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A Phenomenological Investigation Into The Experiences Of High-Achieving African American Male Student Athletes At Predominately White Institutions In The Southeast Region

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF HIGH-
ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT ATHLETES AT
PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS IN THE SOUTHEAST REGION

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, grandmother, and aunt: Mildred Smith, Andrea' Laverne King, and Antoinette Alexander. I am extremely thankful for the support and encouragement toward my academic endeavors. I also dedicate this dissertation to all high achieving Black male student athletes, and those who aspire. To my family, thank you for being caring and understanding, and most of all offering words of encouragement throughout the process. I will forever remain grateful. To my mother, thank you for encouraging me to pursue higher education beyond the baccalaureate level. Without your constant support, I would not have accomplished as much as I have. I am also grateful for my aunt, Antoinette Alexander. As a young man, you always taught me right from wrong, and instilled in me the qualities and characteristics of a leader. Therefore, I express my gratitude to each of you as I complete this rewarding process of earning a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership and Research.

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to examine the academic experiences among high achieving African American male student-athletes at predominantly White NCAA Division I institutions in the Southeast region. Most existing literature regarding African American student-athletes at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) have examined their experiences by highlighting major deficiencies of this groups academic abilities. Most studies emphasize these students' lack of preparedness, low academic achievement, and high attrition rates (Harper 2005). As a result, little information is available regarding African American male student-athletes who actually excel, achieve at high levels academically, and accomplish goals in which their non-student athlete peers do not. Therefore, this study will serve as a platform for high-achieving African American male student-athletes, and will provide their experiences and perspectives—which have been silenced for the past few decades. Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) and Stereotype threat theory (Steele, 2003) will serve as the theoretical bases for this study. These theories will be used to uncover the motivation of these student-athletes, and also describe the stereotypical experiences often faced while at PWIs.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In urban America, literally thousands of young Black men have institutionally, culturally, and interpersonally disconnected: they attend school only infrequently, if at all; they have given up any hope of ever holding a legitimate job or of being otherwise productively involved in the mainstream economy; they respect only their closest peers and seek only their peers' respect; in many cases they see no future for themselves or their generation and have little expectations of living beyond their teens or twenties. Some go as far as to pick out the coffin and the clothes in which they expect to be buried (Edwards, 2000, p. 2). One of the most actively discussed, and sometimes vigorously debated issues since the late 1980s has been the declining social, economic, and educational status of young African American males in our society (Garibaldi, 1992). For many years, there has been an overwhelmingly disproportionate number of African American males in the criminal justice system, in addition to further declining educational outcomes. Even if one doubts that a "crisis" truly exists or questions whether African American males may one day become an "*endangered species*", few systemic solutions have been offered to address realistically the problems that at least one-third of young Black men experience (Garibaldi, 1992). Contrary to public perception, African American males do want to finish school and many want to be challenged academically. Much of the published literature regarding African American males in institutions of higher education focuses mainly on the negative perceptions of these students. Further, this message is reinforced on college campuses across the world, especially among institutions that have Division I National Collegiate Athletic Association NCAA teams. Moreover, literature overwhelmingly addresses African American male student athletes

from the deficit perspective: academic failures, declining enrollments, and other adverse outcomes regarding their successes.

While attending White Castle High School in my local community, I was remembered as the guy who ran track and made all As. Often, friends and teachers who did not know me personally would call me "geniouslete", short for *"genius athlete"*. Reflecting now, I have a greater understanding of what many overlooked in calling me a *geniouslete*. African American males, especially athletes, are widely viewed as achieving less in school than their White counterparts; my case was the opposite.

Athletics were essential to White Castle High School. Annual homecoming events included a rally that ultimately ended with multiple annual class reunions. The athletic programs generated much of the schools resources, which created a sports reputation for the school. Although all sports were valued equally, track and field was a popular sport at White Castle, and during the fall semester of my senior year, I decided that I would pursue track beyond high school. After completing high school, Dillard University recruited me and a combination of track and field and honors scholarships funded my education.

