figured out from an early age. That wasn't influenced by athletics at all.

Frank also explained that a strong value of education and inner drive to succeed in life was always present and served as a guiding light, enabling him to be in the position that his is in today.

My motivation was to be able to get my mom out of the situation that she was in even though I couldn't move her away from the neighborhood that she was in. She doesn't have to be so concerned about me because she knows I'm doing better. Me being able to graduate and have a good paying job is a stress reliever for her. I think that was one of the things that helped me to be able to graduate when so

many other people weren't. Education was always important to me. I always had a dream of what I wanted to do, and I always had an inner drive of where I wanted to be in life. If I look back over it and I look at the people that seen me grow up, they probably never would have thought that I would be in the position I am in now to be 32 years old, married with a child on the way, and having a bachelor's degree and a master's degree, and working as a youth pastor in a church of this capacity. My journey has been difficult, and I've learned a lot. It's allowed me to grow to the man I am today.

Kenneth attributed his work ethic and faith in God to his upbringing on a Southern farm and the influence from his grandparents.

It was great um great childhood. A hardworking childhood because uh my grandmother, she's old-school. My father, he's kind of old-school too. So I grew up on a farm, believe it or not, in (my home state). And so you know we had uh cows, chickens, we had gardens things like that. So, you know, hard work has been an essential part of my nature. We really didn't push education in our home. It was a lot of religion that was pushed in our home and things like that, but you know as far as going to church and trusting in God and believing in God and things of that nature. But when it came to education, you know if you got your homework done, you got your homework done, but it was like you know, you come and get off the school bus, you put on your little work clothes, and you get down in the yard and go to work.

He also took personal responsibility for his preparation and did not hold the system culpable for his lack of preparation.

Once again I think that it was all, it was basically all on me. You know. I don't think it gave me the tools that I needed to be successful in college, but once again I can't give all that, put all that responsibility on the teachers. It was also me realizing that look, hey, you got an opportunity to go to college not only that but you have the opportunity to do well for yourself and in life if you take ahold of gaining a good foundation of a good education. You know, so I mean it certainly at one point it's the system and at the other point it's the tenacity of the other individual at that point to get it done. You know you can't put all the responsibility on the teachers.

These student-athletes each expressed the belief that the positive character traits that helped them succeed in life, whether it was their work ethic, internal, or sense of personal responsibility came not from their involvement in athletics but from their families and the way in which they were raised. The participants' statements support the claim made by John Wooden that athletics in their lives presented the opportunity for them to exercise the positive character traits that had been ingrained in them from childhood.

Participant transcripts tended to support the literature in regard to the transference of skills from athletics to both academic and positive life character traits, the impact of athletics on involvement in disciplinary issues, and the idea that sports do not necessarily build character but instead present the opportunity to reveal it. An interesting

contradiction was found in that the student-athlete participants both attributed the development of certain positive character traits to athletics but then also expressed that these attributes were a part of their personalities prior to their athletic involvement. In most cases these were different skills, indicating that both athletics and family upbringing were contributors.

The participants believed that their experiences in athletics afforded them a tremendous opportunity to gain an education and a better life, which directly contradicts Ogbu's Theory of Opposition Culture. Ogbu (1990) examines two minority types, in particular voluntary and involuntary minorities, which experience and respond to education very differently. Voluntary minorities entered the country voluntarily with aspirations of increasing their lot in life by taking advantage of the educational and opportunity resources available in the United States. Involuntary minorities, on the other hand, are minorities that did not willfully choose to become a part of the new society but were instead forced to become members through colonization, slavery, and conquest. Ogbu argued that these minorities viewed education not as a vehicle through which their future is improved but instead as a means of socialization and oppression associated with their involuntary suppressed state. The participants in the study that are African American and would be classified as involuntary minorities shared a very different view than that which was predicted by Ogbu. Instead of viewing education as a means of their oppression, they viewed it as a means of improving their lives similar to the aspirations of the voluntary minorities yet different from them in that they did not share a desire to return to their disadvantaged homelands. The participants in this study appreciated the

opportunity that a college education afforded them and worked tirelessly to make the most of their education and the better life which they associated with it.

Gaps that were evident in the literature in regard to the relationship between involvement in athletics and the development of positive character attributes included the lack of literature review variables such as race and socio-economic status. Due to the high participation rates for Black and students from low socio-economic backgrounds in athletics, it is unfortunate that there are not more studies that incorporate these factors. Another gap in the literature included the lack of any investigation on the impact that religion played in the formation of positive character values, as several of the participants noted the significant role that it played in the development of their character. Two of the participants also noted in the discussion on the development of their character the concept of self-reliance, as Participants Two and Seven noted that they were both resistant to receiving hand outs and wanting to earn their way while seeing others as not holding that value. It would be interesting to see the relationship between this value and student success in life and in school. Accountability was also not a character attribute that was found in the literature as being a positive character trait inherent to the definition of character.

Participants One and Four noted that the relationship with their coaches and teachers were based on accountability and the belief that they were ultimately responsible for their actions and taking care of their own business. This could be a key area in the discussion of the relationship between athletic participation and student success, especially in light of the current shift in our culture surrounding the concept of

entitlement where youth today are raised with the ideal that they are deserving or entitled to certain privileges.

Athletics and Social Capital

Phillips and Schafer (1971) cited that student-athletes were able to increase their social mobility through their association with others who had stronger and more developed social networks when compared to those who did not participate in athletics. College athletics tends to draw participants from a wider range of socio-economic statuses, where team members are assembled based on athletic performance and interests rather than on the neighborhoods they were raised in and how much money their parents made. Sam in particular noted that the connections that he made due to his participation in athletics strengthened his network.

I got the opportunity to come and play football, so in doing that I was able to actually gain more connections because coming into colleges and Division I college, there's a lot of people. There's staff. There's not just their football coaches but instructors. Sometimes I had a project. I needed to interview someone in the field that I was thinking about going in, which I was kind of working towards sports management, and one of my coaches put me in contact with a guy that actually represented professional athletes. That right there helps expand your network, which when it comes to jobs and it comes to moving in a career path many people know networking is one of the key ingredients. You have to know how to network. You have to know tons of people.

Kenneth also viewed a very strong connection between the stronger networks he was able to develop through athletics, especially when it came to references.

Yeah, I mean all the, all the coaches that have coached me, a lot of individuals you seen I use as references on my resumes, and you know was able to get jobs I probably wouldn't have been able to get if I hadn't known you guys or been through or went through the university system in a sense. So, you know, yeah all you guys played an important role as far as networking because you wonder how all those names on your resume, you know if I can say so and so at (the university) um head of the department or whatever that's going to speak big over somebody that says a manager at McDonald's.

Frank stated that the networks he developed through athletics opened doors for him that would not have otherwise been available.

Ms. (James) is a lady that I worked with as a graduate assistant. Still have a great relationship with her. I think those relationships go so much further than just college and athletics, but they become the people that help me with my getting jobs because of recommendations that they wrote for me. Yeah. I think being an athlete helped out a lot with the relationships. Yes. Perfect example, I had an interview with the NCAA and it was based off of my letters of recommendation. I had my athletic advisor, Ms. (Ash), and the acting athletic director at the time write me a letter of recommendation. My relationship with them allowed them to write a great letter of recommendation to be able to get my foot in the door with the NCAA when I wasn't even qualified to be interviewed by them. Ms.

(Dennison), she knew somebody that was part of the interviewing process, and she talked about how good of a kid I was, and they just wanted to meet me based off the people that wrote letters of recommendation for me.

Sidney valued the influence and encouragement that the networks he had developed through athletics in college provided him.

I stayed in contact with the connections that I had, that I met from out there, and they were able to ... I moved to a different location. I'm living in (my home city and state), now; a bigger market for me, and some of the guys I knew, they called people they knew. Even though the good job I landed wasn't a referral from anyone, I just kept pressing. They wouldn't let me give up. They motivated me. They'd call and say, 'Hey, I may know this guy at such-and-such a place. Go send out an application to him. I have family in that area, if you need help, if you ever get stranded or you need... Maybe you can't make it home for Christmas or Thanksgiving, you can stop by the house and have dinner with them.' There was a lot of people that took me in as family, just like the people I knew.

The value of these references and connections confirm the findings of Day and McDonald (2010) who determined that these networks were invaluable and often provide former student-athletes information on opportunities and allowed the contact to exert their influence on those that made hiring decisions. The value of these relationships was enhanced, as these valuable connections conferred their social status upon the beneficiary, therefore elevating the reputation of the student-athletes as they entered the job market and moved up through their careers.

Lin (2001) contended that disadvantaged groups tended to benefit more from the development of diverse social connects due to their lack of access to the “good old boys” and established networks that had been previously restricted to Whites. Restriction to homogeneous networks has been found to be problematic in that it limits the individual’s networks to those who possess limited social networks themselves, regardless of the volume of these connections. The participants in this study tended to develop diverse networks, which they view as benefiting their options and opportunities. Kenneth expressed the limitations associated with a homogeneous small town network.

I'm from a small town, and so it's easy to get influenced by these negative people, you know, and if you don't have a lot of positive influences in that situation to kind of say, 'Hey! This is the route you need to take. Try this! Work with this! Go this route. Ah, work on your education, build the tools, and get the tools that you need to be successful in college or successful even if you don't decide to go to college, but successful in life. Do these things.' You know there's very few people, uh, that, uh, are in our culture that influence us to go that way, especially in a small town. It's very few people, you might meet one or two, maybe three or four people, teachers, coaches, role models, you know, uh besides your pastor at church. That's kind of telling you, you know it's not for, for a lot of people it's not a stable situation.

Felix noted that football allowed him to meet different people as well.

Playing football, it allowed me to meet people that were successful outside of football. It allowed me to meet people that had used their education to secure a better life financially.

Sam expressed the value of developing diverse networks with those beyond athletics as well.

Yes, I mean they (networks) were crucial because as you're doing --That's what I try to stress to the guys now. There's always going to be a time where you need somebody else to help you or to be able to vouch for you. It's not just I'm a good athlete. You have to be able to reach out to people in the community and people that just not necessarily in athletics or maybe board or region or someone you've met or something to that effect. I think athletics itself gives ... puts you in touch with a lot of people.

Felix did not believe that he developed diverse networks, noting that his connections were restricted to those that were made in football due partially to time demands of the sport.

I would say a lot of the networks I met were through some of my teammates. I didn't meet many people outside of football when I was here, just because it was either the coaches, I never really had time to get into organizations with networks and things of that nature. I don't think that I developed a big network while I was a student athlete.

Riess (1980) found that the notoriety gained by student-athletes resulting from their playing days in college helped them gain access to public positions and offices. He

also found that companies who felt that they could benefit from the exposure of hiring a big name athlete in areas related to sales and real estate would often recruit former baseball players. Two athletes in the study stated that notoriety was associated with their roles as athletes. Kenneth discussed the perks that were available to student-athletes as a result of their status as athletes and their scholarships.

No, it's a totally different experience (student-athlete experience). Because, like I said, you get certain perks. You know, you get, um, per diem. Other students, you know, have to get, and depend on financial aid and stuff. They have to get some work study jobs and things of that nature. As an athlete, you know, people just kind of hand you money at certain times. So yeah, you know, scholarships or it's easy to get a job compared to other students on campus, you know, because you know you network with the right group of people.

Charles described the potential advantages of the exposure the opportunity to associate with those with money as a result of being a college student-athlete.

I wouldn't say my relationships in college guaranteed that I was going to get a job or guaranteed anything, but it does expose you to a lot of high profile people that do provide jobs. A lot of the booster programs will... if you ain't got no money you can't be a booster right? You're mingling with all these guys and they're fans of you. They're idolizing you. When you're done playing, sometimes you still carry a little on some of those relationships and sometimes you don't, but I won't say that any of those relationships turned out into a \$100,000 paying job. It still allows you to network with the right people.

Bourdieu (1986) perceived social capital in restrictive terms as a means of exclusion by which the haves protect and further enhance their elite status in society over the have nots and as a means of protecting the status quo and the unequal distribution of networks. The participants in this study were able to transform a basis for exclusion to their advantage through an internal drive to succeed in part motivated by a strong desire to escape from their dire economic situations. Bourdieu uses this combination of influences in his explanation of how capital is created for individuals through their exposure to education: “Lower class survivors have compensated for their initial lack of capital by acquiring a scholastically based cultural capital through exceptional intellectual ability, individual effort, and unusual home or social circumstance” (Swartz, 1997, p. 201). The act of persevering through college and successfully earning a college degree provided the participant with increased capital (cultural and social) that could then, according to Bourdieu, be quantified and compared to others easing their conversion to economic gain. The participants in the study experienced this upward social mobility because of their individual effort and strong desire to improve upon their disadvantaged circumstance.

Kenneth attributed his success in college and life to the individual effort that Bourdieu described as critical to overcoming his academic deficiencies that resulted from his disadvantaged situation.

I struggle writing papers. I struggle um, you know, in my grad assistant course. Doing, you know 10 page papers, 11 page papers. Uh I just didn't know how to make certain grammar corrections and things like that... So I manage my time to

where I can go to the student support services and get English teachers or whatever to correct my assignments that I need to correct and get them done and turn them in on time.

Devin supported Bourdieu's explanation for how the disadvantaged overcome their deficiency in capital entering the experience through effort, drive, and intellectual ability.

I just had that ambition and that hunger and that drive to do what I had to do to make it. What I didn't have were the tools and skills, but I had to go out and find those tools and skills. Once I found them, I used them and used them to the point where I bettered myself... If you have the ability, the desire, and opportunity, you'll make it. You'll achieve whatever you set your mind out to do. But if you lack one of those, you won't succeed.

In this case the opportunity was present by the participant's involvement in sports.

Bourdieu mentions the importance of drive and intellectual opportunity but neglects to mention the significant role that "opportunity" plays in overcoming disadvantaged backgrounds. For the participants of the study, football had created the important opportunity necessary for success. Sidney expressed this same drive encouraged by his underdog status and those that were depending on him.

To me, coming from an environment that we were stereotyped, and we were already behind the eight ball, I'm an underdog type of person, so I was going to prove them wrong. Therefore, that was the drive. That was the energy I needed, so whenever I'd get off track, to get back on track, just think about how many people

are doubting me right now, just think about ... On the flip side, think about how many people are really depending on me. I stayed in contact with the connections that I had, that I met from out there.

Frank was also driven by his humble socio-economic beginning and the same desire to prove those who were not in his corner wrong, which enabled him to excel.

I grew up in a very rough area in (my home city), the west side of (my home city), which is a neighborhood called (normal heights). I am the only one in my immediate family that has gone to college and been able to receive a degree. I have more degrees by myself than anybody in my immediate family. If somebody said I wasn't gone get to do it, my job is to be able to prove them wrong and be able to take it from them... My whole experience I think was the same as some people, but the difference was my drive to be able to prove people wrong and then be able to get to that next step in life.

Sidney was encouraged by his current socio-economic situation and a strong desire for a better life that kept him on the right path not allowing the opportunity to pass him by.

I think that made it a little easier for me to turn down the marijuana or to not skip class or to work a little harder, to go after school and meet with the English teacher, to do that homework assignment. I think it was just the perspective I had and the opportunity I wanted to make sure I didn't let slip through my fingertips.

For Charles the drive also came from his desire to escape a bad socio-economic upbringing.

It was nice living, but I grew up in a single mom family, and we always had times of struggle. Some of my worst memories were being evicted from every apartment we lived in, getting cars repossessed, sleeping in the car at times, making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches out of junk. Honestly, the only way out was to get a scholarship and I knew that. Just to distance myself away from it all. So I came up here in 2002, mom dropped me off at the doors with a hundred dollars and gave me a pat on the back and that's where my journey really started at that point. But growing up I always knew that I didn't want to go back to those hard times in life. It may be a cliché, but my dream was to play in NFL because of the money. I wanted to be able to buy my mom a house and a car and do all those things.

Each of the participants in the study in one way or another communicated that they had a strong drive to succeed and possessed a strong intellectual potential, though in some form or another lacking the skills, and were from unusual home situations supporting Bourdieu's explanation for the development of new capital. The ability to create new capital through drive and inspiration and the development of stronger and more diverse networks along with the increased notoriety associated with the athletic status were all important to the successes of the participants in this study. Their limited backgrounds left them in disadvantaged situations not only economically but also in regard to their social networks, positions that they were able to escape from due in part to their involvement with athletics and the individuals they met through this association.

The experiences of these students generally support the literature with the following exceptions. The literature on the impact of participation in athletics on social mobility fails to mention the potential impact of negative networks on participants. Several of the participants mentioned the potential negative impact of networks that were available to them as a result of their involvement in athletics. Sam described many of the others on his team not necessarily being academically engaged, “hanging out in the hallways, hanging out or just talking... most of them just hanging out - no books, nothing.” Kenneth also mentioned the negative networks trying to pull him down when he was beginning to make progress.

The thing about education you do either one or two things: you either fall into the crowd or you're going to pull away from the crowd. And when you start to pull away from the crowd while becoming more intelligent, they notice that and they, ‘Aw, come on homes. Where are you going? Come back down here with us cause this is where you belong type of thing.

For some students who are attempting to pull away and develop their social capital, there is force that exists that is trying to pull them back down to their limited social capital.

Another significant aspect of social capital absent from the literature was the role in the development of certain life skills that enhanced capital. Kenneth viewed these as skill that could be applied to the new world they were experiencing.

The one thing about education is can you transition it or does it apply to real life? I mean you can be educated, you can be knowledgeable of a certain topic of a subject, but how can I use that knowledge? Can it be applied in the real world? I

mean you have these classes where they base theories of 1980 or what not. Can I use that stuff? Is it, is it can I take it to the real world, real world situations and solve problems with that? That's the point of education. Can I apply it to my real life?

Sidney correlated it more with the understanding of how to manage money.

Yeah, it was a challenge at first in the sense of I've never had it, so I didn't know how to manage it. I didn't know how to ... The proper things to spend it on, the proper things to do with it... I knew about what a 401k was in school, but I didn't really know the importance of having one. I didn't know the importance of not only working but working a job that's a career, therefore you can retire. You don't have to work your whole life.

Charles also identified the absence of certain financial life skills prior to coming to college.

I wouldn't say that it was educational preparation that I was lacking. It was more of a lifestyle preparation that I was lacking, almost to the fact like I didn't know how to balance a checkbook. I didn't really know how to manage money. That's the preparation, like the traditional life in general. It had nothing to do with education though.

In each of these occasions, the participants noted the absences of a different kind of education, a certain skill set that seemed to impede their growth, deficits that were eventually remedied by their connections to individuals from the middle class who were able prepare them for the new life that would be ahead for them.

Also absent from the literature was the impact of the personal characteristics of the individuals who were benefiting in regard to social capital when it came to their relationships with those from the advanced social class. In several cases the participants noted that there was something about them that facilitated the interests that others took in supporting the development of their social capital. Frank credited his personality for the ability to develop and maintain these advanced networks. "I think it was based off of my personality, my character and integrity and all those things that people take for granted. It helped me to be able to develop those relationships. My teammates, they call and check up on me a lot."

Devin acknowledged that his likeable personality impacted the fact that others wanted to help him succeed. "Just having that likable personality. I really like this kid. This kid's really doing what he needs to do to succeed." It is clear that the participants' exposure to higher education and college athletics expanded their social capital, but there is also evidence that their personalities played a role in the likelihood of them receiving the expanded network.

Athletics and Mentoring

Mentoring has also been closely connected with the ability of student-athletes, in particular Black student-athletes, to succeed in college due to the role it played in helping them overcome the challenges associated with being Black student-athletes. As previously noted, Black students in general do not graduate nor are they retained at the same rates as their White peers in college. The college experience is often very different and difficult for Black student-athletes. One of the reasons college is more challenging

for Black student-athletes and why mentoring becomes so much more important in their lives is the demands of their sport and the amount of time they have available to connect with others, something that Benson (2000) attributed to the time demands associated with being a Division I college student-athlete where the commitments of practice, weight training, film review, and athletic related physical rehabilitation often limit the amount of time student-athletes have available to develop relationships with faculty.

Several of the participants in the study acknowledged that their experiences were different from those of non-student-athletes due to the demands of football. Kenneth noted that athletics restricted his options for building connections with others even though the athletic program attempted to structure time for these types of opportunities.

My involvement on campus was kind of based off the responsibilities that our coaches and administration gave us. So we had to do like community service or whatever it may be. That um, for me that's as far as my support on campus went. You know because it was a requirement... College athletes work hard. All college athletes work hard. You spend from 6:00 in the morning, depending on what time you got class, till almost noon in the classroom, and then you turn around and you spend another almost three hours on the football field to practice. And then you turn around from that and go to the study hall or whatever. So you, you know what I'm saying, it's a full day's worth of work.

Felix also recognized that his involvement in athletics left little time for anything else if he wanted to be a good student and a good athlete. Though some of the requirements were defined as voluntary, this to a student-athlete is not voluntary at all.

Outside of football and academics, whatever little time I had to myself I kind of wanted to keep it to myself. Football was just so time consuming, and it didn't afford you to do some of those other things, a part-time job, or getting into clubs... You have the football requirements, you have the academic requirements, and if you want to be good at either one, you're probably doing more than a normal student athlete is doing. You got five classes and you got one tutor. You got to read on your own. You got to go to office hours, so that requires more time. You want to be a better football player, you got to do extra. You got to wake up early and do the workouts on your own. Your days eat up so much just with time, whether it's mandatory time or voluntary time on your own, toward the academics and sports. So I wasn't able to.

Sam also noted that the demands were taxing throughout the year often restricting his options.

Your in-season time and even your out-of-season time, that's one thing that's about athletics. It's an off season, but off season only says hey, you're not playing any games. There's less hours that you're mandated to be around the staff, but if you want to be a good athlete, if you want to be a great athlete like most that get involved in athletics, you're always going to be putting in some more time anyway.

Charles also noted that he did not have the time to be a student due to the demands of his sport.

I didn't have time to be a student. I was playing, either working out, spring ball. I was either in my sport or working out. It was very hard to manage all that together. Your time management skills do get better, but at the same time it was very difficult. I would say that it actually hinders. It didn't hinder my performance in the classroom because I always carried a high GPA, but it also wasn't like I was majoring in calculus either.