My experience at Dillard University was different than my previous academic experiences. At the conclusion of my first year on the track team, I was awarded Scholar Athlete of the Year in the Gulf Coast Athletic Conference for achieving a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 4.0. During interviews, I often fielded questions regarding my academic achievement as it related to my extreme involvement in sports. I noticed a link between African American male student athletes and low expectations and achievement rates in colleges and universities. My interest was peaked as I exuded

characteristics of a *high achieving* African American male. Therefore, this dissertation afforded me the opportunity to further explore the phenomenon of African American male student athletes and their academic successes. Research regarding this population of students and their academic success in colleges and universities is relevant. In my interactions and relationships with African American male student athletes as a burgeoning student affairs scholar-practitioner, I have been questioned regarding my experiences as an African American scholar-athlete; and thus, this research study was born.

Statement of the Problem

African American Male student athletes have been the focus of study regarding academic and psychosocial adjustment in college since the 1960s (Melendez, 2008). For decades, research has been dedicated to the athletic achievement of African American male athletes, whereas the focus on athletes' academic achievements has gone unstudied. From a young age, African American males are encouraged and influenced by family, church members, and society to value athletic achievement. Further, this pressure and burden to "*make it out*" has caused many African American boys to neglect their academic responsibilities, and to focus more on their natural given talent—superior athletic abilities. Throughout their lives, these young men dedicate countless hours competing with each other as a form of exercise, entertainment, and ultimately as an expression of their quest to be respected as men (Carey, 2000). Although there is scant literature addressing the academic achievements of African American male athletes, the educational achievement of Black male student athletes more recently has become a topic of scholarly interest. Even more concerning to many has been the academic performance

of some Black football and basketball players at the highest levels of intercollegiate competition—scholarship recipients at NCAA Division I, revenue-producing schools (Beamon, 2009; Benson, 2000; Comeaux, Taustine, & Harrison, 2011; Donnor, 2005; Edwards, 2000; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001; Lapchick, 1988; Singer 2005).

Studies of young African American males have indicated that the most popular career to which they aspire is that of the professional athlete (Lindaue & Mannix, 1991). The cyclical societal messages that devalue the significance of a valuable education have become epidemic in the Black community. The quest to achieve the "*American Dream*" of being a successful professional athlete has diminished and therefore requires a different outlook for African American males. The systemic belief that a young Black male who can jump high, run fast, or shoot a basketball into a hoop, which will lead to a successful and profitable future, has been dispelled over the past two decades. Although the pursuit of a professional athletic career may come to fruition for some African American males, the reality is that a small percentage of athletes advance beyond their collegiate career. In football and basketball, the two college sports most populated by African American male student athletes, less than two percent of college senior football players are drafted by the National Football League (NFL), and the National Basketball Association (NBA) drafts approximately 1.3% of senior basketball players (Probability, 2010).

African American student athlete males are faced with additional issues while attending college. They are forced to combat the myths and stereotypes commonly held by campus community members that they are far less intelligent, more violent, and from low-income backgrounds (Messer, 2006). Because many student athletes neglect their

academic obligations and fail to maximize their educational opportunities in college,

these students perpetuate the "dumb jock" stereotype held by many within and without

higher education. Their experiences differ from non-student athletes and often they are

viewed as academically inferior without having the opportunity to fully express how they

experience school (Martin, 2005).

Underwood (1986) suggested that the perceptions and perspectives of African

American student athletes should be researched and better understood to address the

problem effectively, but only Adler and Adler (1987), among others, used qualitative

research designs to discover more about the group's educational experiences. Analysis of

past research discloses the voids and the lack of illustrations in the literature regarding

African American student athletes. Additionally, the research regarding African

American male student athletes who perform well academically is highly problematic,

and their experiences should be studied in depth. Additional research must capture this

group of student athletes' voices rather than stereotype or label them as underachievers.