Sidney viewed athletics as absorbing his entire life even though he was prepared academically.

I actually went to college prepared. I was pretty gifted in the classroom. I took the ACT only once. My score was 23, so as far as ... I was prepared for college, as far as the coursework, but I wasn't prepared to be a student athlete. It was very hard being a student athlete at a Division I level, because it's really football and school. That's your whole life. You really don't have time... If you want to excel, you don't have time to do anything else.

Each of the participants viewed the requirement of school and sport as demanding, making the need for support in making the transition through college even more crucial, a need that was often met by important mentors in their lives.

Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) found that the demands of being a college student-athlete often left Black student-athletes feeling socially and institutionally alienated or isolated, a phenomenon that several of the student-athletes in the study indicated that they had experienced as the isolation of being a Black student-athlete on campus. Sam explains the role that the isolation played in the development of his feelings

of comfort and safety on campus as an African American on a predominately White campus.

As a freshman, I didn't really hang out with other people from a different race than me because I didn't have an idea what that was like. It was always an unknown fact of not really knowing, 'Am I going to be safe? Am I going to be...' It was uneasy at first.

Student-Athlete Five's experiences of isolation were related to his race, believing that they impacted both social and educational realms influencing his experiences in the classroom as well.

When you go out and hang out, we, you have to go to these certain places where predominantly the African-American students go. You're like cool. You're in a group of people, but then you get to class, now that majority figures that most of the school was Caucasian that sets in. Sometimes it was maybe myself, maybe... I remember English class was just me and then another African American basketball player and everybody else in the class is Caucasian. That was different for me, because usually in high school a majority of the students are African American and the one or two Caucasians or different nationality in there. It was flipped. It was opposite.

Student-Athlete One developed that same sense of isolation but attributed it to his status as a student-athlete believing that it limited his collegiate student experience.

You get isolated. As an athlete, you know, you put yourself in a position where you're only able to socialize with one group of people. You know what I'm

saying? (That's what) what isolation is, is that, you know... you go, you come on campus, you get put in the dorm room, you and other athletes are set off in this corner. And you don't, you don't, you don't build a lot of social skills that kind of makes you... I guess, in a sense less diverse.

The time demand and the isolation associated with being a Black student-athlete on a college campus are among the challenges faced by these students, challenges that critical mentors often helped these student-athletes overcome.

Sauer, Desmond, and Heintzelman (2013) found that college student-athletes, when compared to non-student-athletes, were more open to mentoring, were better mentors, had higher levels of emotional intelligence - all ultimately resulting in higher levels of personal and professional success. The coaching relationships associated with college athletics appear to expand beyond the playing fields and into the personal lives of student-athletes as they begin to see the value of these relationships and actively seek out support from those that are in a position to help them succeed. For many of the student-athletes in the study, coaches played key roles as mentors in both leading up to and during college. When asked who their mentors were, coaches were often the first to come to mind outside of a parent for the student-athletes. Student-Athlete Four recognized his high school coach, who was the person he often turned to when he needed help managing difficult situations.

Looking back on it, he did a lot of little things, like underlying things, to make sure I was successful. The talks, the conversations, he was the first person that I told that I had a son, that I was going to have a kid. I didn't know how to handle

that situation. I went to him before I went to my father. He just ... Helping me talk through those situations. Anything. I hope I'm off the statute of limitations, but when I was getting ready to leave for college, I couldn't even afford a plane ticket. He freaking bought me a ticket on a two day notice to come to college. All those little things, conversations, when things got hard here in college, first person I'd call. Unbelievable guy.

Kenneth indicated that his coach was more than someone who helped him develop his skills on the field but someone who truly cared and took a personal interest in him.

He's (my coach) another one of those blue collar guys that didn't take no crap. He'll run you 'till you pass out. If you were late to practice or didn't show up to practice or you were having trouble as far as your personal life and stuff like that, he's one of those hard-nose, hard-nosed guys... He worked with me for my academics and stuff like that. He came out to (my school state) and kind of showed me what classes I needed to get into and kind of supported me through all that as I was making the transition to come to (my university), cause he was the guy who recruited me.

Sidney viewed his coaches as more like parents away from home that helped him stay on track by being a strong disciplinarians.

Your coaches, most of them, they're really like your parents away from home. Some of the same values, the same things that they have, the coaches have. They try to make sure that you stay on the straight path, and if you don't, you will get

punished; maybe suspended from a game. You may not start anymore; you may lose your position. To me that was just a way of taking something away that they know you love, and by doing so, more times than not, you'll do the right thing.

Critical to these mentoring relationships was the fact that these coaches took a personal interest in the lives of these students, that they held them accountable for their actions and that they were there to help and support them when student-athletes needed them.

Student-athletes, due to their heightened notoriety in the community, also have increased accessibility to community representatives and alums who can potentially serve as mentors. Melendez (2008) found that Black student-athletes, who tended to be recruited from different geographic areas, felt both alienated and threatened in their new college communities. He felt that student-athletes would especially benefit from developing connections with community members in order to help them feel less alienation and anxiety.

Sidney was one participant in particular who benefited from a mentor from the community ranks. He had met his mentor, who he is still close to today, through a program that connected college football student-athletes at his institution with Black community mentors.

I gained a lot of help through the (mentoring) program, through my mentor, Mr. (Smith). I must say, without that program I don't think I would have graduated college, and I don't think I would have been on the path that I am currently on now. Well, I was a guy that didn't like to let a lot of people into my personal life. He stayed consistent. He knows whenever I needed someone to talk to, I could

talk to him. Whenever I needed help, a tutor, they would lead me to the right one in the (mentoring) program, and it helped me to get up out of the shell I was in, and it helped me to actually graduate.

This was the only student-athlete who noted the significant role a community mentor played in his life, a relationship that made an important impact on his success due to the personal interest and availability factors that were also indicative of their relationships with their coaches.

Watson, Connole, and Kadushin (2011) found that student-athletes in all sports were more inclined to give and receive mentoring from their peers and coaches. They suggested that these relationships, where more experienced peers and coaches provide feedback and advice to their less experienced peers enhancing the learning environment, provide Black student-athletes with a critical resource to meet the challenges associated with being student-athletes. These positive relationships can also be very beneficial in that they increase intrinsic motivation, promote autonomy and critical thinking skills, not to mention the enhanced feelings of self-value associated with the friendships and bonds with teammates and coaches that result from these relationships. The student-athletes in the study indicated that they had experienced several of these crucial benefits from their relationships with their mentors.

Sidney noted that his mentor through the school's mentoring program pushed him and helped keep him on the road to success enabling him to overcome his disadvantaged background.

You have to have a strong mind and a strong upbringing to make it away from where I'm from. If you're a follower, you're not going to go anywhere. If you want to feel sorry for yourself because of the way you had to grow up, you're not going to make it out. You've either got to have a strong mind and a strong faith, and you have to have somebody that's going to push you. You've got to have somebody... That's one thing I love about being offered those tutoring sessions and being a part of that (mentoring) program. Without them, there were times that I was getting weak, and there were times that I was getting homesick, and there were times that ... I had a newborn child, and she was back home, so there were times that I wanted to be there. I missed maybe a year and a half or two years of seeing her grow because I chose to continue and finish college.

Kenneth discussed the role that his coach and mentor played in helping him become a man by treating him like a man and helping him develop his work ethic that would carry on in life.

He gave us the support that we needed and he talked to us and he sat down and talked to us like real men. And he made you feel like, you know, he helped you understand what it was going to take for you to be a man in this world. And he was always willing to share those moments with you to help you see, like, you can get it done. So he was key as far as that an education, then also my athletics. Like I say, he a blue collar guy. We're going to work every day... Get up in the morning, we'll practice. Turn around, go work out, then go back to practice under the lights at night. (Laughs)

Devin indicated that his coach mentor helped him see the potential that he had within him.

It was important, because it let me know somebody knows I had the potential to not only perform at the next level but the potential to become a better person academically. It was very important. Getting that sense that somebody really cared about my direction, where I was going... He was a mentor. He was there when there was tough times. He helped me understand some of the aspects about the situations I was going through. Very instrumental.

Felix expressed that his coach mentor went the extra mile to support his athletic/academic interests but also promoted his self-autonomy by holding him accountable.

I was afforded a coach that took an interest in me and my situation and wanted to make sure that I was a qualifier. He set me up with an English teacher for SAT rep class. He made sure that I was taking the right core classes to qualify. My coach was one of such that he'd tell you what you got to do and if you don't do it, that's on you. In my high school class, we had... It wasn't like a hand held thing. It was just more of an ownership on yourself. We're going to give you the knowledge and you make the best decision that you make.

The student-athletes studied each noted the fact that mentors played an important role in supporting their success in college and in life. Mentoring often helped them grow by supporting their development of skills essential for success, by helping them see the potential within themselves, by providing motivation during critical times in their lives,

and by helping them become autonomous by holding them accountable, all supporting the literature that suggests a strong relationship between mentoring and student-athlete success.

The literature also provided a clear representation of the key characteristics of influential or successful mentors. The current study revealed that the qualities of the mentors that the student-athletes found most beneficial were those associated with the mentors taking a personal interest in their lives, caring about them as individuals and not merely as student-athletes, not taking it easy on them and holding them accountable for their actions, and being available to them during times of need - characteristics that are also found in the literature.

The experiences of the student-athletes in the study tended to support the findings in the literature on the positive relationship between mentoring and student-athlete development with a few exceptions. One example in particular was the role of faculty mentoring relationships found in the literature, which was not determined to be significant in the experiences of the student-athletes in this study. Person and LeNoir (1997) linked mentoring relationships, in particular those with African American faculty, coaches, and campus staff and administrators, as a key element in the retention of African American student-athletes concluding that students feel better about their institutions when they are able to connect with faculty and other as role models. There was not a direct link between Black faculty mentoring and student-athlete success in this study, as none of the student-athlete participants mentioned experienced a Black faculty mentor or even a faculty mentor when asked about significant mentors in their lives.

The participants in the study also expressed a strong influence from mentors that impacted their development that pre-dated their athletic and college experiences, relationships that were overwhelming linked to parents. The literature on the relationship between mentoring and athletic involvement was void of any discussion on the significant role of parent/mentor relationships that played a key role in the development of the student-athletes involved in this study.

Data Analysis Summary

The data analysis reviewed the relationships between the literature and the student-athlete participants' experiences in an effort to better understand the impact of factors such as encouragement, success in academics, character development, the acquisition of social capital and mentoring on student-athlete success in college, life and social mobility. This research, which utilized the phenomenological qualitative method, investigated the lived experiences of former Black student-athletes to determine the impact of participation in college athletics in the areas noted (encouragement, academics, character development, social capital, and mentoring) as they perceive them in this new era of college athletics. The findings largely supported the literature but also provided the opportunity for the discovery of several new concepts that were not found in the literature. Several of these new findings were related to the qualitative nature of this particular study as opposed to the quantitative nature of most of the research that had been found on the impact of athletic participation on student-athlete development. The advantage of using a qualitative approach was most pronounced in that it provided a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences in college athletics providing a

valuable understanding as to the reasons behind the various phenomena. The study was initiated to better understand the relationship between participation in college athletics and social mobility. The analysis of the data leads to the conclusion that participation in college athletics had a positive impact on the experiences of the participants, in this case student-athletes who came from low socio-economic backgrounds, and achieved success in college and in life as noted by upward socio-economic mobility and education. In particular, the research findings indicate that factors including encouragement from others, impact of participation in athletics on academic achievement, lessons learned through sports related to character development, development of social capital and impactful mentoring relationships all had varying levels of positive influence on the participants' ability to succeed in college and in life. The research also revealed that race continues to have a role in the experiences of Black college student-athletes as they transition through college.

The following and concluding chapter will provide a more detailed discussion on the major findings of the study relating to the five themes (encouragement, academics, character development, social capital, and mentoring), as well as a discussion on the implications for the importance of the research and recommendations for further research.

Chapter V

Discussion

This chapter will review the findings analyzed in Chapter IV followed by a discussion of their significance as well as recommendations for further research. The format of the chapter will be similar to that of Chapter IV, organized according to the five major themes (athletics and encouragement, athletics and academic achievement, athletics and character development, and athletics and mentoring) that best inform the research question: How Can Intercollegiate Athletic Programs Impact the Social Mobility of Black Male Division I College Student-Athletes? The qualitative nature of the study is valuable, as it presents a deeper understanding of the Black student-athlete experience, the factors that improve the likelihood of their success, the challenges they encounter, and the price they pay as they strive to succeed as college student-athletes and professional persons.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study has been to explore the lived experiences of Black former college football student-athletes to determine how involvement in college athletics affected their achievement of academic success and enhanced social mobility. Involvement in athletics has long been linked to positive health, leadership, and character development, but very little research has been conducted in the current landscape of college athletics to determine how participation in college athletics impacts the educational attainment levels and social mobility of its participants.

Student-athletes recruited for their physical talents enter college athletics disproportionately from disadvantaged households and are often ill-prepared to face the academic challenges associated with higher education. Vast support structures have been developed, both on the athletic and academic sides, designed to support student-athletes through college, with the ultimate goal being graduation. The coaches provide the opportunity for these student-athletes to develop their athletic talent and the discipline to guide them in advancing stronger character and academic achievement. The academic community, which includes instructors and academic support personnel, provides the structure and support that enables these students to develop the necessary academic and social aptitude allowing them to graduate and transition to their careers. But how exactly does the program work? How are the thousands of students that enter college athletics really changed by the experience? Student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds have come through the college student-athlete experience better off than when they entered college. They have been the first in their families to earn a college degree, have gone on to higher paying jobs, and have earned more than their parents ever made with career opportunities that their parents could have only imagined. What was the experience of those who succeeded and went on to a better life? How did their experiences in higher education impact their ability to become something more? How were their experiences similar and how were they different? It is also clear that though this study focuses on the role that participation in athletics plays in the development of the participants, their experience should be viewed thorough a broader social context that includes family, religion, and race.

Beginning with the participants stories, the discussion will be framed on how to better structure the way that colleges and universities support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, investigating the athletics model of student development, identifying the key components, and evaluating how aspects of the athletic model can be used to better serve the general population of disadvantaged students who choose to enter U.S colleges and universities. College and universities today are struggling to retain and graduate their students, especially minorities from disadvantaged households; athletics is having some level of success with their model. What is it about the model that works, what does not work, what can be replicated, and what might be used to help all students from under represented populations succeed in college, graduate, and ultimately gain a professional career and a better life?

Athletics and Encouragement

Students who participate in athletics have been found to have received more encouragement to pursue their academic interests and attend college. The literature has shown that the encouragement can be both supportive and detrimental to the students' development. Beamon (2010) found that sports tended to be overemphasized in the socialization process of Black males, contending that they were more encouraged to pursue sports as a career as opposed to pursuing other academic interests. Additionally, Funk (1991) found that Black families were more likely than Whites to view participation in college athletics as leading to professional athletic careers. Other researchers found that relationship to be more positive. Picou and Curry (1974) discovered that student-athletes from disadvantaged and Black households tended to receive more encouragement

from others, with Bend and Petrie (1977) coming to the same conclusion for all student-athletes, adding that these students aspired to attend and succeed in college at a higher rate. Another explanation of student encouragement was presented by Ogbu (1990) who held that Blacks resisted the encouragement to succeed academically feeling that if accepted and bought into the dominant culture's notion of education they were essentially "selling out" and in some way denying their own cultural identity in what he refers to as the "acting White" phenomenon.

The information received from participants in this study supported the literature in that they received high levels of encouragement to both participate in sports and to pursue academics and a higher education. The data also revealed that encouragement was often closely tied to the participants' athletic performance, suggesting that the attention was associated with the perceived gained value in the self-interest of the encouragers. This phenomenon supports the claim of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the concept of interest convergence which, according to Delgado (1995), asserts that Whites will only argue for the advancement of Blacks to the extent that it benefits their self-interests. In this case the encouragement began when the participants excelled athletically, inferring that the encouragement was tied to the athleticism and the benefit to the encourager and the program as opposed to any genuine interest in the individual student. The study also confirms the discovery by Beamon and Bell (2006) that student-athletes were more often encouraged to pursue athletic careers as opposed to other areas of study. What Beamon and Bell's quantitative analysis did not show were the reasons behind why student-athletes were encouraged or socialized to participate in athletics. The analysis of the

current data shows that these former student-athletes were encouraged by a strong sense of pride that participation in athletics helped to create within families that were often struggling with economic and personal circumstances. Encouragement was also driven by the fact that participant supporters often viewed involvement in athletics as a means to a better life, providing a gateway for them to improve their current socio-economic situations.

The study did not support the argument made by Ogbu that minorities believed that they were in some way “selling out” if they accepted the dominant culture’s high value placed on education. Though the study shows that participants experienced being hassled by their Black peers for valuing education, they did not support Ogbu’s notion that denied the value of education and its association with the rejection of their own culture. In fact, they exhibited a very strong propensity to accept the dominant culture’s ideal of education and the belief that it would lead to a better life.

What is most telling in the study in the area of student-athlete encouragement is the notion that student-athletes were strongly driven by a will to succeed and create a better future for themselves that seemed to supersede the influence of any encouragement. This is not to deny that they were more encouraged than others and that interest convergence noted by CRT may have played a role in their encouragement, but what is significant is that these students used the encouragement in order to support their development. Instead of allowing the system to use them, they were able to use the encouragement, regardless of the motivation behind it, to better their situations.

Many student-athletes become entangled in the encouragement to the point that they lose focus, something that did not happen to the participants in the study. These students were driven by something deeper than the mere attention they received for excelling on the field; they aspired for deeper, more meaningful outcomes, which were an education and the life-long career benefits that were associated with a college degree. Also notable is the finding that these students resisted the pressure from peers to underperform in the classroom, rejecting the “acting White” phenomenon proposed by Ogbu. The participants stated that they did not internalize the peer pressure but instead diffused it by viewing it more as a complement, an opportunity to pull away, and a test of their strong minds.

The study revealed that these individuals possessed additional skills most likely associated with Yosso’s (2005) Cultural Wealth Model. Her model of cultural capital for students of color advocates for a stronger value being placed on aspiration, language, familial, navigational, and resistant capital. The struggle associated with being the underdog for so long had supported the development of a different type of capital that was evident in the resilience of these student-athletes. Present as well was a very strong influence from family to work, do the right thing, and make the most of the educational opportunities that were presented to them.

Recommendations

As previously mentioned, much academic and personal support is afforded these student-athletes during their time in college. The student development model introduced earlier in the study was evident and deemed impactful in the experiences of the

participants. The study suggests that student-athletes would benefit from additional programming to support the development of stronger self-management skills. Student-athletes could be provided additional guidance in the development of goals that they feel strongly about, goals that go beyond athletics and their performance on the field.

Students also need to be trained in managing their time in accordance with their pre-established goals. A value based time management educational program would be most helpful for student-athletes, helping them to truly explore what is most important and helping them to develop the self-management skills to achieve the goals they value.

Diversity training could also be provided to this population, education which presents student-athletes with the opportunity to learn about cultural heroes, not focusing on those from the world of sports, who were able to overcome adversity to succeed in life, supporting the concept of cultural capital of Communities of Color proposed by CRT. Having a cultural foundation for valuing aspiration, family, navigational, and resistant capital for Black student-athletes would provide those students who struggle with the acceptance of the dominant culture a notion of education with a culturally endorsed alternative. Many students do not possess this type of cultural awareness that could very well present positive alternatives for them to turn to when faced with pressure to give up or give in. It is evident that not all student-athletes possess the same drive to succeed; perhaps this is something that can be developed through improved self-management skills and the establishment of a reframed mindset. These same cultural awareness programs, in addition to management skills and diversity training, could also

be incorporated for the general Black student population using a non-student-athlete framework.

The public attention that college student-athletes in high profile sports garner also presents an opportunity for Black student-athletes to assert their inherent political capital, making a stand in support of issues which are important to them, such as the quality of their educational experience and social justice for all Black student-athletes. In a new age where student-athletes are becoming more engaged and empowered- evidenced by the unionization attempt by Northwestern scholarship football student-athletes (Strauss, 2014), the O'Bannon vs. the NCAA case which challenges the practice of college athletics restricting compensation to student-athletes for the use of their likenesses in video games and broadcasts (Boren, 2014), and the Kessler vs. the NCAA antitrust suit which challenges NCAA rules limiting the amount of scholarships student-athletes can receive (Schroeder, 2014)- Black student-athletes need to assert their influence in order to impact change. Scholar and cultural critic Henry Giroux (2015) believes that one of the central roles of higher education is the creation of the opportunity for the "power of politics, public dialogue and dissent...central to producing critically engaged, civically literate and socially responsible citizens." The current "age of the student-athlete" presents an opportunity for Black student-athletes to critically examine their college athletic and academic experiences and assert their political voice to challenge those inequitable practices, whether be it for excessive time demands or restricted and limited educational experiences. Giroux goes on to assert that the very purpose of higher

education and the fate of democracy are at stake if the university and its participants do not embrace their role as the impetus of critical thought and civic engagement.

It also appears there should be a responsibility to the communities from whence these student-athletes are recruited, a cultural consciousness associated with the fact that student-athletes are often recruited from poor neighborhoods, environments to which they more often than not do not return. All of the participants in the current study did not return to their communities of origin but instead chose to remain in the geographic regions where they attended college or other areas away from their home neighborhoods. This phenomenon equates to “brain drain” for the communities of origin that lose valuable human capital when these individuals are educated and do not return but instead take their recently developed skills and capital to their new homes and neighborhoods. The participants in the study all attended college a fair distance from home and mentioning not having a desire to return home due to the fact that they felt that there was nothing there for them in regards to both negative influences and the lack of opportunity. It seems fitting that intercollegiate athletics, which reaps a tremendous benefit from the athletic capital recruited from poverty stricken neighborhoods, has a responsibility to replace the talent with something of value. Student-athletes and athletic departments are generally engaged in community service, giving back to the community that supports their athletic teams but not necessarily with a strong enough commitment to intentionally support the communities that provide much of their athletic talent. Often the efforts are led by individual student-athletes with a strong commitment to community as opposed to the intercollegiate athletic program. Athletic programs and the NCAA should be more

intent on supporting impoverished neighborhoods in order to help them recoup the lost talent and the flight of human capital that is common when student-athletes succeed in college and in sports. Such programming should go beyond events and one day camps and into long term interventions that invest in the human capital and creation of the infrastructure to strengthen these communities and add stability to areas that have been stripped of their human capital.

Recommendations for further research would include an investigation into the examples of interest convergence found in the study in the area of encouragement. Why were these instructors and others not encouraging these Black students to aspire academically or to pursue a college education until after they recognized their athletic potential? What was the motivation behind encouraging these students? Did they truly care about these students? Did they have an interest in helping these students succeed or were they simply caught up in all of the fanaticism associated with sports in today's sports culture? Along this same line of thought, further research could also include a quantitative analysis of the experiences of student-athletes to determine those who were encouraged by instructors and other associated with their schools to determine how many were encouraged from these areas to measure if the impact was significant.

Additional research in the area of athletics and encouragement could also involve a study of the reasons behind why minorities discourage other minorities when they see them doing well academically. Is it because they are jealous and do not want to see their peers succeed? Is it because they possess some type of deficiency in themselves and are projecting this self-doubt on their peers? Or could it be that they fear losing their friends

to the middle class and this other world associated with valuing education? Identifying the reasons behind this negative peer pressure may be helpful in remedying this phenomenon, which was evident in this study.

Athletics and Academic Achievement

Previous studies have indicated that athletic involvement has both a positive and negative impact on the academic success of college student-athletes. Multiple studies found that student-athletes made better grades than their non-athletic peers (Darling, Caldwell & Smith, 2005; Silliker & Quirk, 1997; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Rees & Sabia, 2010). Other studies determined that the impact was most pronounced for the at-risk student populations. In particular, Bend and Petrie (1977) determined that the difference was more pronounced for student-athletes who were from disadvantaged backgrounds. These findings were supported by a study at Michigan State University (Shapiro, 1984), indicating that a greater proportion of student-athletes who received special admissions graduated at a similar rate as the general student population.

On the other end of the spectrum, Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, and Hagendorn (1999) found that involvement in college athletics had a negative impact on students' cognitive development, especially for football and basketball players, as they progressed through college. Their research was supported by Maloney and McCormick (1992) and Gayles and Hu (2009) who similarly found that those in revenue-generating sports, such as football and basketball tended to perform below their athletic and non-athletic peers.

The study indicated that the participants fit the profile of student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds making better grades than their peers, supporting the literature on the link between athletic participation and athletic achievement, which was directly linked to the selection criterion for participants in this study. The qualitative analysis added to the literature by providing a better understanding of the relationship between sports and education. The student-athletes in the study attributed their success in the classroom in part to the lessons they learned on the fields of competition. Specifically, they attributed their competitive nature, positive self-image, confidence, and work ethic developed through athletics as being directly transferred to what they were required to do in order to succeed in the classroom.

The participants also noted that there were a number of barriers they needed to overcome, due in part to the previously explained intersectionality of race and class in order to succeed academically. The barriers associated with being student-athletes in the sport of football could also be added to the equation as these students are often perceived as not valuing academic achievement (Sperber, 1990). The challenges experienced by the participants included prejudice resulting from their being profiled as underachieving and incapable, supporting the literature and Critical Race Theory proponents claim that race still matters (Tate, 1997).

The participants in the study also had to deal with student-athletes being held to a high academic standard exemplified by stringent initial eligibility requirements as well as higher satisfactory academic progress requirement and grade point average minimums once in college. These additional academic requirements can be linked back to the

student-athletes development model introduced in the first chapter that described direct policy and standards implemented by the NCAA as a part of their academic reform efforts to embed a culture of academic success in college athletics. The student-athletes in the study also acknowledged facing additional academic challenges from their professors due to their athletic status.

Further challenges for the participants included coming from low resources schools that left them lacking basic foundational skills required to succeed in higher education. The students also noted that they lacked other life skills that were unrelated to academics and the classroom, skills which are associated with the cultural capital described by Bourdieu (Swartz, 1977), including a wide range of resources such as verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about school systems, and educational credentials.

The participants also supported the conclusions of Maloney and McCormick (1992), acknowledging that the time demands placed on them due to the requirements of competition in Division I football had an adverse impact on their educational experiences, often restricting their options for courses and majors. The study also supports the findings of Gayles and Hu (2009) who attributed the lack of academic success of the student-athletes from the revenue generating sports to their limited engagement with athletic non-high-profile athletes. Though these student-athletes did not experience a lack of academic success, they did acknowledge facing the isolation associated with their race, role as student-athletes, and socio-economic status that affected their educational experience.

The findings of Shapiro (1984), who attributed much of the academic success of student-athletes to the high level of academic support that student-athletes receive, along with the breaks that they are often provided by college instructors, was supported by those in the study. The student-athletes interviewed believed that the academic support received played a role in their success, in particular the support provided by their athletic academic advisor who tended to take a personal interest in them and their academic and personal success, as well as the specialized and targeted support that went beyond what the regular academic support services on campus could provide. These findings support the student development model role introduced in Chapter I in supporting student-athlete success in college. The model, which was developed by the NCAA to promote student-athlete development, included an increased emphasis on the provision of additional academic support to student-athletes in order to improve retention and graduation rates. Also noted was the fact that students often received additional support from instructors due to their role as athletes and that instructors realized that they were putting extra effort into their studies while also managing a demanding athletic schedule.

Associated with the connection between academic achievement and participation is the belief that student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds have greater aspirations to attend college, a notion that was supported by Bend and Petrie (1977). The qualitative data from this study portraying the lived experiences of the participants presents the reasons behind why these students were driven to accomplish what was a very important goal for them and their families. The student-athletes in the study acknowledged that their drive to pursue a college education originated from their parents,

who viewed education as a way for them to get out of the neighborhood and their dire economic situations, and as coming from a sense of pride and the constant pressure to not let their families down.

For the most part, the lived experiences of the participants confirmed the findings presented in the literature with a few exceptions. The most glaring gap in the literature is related to the quantitative nature of most of the current research found on the impact of athletic participation on student-athlete academic achievement. For example, the quantitative research in the field revealed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds made higher grades and aspired to attend college at a higher rate but could only guess at the potential reasons behind the phenomenon. The reasons previously stated for the explanation behind the students' drive present examples of how qualitative research can expound on the explanation for these types of phenomena.

Other gaps that were found in the literature include the significant need for life skills education for Black student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds. It was clear in the analysis of the data from this study that these particular students lacked and were in need of additional education to fill the void left by the lack of cultural capital resulting from their disadvantaged backgrounds.

The literature also presented very little exploration of the relationship between student-athlete academic achievement and religion. The impact of religious beliefs and values on their success in college and in life was mentioned by several of the participants in the study, a notable influence that came up more than once with several of the participants.

A final gap in the literature that was noted was the lack of any research on the impact of language or vocabulary on the academic success of student-athletes. One student-athlete in particular noted that the vocabulary associated with his native geographic region and not necessarily intellect impeded his academic transition to college, which again relates to the lack of cultural capital described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977).

The study revealed the specific challenges faced by student-athletes that were unique to their status as student-athletes, their race, and socio-economic status; in particular, the participants acknowledged that

- They were victims of profiling,
- They lacked skills associated as gaps in cultural capital,
- Their lack of engagement with others students led to feelings of isolation, and
- The time demands of college athletics limited their collegiate experience.

Recommendations

These finding can be very helpful to both student development staff and leadership not only in athletics but also in the university at large as they work to find ways to better serve this particular student population. Many institutions may have become a little more relaxed, believing that race is no longer an issue in the United States and its institutions of higher education. Currently, diversity training is only prevalent when there have been issues. It is important that higher education leadership be mindful that profiling in areas such as admissions and student support and development, though subtle, is still in existence in our schools. In an age where recruitment and retention are

critical in a highly competitive market for students, colleges and universities need to be cognizant of the potential impact of negative experiences of minorities. The concern goes beyond the fact that the individual student may not be retained due to a bad experience, but that the institution may suffer from negative press associated with the real or perceived racist institutional climate. Most recently, Oklahoma University experienced negative press associated with the racist chants by members of a fraternity who were caught on video (Moyer, 2015). The direct impact was the closing down of the fraternity, but additional consequences involve the tarnishing of the image of the institution that may have an impact on recruitment. One day after the incident at Oklahoma University, a top football recruit rescinded his commitment to attend OU on a football scholarship, choosing instead to attend and play at another university with family members citing the video as the reason. Leadership needs to take note of this and remain vigilant in ensuring that their institutions offer appropriate diversity training for all employees, students, and student organizations.

The fact that the Black student-athletes experienced feelings of isolation due to their lack of engagement with the general student population presents an opportunity for school support staff and leadership to help these students become more engaged on campus. Unfortunately, there is a measurable divide between student-athletes and the general student population. Leadership in athletics and at the university and college level should work to create collaborative opportunities such as joint programming, shared learning environments, and student-athlete and general student leadership collaborations.

Another area for review would be student-athlete academic support, as many schools have developed enhanced academic support centers restricted to student-athletes only. Schools should work on making these areas shared spaces with student-athletes working side by side with non-student-athletes in order to help bridge the divide between these populations, providing opportunities for student-athletes to connect with those outside of athletics and enhancing their academic experience. The same can be said for African American student cultural or support centers on college campuses, as efforts should be explored to desegregate these centers, providing the opportunity for valuable integration and collaboration between all students.

The feelings of isolation for student-athletes of color were also attributed to these students' time restrictions due to the demands of their high profile sports. There is currently a NCAA limit of 20 hours per week that a team can require student-athletes to practice, a limit that is often loosely interpreted by schools. The limit also does not include time spent in the training room, traveling, preparing for practice, fundraising activities, media interviews, community service, the extra voluntary practices/film sessions, and the additional time needed to truly excel in the sport.

With the increasing level of competition in college athletics driven by the business model of college athletics described in the first chapter of this study, the pressure on student-athletes has reached an all-time high. College athletics leadership needs to make a stand to scale back on the extra time demands placed on student-athletes. This is not an action that an institution can make on its own but one that needs to be made collaboratively by college athletics leadership nationally due to the need to develop a

level playing field in regard to competitive advantage. If participants in college athletics are to be considered student-athletes and not employees of the institution, then this is a move that must be made, a move that would be in the best interest of the students who participate in college athletics, especially those in high profile sports where most Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds participate.

In light of the current research, it is also recommended that the NCAA re-explore the most recent academic reform measures and its commitment to developing a culture of academic success in college athletics. The current model which relies heavily on the evaluation of academic performance metrics such as APR and graduation rates has the unintended consequence of leading student-athletes away from desired major and into programs that allow them to maintain their athletic eligibility and often their scholarships, negatively impacting their student-athlete experiences and opportunities after college.

Another area of interest is the emergence of the concept that student-athletes of color from low socio-economic backgrounds are deficient in certain life skills as a result of their gaps in social capital. Bourdieu associated capital, or in this case embodied cultural capital, with the accumulation of resources, actual or virtual, that is acquired over time and that can consist of language spoken in and around the family and the expectation and legacies associated with a prestigious education.

The participants in the study, who were Black and from low socio-economic backgrounds, lacked the verbal facility, the general cultural awareness, and the “know how” about education that their higher education middle class peers often possessed. Participants explained that they had the academic aptitude and mental capacity to succeed

in college but lacked these additional life skills, which they said hindered their academic development. This is significant in that it should encourage student development staff and higher education leadership to develop programming and education that would help student-athletes and students in general acquire these life skills that are essential for both navigation and success in college and in life. These educational programs should include financial literacy education where students learn how to manage a credit card and a bank account, how to maintain a budget, and how to prepare financially for life once they graduate and take on responsibilities associated with a car payment or a mortgage. For many in college, these skills have already been developed, but for those from disadvantaged backgrounds there is a gap that the current study indicates needs to be filled. Additional education can be centered on planning, personal health and wellness, nutrition, time management, and study skills that these student-athletes may not have received while growing up. Many colleges and universities currently offer these courses with many viewing them as non-academic. Leadership should be mindful of this misconception and realize that these types of courses and the curriculum they present are often critical to the success of students from this population and even more valuable than much of the academic information presented to these students, which they often find neither practical nor useful.

An area that would be worthy of future study in the discussion of the impact of athletics on academic achievement would be research exploring the impact of barriers associated with race of college student-athletes. The study showed that race is still very much an issue in higher education and college athletics, and it would be valuable to see

exactly what the impact of the phenomenon was on the development of student-athletes of color. Was the experience something that in some way impeded their development or did it add to their character as they were able to utilize their resiliency to overcome the challenges associated with racism?

Further research on the impact of sports on academic achievement should also involve a study on the impact of how athletic departments are able to specifically and intentionally support student-athlete development amid the challenges noted in the experiences of the student-athletes (time demands, more rigorous academic standards, isolation, and prejudice). NCAA student-athlete graduation and APR rates continue to increase while the standards for initial eligibility have decreased, so it would be beneficial to know how athletic departments are able to support these student-athletes with such high success rates.

Though this study investigates a general assessment of the value associated with the benefits of the student support behind the student-athlete development model described in Chapter I, a deeper analysis would be beneficial. This information could be used to create best practices for other departments, colleges, and universities to use as they work to increase student retention and graduation rates campus wide.

Athletics and Character Development

The literature in the area of athletic participation and character development reveals both a positive and negative relationship between the two. Phillips and Schafer (1971) cited that participation in athletics had helped student-athletes develop certain transferable skills, such as a strong work ethic, mental toughness, persistence, and

commitment to excellence, which carried over to the students' work in the classroom, an experience that the participants in the study supported. The study also re-affirms the existence in participants of a capital noted earlier in the chapter referred to by Critical Race Theorist as Cultural Capital of Communities of Color. Navigational capital, a value associated with Communities of Color, encompasses skills associated with the ability to navigate a hostile environment that does not necessarily value the cultural capital of the historically disadvantaged (Yosso, 2005), which is especially relevant to this study as the participants were able to overcome similar challenges and opposition. Several of the participants noted that their resilience, work ethic, and high aspirations were ingrained in them from a young age, fitting appropriately also into the descriptions of cultural capital described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) as not being something that could be simply handed over but instead being acquired over time and consisting of a wide range of spoken language, manners, preferences and orientations. The participants' success in college and life can be traced back to these character traits, which were linked to their high aspirations and ability to navigate a challenging environment, traits not often valued and recognized by the dominant culture.

The study also revealed that these student-athletes who were able to succeed in college and life tended to disassociate themselves from delinquent behavior, supporting the research of Segrave and Hastad (1984) who found that student-athletes were significantly less likely to be involved with delinquent behavior and that urban youth, as well as athletic participants from both low and high socio-economic status groups tended to be less involved in delinquent behavior. The current study did not support the finding

Segrave and Hastad (1984), Beach, Krause, and Priest (1999,) and Shields and Bredemeier (1995), which linked participation in high profile sports, such as men's basketball and football, with lower rates of character development and higher rates of delinquency. The study also revealed a strong correlation between positive student-athlete relationships with coaches and a reduction of anti-social and an increase in pro-social behavior of student-athletes (Davidson & Moran-Miller, 2005; Rutten, Biesta, Stams, Schuengel, Dirks & Hoeksma, 2005). Student-athletes discussed having strong relationships with their coaches that often prevented their involvement unacceptable behavior.

The study also supported the findings of Shields and Bredemeier (1995) and Videon (2002) who determined that the positive characteristics displayed by student-athletes should not be attributed to their involvement in sports, that these positive characteristics were pre-existing and that athletics merely presents the opportunity or the arena for the expression of these attributes.

Finally, the current study contradicts aspects of John Ogbu's Theory of Oppositional Culture in that participants did not view education as a means of oppression and socialization but rather as a means of improving their lives similar to the aspirations of the voluntary minorities. The participants in this study expressed that they appreciated the opportunity that a college education afforded them and worked tirelessly to make the most of their education and the better life which they associated with a college degree.

The current study also revealed several new contributions to the grasp of the relationship between athletics and character development. These new findings included a

better understanding of the impact of variables such as race and socio-economic status on this relationship, as participants discussed the impact of these factors on the development of their character.

The participants presented evidence of a strong relationship between character development and religion, with participants relating that it played a significant role in the formation of positive character values. This study also noted the significance of the concept of self-reliance as participants acknowledged that they were resistant to receiving handouts, wanting to earn their way while seeing others as not holding the same value. Accountability was also a character attribute recognized in this study that was not found in the literature as being a positive trait inherent to the definition of character.

Recommendations

Implications for student development programs and athletic leadership in the area of character development would involve the creation of educational programming and training to support Black student-athletes in making connections between the skills developed in athletics that could then be used to help them succeed in school and in life. Among the attributes listed by participants that should be incorporated into programming are those characteristics associated with work ethic, the ability to push through oppositional boundaries, persevering through hardship, and the development of tough skin, which are all common to participation in athletics. This training can also be used to help student-athletes prepare for life after college and in gaining employment, as these same skills are also sought after by employers.

Similar to what was discussed earlier, Black student-athletes should also be provided diversity training to help them make connections with the cultural capital developed through their experiences in overcoming their disadvantaged backgrounds, described by CRT as cultural capital of Communities of Color. Often students do not make these connections, something that additional training in this area can help as they learn to better understand the value and application of their experiences as student-athletes and their lives after college.

There are also implications of the study that can be used to assist coaches in the recruitment and development of student-athletes. The confirmation that sports does not necessarily build character but provides the opportunity to reveal and further develop it can be very helpful to coaches in recruitment. Often coaches believe that they can save and change all student-athletes who come from bad situations without regard to the character of the young men they recruit. This study suggests that coaches would benefit from paying closer attention to those characteristics, such as work ethic, resilience and mental toughness, during recruitment to ensure that they are not taking a student that is lacking in these skills that are closely associated with success in college athletics and academics. The recommendation is not to totally avoid recruiting these types of students but instead to understand and calculate the risk associated with recruiting students who lack the character to succeed in college.

Another implication for coaches involves the incorporation of team commitment into the messaging provided as well as the development of strong relationships with student-athletes, as the study revealed that student-athletes often resisted involvement in

delinquent behavior due to a compelling commitment to the team and their coaches. The coaches and teams would benefit from developing a resilient structure and branding concepts that emphasize team and the values associated with what is most important to the success of the program. The assessment of the characteristics linked to student success in college, which are also known as non-cognitive variables, can also be used by student personnel and colleges in general. These character traits, such as commitment, resilience, and openness to receive support, can be evaluated with specific interventions being utilized at the student assistance level to identify and support students with challenges associated with gaps in these areas. The study also indicates the important impact of coaches holding student-athletes accountable; several of the participants acknowledged they valued and learned a strong lesson from coaches who held them accountable as opposed to those who did not. Coaches may believe that they are helping students by giving them the easy way out and not holding them liable for their actions, but the study showed that this was not the case, as these students appreciated the fact that they were being treated like adults and held answerable for their actions.

The study also revealed that student-athletes placed a high value on religion and the strong role that it played in the development of their character, suggesting that athletic department and student development officials should pay special attention to the fostering of the student-athlete's spiritual development as well. Many schools have a strong Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and athletic staff should work to ensure that these types of religious organizations for all denominations are sustained on their campuses. The same support is also encouraged for the general student population along with the

diversity training that was recommended for student-athletes. These populations are very similar with the main difference being involvement in college athletics.

Recommendations for additional research in the area of character development and sports would need to include exploring the impact of religion on the development of student-athletes in general and Black student-athletes from low socio-economic backgrounds specifically. The fact that religion came up on several occasions as these students discussed their experiences growing up and how their relationship with God helped them is worth looking into, especially as it applies to this generation. It would also be of value to conduct quantitative research on the impact of religion on the lives of Black and non-Black student-athletes to determine if there is a significant difference and to evaluate the impact of religion on the students experience and success in college and in later life.

Also recommended is additional research in the area of accountability and its impact on the development of Black student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds. The phenomenon was not mentioned in the literature review but was revealed to be significant in the development of these student-athletes. Could the fact that these students were held accountable at a young age by their parents and coaches be a valuable link between the impact of character development and success in college and in life? It would be interesting to see if there was indeed a correlation between being held accountable and student development and success. This could be a key area in the discussion of the relationship between athletic participation and student success, especially in light of the

current shift in our culture surrounding the concept of entitlement where youth today are raised with the idea that they are entitled to certain privileges.

Athletics and Social Capital

Student-athletes in the study were able to strengthen their social capital through the associations developed due to their participation in athletics, supporting the findings of Phillips and Schafer (1971), Schafer and Rehberg (1970), Day and McDonald (2010), and Lin (2001) who found that student-athletes were able to increase their social capital through their association with others who had stronger and more diverse social networks when compared to those who did not participate in athletics. The participants in this study were also able to transform a basis for exclusion to their advantage through an internal drive to succeed in part motivated by a strong desire to escape their dire economic situations, exemplifying Bourdieu's explanation of how capital is created. Bourdieu believed that "Lower class survivors have compensated for their initial lack of capital by acquiring a scholastically based cultural capital through exceptional intellectual ability, effort, and unusual home or social circumstance" (Swartz, 1997, p. 201). By persevering through college and successfully earning a college degree, these individuals increased their cultural and social capital that could then, according to Bourdieu (1986), be quantified and compared to others, easing their conversion to economic gain.

New information gained from the study not evident in the literature researched was the perceived impact of negative networks on participants. The current study revealed the potential negative impact of networks that were available to them as a result of their involvement in athletics, such as exposure to a negative college athletic related

social element that attempted to pull the student-athletes down as they were making progress. An additional finding of the study not evident in the literature was the impact of the personal characteristics of the individuals who were benefiting from social capital when it came to their relationships with those from the advanced social class. The study found that there was something about the person that facilitated the interests that others took in supporting the development of their social capital, whether it was their personality, character, integrity, work ethic, or a pull for the underdog; there was something about them that made others open to helping them succeed. It is clear that the participants' exposure to higher education and college athletics expanded their social capital, but there is also evidence that their personalities played a role in the likelihood of their receiving expanded network opportunities.

Recommendations

The fact that the student-athlete experiences impacted the participants' exposure and development of social capital presents an excellent opportunity for colleges in general and athletic departments specifically to support Black students, especially those with social capital gaps, in learning how to make the most of these enhanced relationships. Traditional middle class students typically have developed their social capital but also possess the cultural capital to know how to use these associations. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often do not possess the knowledge or experience of how to make the best use of these new associations. Mentoring programs, similar to the one described by one of the participants, which pair students with faculty, university staff, and community members, should be developed and supported by the

athletic department. Such programs, which would involve training for both mentors and mentees, would be beneficial in that they would expose the student to a personal mentor but also that the mentor would support the student with assistance for best utilizing their expanded social networks. As previously mentioned, there is a significant gap in the social capital of Black students from low socio-economic backgrounds, a gap that can be filled by a well-structured and supported mentoring program. Mentors could help both Black students and student-athletes by providing them with references and diverse connections outside of athletics when they are ready to find a job.

As previously mentioned, it is recommended that athletic leadership take an active role in the exploring the detrimental impact of the time demands and commitment on the collegiate experience of student-athletes. The study shows that the high demands of college athletics on participants are not only affecting their academic experiences and their career choices but also their opportunities to develop critical relationships with faculty and others outside of athletics. This section also explored the development of social capital through the participants' drive, resilience, intellectual capacity, pride, determination, and strong desire for a better life, which were also associated with the cultural capital of Communities of Color espoused by Yosso (2005). As previously noted, implications of this study support additional diversity training for Black students to help them understand they possess a type of cultural capital that is not necessarily recognized by the dominant culture.

Recommendations for future research in the area of the impact of participation in college athletics on the social capital of participants includes a review of the

characteristics of students who have a tendency to be better supported from enhanced networks as well as those who are more likely to support others in enhancing their networks. The study found that there were certain personality traits that made individuals more likely to be supported by others. It would be helpful to be able to identify exactly what it is about these individuals that make others want to help those from low socio-economic backgrounds succeed in college and in life. On the other end of the relationship, it would also be helpful to know what the personality traits are of those that are willing to support these students. This information might be used to help Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds be more open and available to the development of these networks, and it may also help identify candidates at the institution and in the community who are most open to and likely to guide these students in developing these networks.

Athletics and Mentoring

Mentoring was perceived to be a significant factor impacting the success of Black student-athletes in college. Black students in general do not graduate nor are they retained at the same rates as their White peers in college. The college experience is often very different and difficult for Black student-athletes because of the demands of their sport and the amount of time they have available to connect with others, something that Benson (2000) attributed to their inability to develop meaningful relationships with faculty. The current study recognized that the experiences of student-athletes are very different from the general student experience and that the demands of their participation in college sports limited their opportunities to develop these valuable connections. The

study acknowledged the demands of Division I college athletics and the restrictions that it placed on the student-athletes' ability to do much outside of their sport and their studies, limiting their opportunities to develop relationships.

The study also revealed that Black student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds experience isolation and feeling unsure about their surroundings associated with who they were, where they came from, and the demands of participation in athletics, supporting the findings of Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) who determined that the demands of being a college student-athlete often left Black student-athletes feeling socially and institutionally alienated or isolated, a concept that was also shared by Melendez (2008) who attributed the isolation to student-athletes being recruited from different geographic areas. Sauer, Desmond, and Heintzelman (2013) and Watson, Connole, and Kadushin(2011) found that college student-athletes were more receptive to mentoring, were better mentors, and had higher levels of emotional intelligence resulting in higher levels of personal and professional success. These positive relationships can also be very beneficial in that they increase intrinsic motivation, promote autonomy and critical thinking skills, not to mention the enhanced feelings of self-value associated with the friendships and bonds with teammates and coaches that result from these relationships (Watson, 2011). The current study supports these findings as several of the participants indicated that they had experienced a number of these crucial benefits from their relationships with their mentors. As previously mentioned, mentors played key roles in the development of the student-athletes and were described by the participants as taking a personal interest in their lives, helping them develop skills essential for success in college

and in life, keeping them on track towards graduation, and holding them accountable to doing the right thing.

Student-athlete openness to mentoring paired with the research highlighting the strong relationships student-athletes have with coaches associated with positive behavior (Davidson & Moran-Miller, 2005; Rutten, Biesta, Stams, Schuengel, Dirks & Hoeksma, 2005) presents coaches as both appropriate and convenient choices as mentors for their student-athletes. The coaching relationship associated with college athletics appears to expand beyond the playing fields and into the personal lives of student-athletes as they begin to see the value of these relationships and actively seek out support from those that are in a position to help them succeed. The study confirms the assertion that coaches played key roles as mentors in both leading up to and during college for student-athletes.

The current study revealed that the qualities of the mentors that the student-athletes found most beneficial were those associated with the mentors taking a personal interest in their lives, caring about them as individuals and not merely as student-athletes, not taking it easy on them and holding them accountable for their actions, and being available to them during times of need - characteristics that are also found in the literature. Specifically, Carter and Hart (2010) and Kelly (2010) found that Black student-athletes identify providing guidance, availability, trustworthiness, patience, transparency, serving as a role model, possessing relational characteristics and providing constructive criticism, and mentors genuinely caring about them as individuals as characteristics associated with the definition of mentoring.

Examples in the literature that were not supported by the current study included the findings that faculty mentoring relationships were significant in the lives of student-athletes. Person and LeNoir (1997) linked mentoring relationships, in particular those with African American faculty, coaches, campus staff, and administrators, as crucial in the retention of African American student-athletes. There was no direct link between Black faculty mentoring and student-athlete success in this study, as the student-athlete participants did not discuss having experienced being mentored by a Black faculty mentor when asked about significant mentors in their lives. Much of this lack of interaction was explained by the acknowledgement that these students had very little time to explore these relationships unless they absolutely had to meet with professors. The literature also indicated that student-athletes often faced challenges associated with being stereotyped as dumb jocks, leading to the internalization of these beliefs (Harrison, 2008). Though the participants did express this marginalization due their Black student-athlete status, they did not take ownership of the label. In the telling of their stories, even when confronted with these instances, the participants did not express feelings of inadequacy.

New information from the current study that was not present in the literature was research on the influence from mentors that impacted student-athlete development and pre-dated their athletic and college experiences and relationships that were overwhelming linked to parents. The literature on the relationship between mentoring and athletic involvement was void of any discussion of the significant role of parent/mentor relationships, unlike the development of the student-athletes in this study.

Recommendations

Implications from the data collected on the impact of mentoring on the student-athletes' experience can be closely tied to those previously cited in the review of the relationship between athletics and social capital with a few additions. An encouragement to review the impact of the physical and time demands of high profile sports is also applicable to this section, as the study shows that though mentoring helps to remedy some of the challenges in this area, the time demands certainly make it difficult for student-athletes to connect with potential mentors. The need for structured mentoring programs in athletics or at the university level that were suggested in the previous section is also recommended, as the study shows that mentoring relationships were beneficial. The need for intentional programming creating the opportunity for Black student-athletes to collaborate on campus and with the community previously mentioned would also be suitable to address the Black student-athlete isolation concerns reviewed in exploring the relationship between these students and mentoring.

A recommendation for college athletic leadership and college practitioners involves the findings in the area of parent mentoring. The study revealed the preeminence of parents serving as mentors in the lives of their student-athlete sons, a relationship that leadership should review in developing opportunities to connect with parents. Often school officials view this relationship as negative, associating it with parents' inability to allow their children space to grow and become autonomous, referring to these parents as helicopter parents. Coaches and school administrators should take a closer look at the potential influence and impact that parents have with their student-athletes to determine if

this influence can support the development of these student-athlete. The exploration of training to help parents develop appropriate mentoring skills that help them balance positive encouragement and student autonomy should also be explored for both general students and student-athletes. Connecting with parents may help, for example, when student-athletes are experiencing trouble in transitioning to college and communicate this information to their parent mentors. If a strong connection with the coach or an appropriate school official and parent mentor is present, then the parent mentor can share the information and hopefully a team approach can be taken in helping the student through the transition. Much of this is currently occurring in colleges and athletics departments, but what may not be present is a structure for this type of communication. This is just one possibility of how a stronger line of communication with parent mentors can help students succeed in college.

The study also showed that student-athletes were not engaged in the relationships with faculty that Person and Le Noir (1997) linked to the retention of Blacks student-athletes, stating that these students often felt better about their institutions. This reveals that colleges and universities might benefit from creating opportunities for Black student-athletes to engage with faculty mentoring whether through a structured mentoring programs or the creation of opportunities for connections. Due to the time constraints of student-athletes, these opportunities might be credit-based opportunities, such as internships or independent study courses, where Black student-athletes can connect with faculty mentors in an academic setting while also earning degree applicable credit. Similar opportunities may also be created that link Black student-athletes with

community members who are willing to mentor student-athletes as recommended in the previous section. Often times there are concerns with these types of relationships due to NCAA rules prohibiting any “extra benefits” for student-athletes, so it is recommended that the institutions’ compliance office works closely in developing and establishing the training procedures for these types of programs. Given the value of faculty relationships and the current lack of these types of connections, faculty mentoring programs would be beneficial to the experiences of Black student-athletes in college.

Recommendation for further research in examining the relationship between athletic participation and mentoring would include a study of the impact of mentoring pre and post-college, as most of the participants acknowledged the existence of mentoring relationships that predated their collegiate experience. It would be beneficial for those who work with student-athletes to know if there is a certain timeframe for when mentoring is most impactful and if there is a time when mentoring may be too late for a student-athlete. Such information would help those who work with student-athletes and the general student population to determine the best time to implement a mentoring program for students.

Another area of research that was currently absent from the literature was related to the impact of the parent mentor relationship on the student success in college. Information on the advantages and draw backs associated with the parent mentor relationship as well as best practices may be helpful to coaches and school administrators in structuring policies and procedures for creatively and gainfully engaging parents. The current study was also able to identify several key characteristics and roles that were

evident in mentors, namely that mentors took a personal interest in the participants as individuals and not only as student-athletes, helped them develop skills and capital in areas where they possessed deficiencies, helped them see potential within themselves, supported them during times of personal struggle, and held them accountable. Further studies that review the impact of these characteristics and roles would be recommended to better understand and support the Black student/mentor relationship.

It is evident from the stories of the participants in the study that what they experienced as Black student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds was different from that of traditional college student-athletes and college students in that they faced unique challenges but also had advantages associated with where they were from and their participation in athletics. These students benefited from the vast support network associated with the college student-athlete development model, assistance that was especially important to students such as those who possessed gaps in their preparation for college. Their involvement in college athletics and the support they received was important, but much of what helped these students succeed in college and in life was instilled in them prior to their involvement in athletics by individuals including parents, coaches, and other mentors who guided them into, through, and after college. The richness of this particular study can be largely attributed to the fact that the student participants and their experiences were explored, not in a vacuum consisting of college and athletics, but through a broader social context which included education, college athletics, race, religion, inequality, and family. Viewing the Black student-athletes experience through these wide social spheres not only allows for a deeper exploration of

the students' experiences but also for the opportunity to define the approach, methods, and implications for supporting these students using a holistic model of student-development.

Central to these student-athletes' success in college and later life was an unyielding drive to succeed, a resiliency evident in overcoming the various challenges unique to the population, family and community pride, and a strong desire to escape their dire economic situations and pursue a better life. The determination in the participants went beyond their collegiate experience and was firmly grounded throughout their experiences as youths. These college student-athletes, like many students from disadvantaged backgrounds, came to college knowing little about what to expect from college and what higher education expected of them, but with their intestinal fortitude and a strong support network, they were able to figure it out. Athletic departments and the greater college community bear a responsibility to support students who come to college with limitations associated with their disadvantaged backgrounds due to the fact that they have both admitted and often recruited these students.

Most colleges and universities share in their mission statements a commitment to diversity, access, and student success that references their commitment to serving this population. The athletic departments' commitment is based on the fact that coaches makes promises to students and their families that they will support them in their pursuit of a higher education. The commitment to support all students goes beyond the institutional level and to a broader responsibility for higher education nationally, which is the education of individuals, such as minorities and those from low socio-economic

backgrounds, from the underrepresented segment of society. As previously mentioned, the economic academic achievement gap and the divide between the affluent and the disadvantaged continues to grow in the United States, trends that must be reversed if we are going to hold our place of leadership in a global society and pursue the ideal expounded by our nations forefathers of equality and democracy.

Conclusion

This research study explored the experience of Black Division I football student-athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds that were able to succeed in college and in life as measured by increased education and employment as compared to their parents when they were growing up. The experiences of these former student-athletes were captured and analyzed by the research. Though the lived experiences of the seven student-athletes in this study present a better understanding of the Black student-athlete experiences in college that helps inform the research question “How can intercollegiate athletic programs impact the social mobility of Black male Division I college student-athletes?” it is important to note that due to the diversity of the student-athlete population and their experiences, it is difficult to make generalizations regarding the study’s findings to all Black Division I football student-athletes or all Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The study, which sheds much light on the Black student-athlete experience as it provides a closer examination of the reasoning behind certain phenomena related to the relationship between college athletics participation and encouragement, academic achievement, character development, social capital and mentoring, challenges both college student development personnel and higher education leadership as they work to

better serve this disadvantaged student population. The hope is that the knowledge gained from this study can help college leadership and student development practitioners better support students from these backgrounds to succeed in college and in life.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Intercollegiate Athletics as an Agent of Social Changes in Black Student-Athletes

5/10/14

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Henry Villegas, who is the Principal Investigator. This research is studying Impact of involvement in intercollegiate athletics on social mobility of participants.

Involvement in college athletics has long been associated with a positive impact on participants. This study will investigate the impact of involvement in intercollegiate athletics on the social mobility of participants.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your experiences as a division I college student-athlete. Two to three people will take part in this study at the University of New Mexico. Seven to ten will participate across the United States.

This form will explain the research study, and will also explain the possible risks as well as the possible benefits to you. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. If you have any questions, please ask one of the study investigators.

What will happen if I decide to participate?

If you agree to participate, the following things will happen:

You will be asked to participate in scheduled interviews, by phone or in person with the primary investigator for the study. The semi-structured interview will consist of approximately 30 questions associated with your experiences as a student-athletes and should take about one to two hours. A follow up review of your responses will be necessary in order to clarify initial responses provided.

How long will I be in this study?

Participation in this study will take a total of one to two hours over a period of one day.

What are the risks or side effects of being in this study?

The potential risk of the study includes the possible loss of confidentiality. Every effort will be taken to protect your identity during the study including the coding of your identity and the destruction of audio and transcribed materials at the completion of the research.

There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study.

For more information about risks and side effects, ask the investigator.

What are the benefits to being in this study?

There is no direct benefit intended by the subjects, outside of the opportunity to benefit others.

What other choices do I have if I do not want to be in this study?

The study is total voluntary; you do not have to participate in this study if you do not wish.

How will my information be kept confidential?

We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data.

Information contained in your study records is used by study staff and, in some cases it will be shared with the sponsor of the study. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human subject research and/or other entities may be permitted to access your records. There may be times when we are required by law to share your information. However, your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

The subject's identity will remain confidential throughout the process as it is not essential to the research purpose. The subjects' names will not be used in any of the transcripts as subjects will be identified solely by number. Any potential identifiers will be removed from the audio recorded transcriptions and notes as the subject will be identified by number throughout the process. After the dissertation is completed and submitted all audio tapes associated with the study will be destroyed. Storage of transcribed interviews, scanned consent forms and any data associated with the study will be stored on the researcher's password protected computer on the UNM campus. Recording associated with the study will be secured in a locked cabinet in the locked office of the researcher located on UNM campus. The files will also be terminated at the completion of the study.

What are the costs of taking part in this study?

The only cost or burden to participants will be their time.

Will I be paid for taking part in this study?

Participants will not be compensated for participation in the study,

How will I know if you learn something new that may change my mind about participating?

You will be informed of any significant new findings that become available during the course of the study, such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from participating in the research or new alternatives to participation that might change your mind about participating.

Can I stop being in the study once I begin?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point in this study without affecting your future health care or other services to which you are entitled.

In the event that subjects are either withdrawn or elect to withdraw from the research the data will be eliminated from the research and destroyed.

Whom can I call with questions or complaints about this study?

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, Henry Villegas, or his/her associates will be glad to answer them at 505-264-9608.

If you need to contact someone after business hours or on weekends, please call 505-264-9608 and ask for Henry Villegas.

If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team, you may call the UNM Office of IRB (OIRB) 277-2644.

Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research participant?

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may call the UNM Office of IRB (OIRB) 277-2644. The OIRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human participants. For more information, you may also access the IRB website at <http://irb.unm.edu>

CONSENT

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided (or the information was read to you). By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

		Date
Name of Adult Subject (print)	Signature of Adult Subject	

INVESTIGATOR SIGNATURE

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Name of Investigator/ Research Team Member (type or print)

(Signature of Investigator/ Research Team Member)	Date
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APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter to College Student-Athlete Advisor

Dear College Student-Athlete Advisor:

I am contacting you to solicit your support as I conduct a very timely and important research project. As required for my doctoral dissertation in Education Administration at the University of New Mexico, I am conducting research on the impact of involvement in intercollegiate athletics on the social mobility of Black Student-Athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds. I am hoping that you might be able to identify former college student-athletes who meet the following criteria:

- Black male college football student-athlete who has been out of college a minimum of four years
- From disadvantaged background
- Would be interested in being a part of this type of study/research
- Individual would be able to effectively communicate what they experienced as student-athletes

Information regarding individual selected for the study would be kept confidential with only possible risk involved. The study would consist of audio recorded in person or phone interviews with follow up questions. Please contact me directly by email (hvillega@unm.edu) or by phone (505-277-1732) should you know of anyone who might match the criteria above and be interested in participating in the study.

Sincere Thanks,

Henry Villegas

Recruitment Letter to Prospective Subject

Mr. John Smith (Prospective Subject):

Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Henry Villegas and I am a doctoral student at the University of New Mexico. I working on my dissertation and Mary Smith recommended that I contact you regarding your possible interest in my research. As required for my dissertation, I am conducting research on the impact of college athletics on the social mobility of Black college student-athletes. I am a former college football student-athlete who has dedicated his life to college student-athlete development. I am very interested in learning more about the experiences of college student-athletes in order to help current student-athletes succeed in college and life. I would be very interested in speaking with you about this study and your interest in being a participant. The study would involve in-depth phone or in person interviews that will be kept confidential with only possible risk.

Please contact me directly by email (hvillega@unm.edu) or by phone (505-277-1732) if you are interested in participating in this study so that we can further discuss the research project and you potential involve.

Sincere Thanks.

Henry Villegas

APPENDIX C

Research Questions:

How is intercollegiate athletics an agent of social mobility for Black division I college student-athletes?

Sub Questions:

1. What is the influence of encouragement on participants' likelihood to attend and persist in college?
2. What is the impact of athletic involvement on the academic achievement of participants?
3. Do the lessons learned through sports relating to character have a positive impact on participants' success in life?
4. Does participation in athletics positively influence the networks and social capital of participants?
5. What is the impact of mentoring on the success of student-athletes as it relates to academic, athletic success and retention?
6. What is the impact of race and or socio economic status on the phenomenon?

Interview Questions:

1. Would you say your education level is higher, equal to or less than that of your parents when you were growing up?
2. Would you say your current income is higher, equal to or less than that of your parents when you were growing up?
3. Would you say your current employment level is higher, equal to or less than that of your parents when you were growing up?
4. In light of this research, tell me your journey in terms of where it began and how you were able to arrive at where you are today?
5. Describe your backgrounds in regards to educational preparation, family environment, and neighborhood? Did race and class have an impact on your educational experience growing up?
6. Describe your educational experience as a Black student-athlete prior to college?

7. Describe your experiences in college and what you believe helped you succeed in college? What role did race play in this? Did the education you received growing up help prepare you for success in college?
8. Describe your experiences as a Black college student-athlete, how important was college sports to you, your family? Was race and class a factor if so how?
9. Did you feel your experiences as Black student-athlete help or hindered your academic success?
10. Do you think there is a difference in the way Black student-athletes and non student-athletes are educated?
11. Describe your involvement on campus, what role did your participation in college athletics play in your involvement on campus in regards to clubs and organization (academically, socially or culturally)?
12. Why do you think you were able to succeed in college by graduating while others did not?
13. Did you feel you had an advantage in fulfilling your obligation for graduation in comparison to other students?
14. Your friends from high school tell me about them, did they go to college, why or why not? Did they succeed if so why or why not?
15. What challenges have you faced associated with being in a different social class from that in which you were raised?
16. Where you encouraged by others (friends, family, teachers, school officials and coaches) to attend college? If so by who and to what extent?
17. Who were your mentors and how did you meet them? How did they impact your academic success, your athletic success?
18. Did your self-esteem as an athlete transfer to self-esteem in academics? If so, how?
19. Did they develop connections as a result of being a student-athlete? And did these connections help them in regards to succeeding in life after college?
20. As a Black student-athlete did you ever feel like they were being socialized to participate in athletics as a career? If so did this limit or expand your exploration of other options?
21. What type of emphasis did your parents place on sports or academics throughout your schooling?
22. What impact did athletics play in regards to whether or not you were involved in disciplinary issues in school? Did race play a role in this?
23. Did you receive help and support from teachers or school support personnel due to your involvement in athletics? To what extent?
24. Did your involvement in sports make you more goal orientated? If so, how?

25. Did your participation in athletics have an impact on the major you chose?
26. Did you face challenges in college associated with being from a different social class than many that you went to school with? If so, what were these challenges?
27. Did you face challenges in college associated with your race?
28. As a former Black student-athlete what is your view of education, do you view it as a detracting from or facilitating your ultimate success?
29. As a Black student-athlete, where you ever given a hard time by others for doing well academically? Why do you think that was?
30. Have you faced challenges associated with currently being in a different social class from that in which you were raised?
31. Did race play a role in your experiences as a student-athlete? Did you ever feel taken advantage or exploited because of your race and status as an athlete?

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