Empirical research indicates that some African American male student athletes excel and

achieve academically at high levels. However, more is known about deficient test scores,

failing grades, and specialized programs for this population than about their curricular

and co-curricular experiences (Benson, 2000). In summary, researchers must seek to

further understand high-achieving African American male student athletes' approaches to

learning, the value they place on academics, and the strategies that they use to complete

successfully their degrees.

Purpose of the Study

This study was an attempt to examine the academic experiences among high achieving African American male student athletes at predominantly White NCAA Division I institutions in the Southeast region. Most existing literature regarding African American student athletes at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) examined their experiences by highlighting major deficiencies of this group's academic abilities. Studies emphasize these students' lack of preparedness, low academic achievement, and high attrition rates (Harper 2005). As a result, little information is available regarding African American male student athletes who excel, achieve at high levels academically, and accomplish goals that their non-student athlete peers do not. Therefore, this study serves as a platform for high-achieving African American male student athletes, and provides their experiences and perspectives—that have been silenced for the past few decades. Self-efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997) and Stereotype Threat Theory (Steele, 2003) served as the theoretical bases for this study. These theories uncovered the motivation of these student athletes, and also described the stereotypical experiences they often faced while at PWIs. The research study was guided by the following research questions:

(RQ1): What are the academic experiences of African American male student-athletes at PWI's in the Southeast Region?

(RQ2): What sources do these student-athletes utilize to persist and achieve academically?

Significance of the Study

The existing literature on African American male student athletes adversely describes this population as being low achieving and academically incapable. This study's importance belies the paucity of literature as it relates to high-achieving African American male athletes who beat the odds and persisted through degree completion. Because student athletes may be identified as high-achieving does not necessarily deter them from encountering barriers to their achievement (Whiting, 2009). High-achieving African American male student athletes should have the opportunity to have their voices heard by the masses, to openly share their success stories, and to provide insight on factors that contributed to their successes.

Secondly, this study sought to dispel the existing negative stereotypes, low expectations, and unfavorable images of African American male student athletes at institutions of higher education. This study provides a positive perspective of African American males, and attempts to deter and clarify the experiences of this population of students. Instead of relying on previous literature to solve this real world problem, this study provides a new direction for college administrators, faculty, and staff for serving today's African American male student athletes.

Lastly, this study is important because it provides a silenced and oppressed group of African American student athletes the opportunity to openly share experiences, while addressing and rectifying the existing myths that have saturated the literature over the previous decades. The prevailing image of Black men in America is an overwhelmingly negative one (White & Cones, 1999). Blacks are far from equitably represented in the stories, programs, and advertisements seen, heard, and read today (Chideya, 1995). In

summation, the most important segment of this study highlights the experiences of successful African American male student athletes, and teaches about how these students successfully navigated their academic curriculum, while balancing both academic and athletic obligations.

Definitions and Related Concepts

1) African American- U.S. born citizens of African ancestry.

2) Student-Athletes- For the purpose of this study, student athletes were undergraduates enrolled in a college or university and participated in intercollegiate sports at Division I member institutions.

3) High-Achieving- For the purpose of this study, high-achieving student athletes were defined as African American male college athletes who were sophomores, juniors, or seniors, on full athletic scholarships, maintained cumulative grade point averages of 3.0 and above, and were scheduled to graduate within four or five years after initial enrollment at their universities

4) National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)- The NCAA was established in 1906 as the governing body for intercollegiate athletics for member colleges and universities. This governing body makes and enforces regulations that are related to athletic eligibility, recruitment, and financial aid (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2005).

5) Division I- To qualify as a Division I institution, an NCAA member must sponsor at least seven sports teams for male students and seven for women, or at least six teams for men and eight teams for women. Among the many other criteria for Division I are the number of contests against other Division I teams and the

number of home games played during the season (National Collegiate Athletic

Association, 2005).

6) Revenue generating sports- For the purpose of this study, revenue generating

sports were identified as football, and men's and women's basketball. Revenue

sports such as football, men's and women's basketball generate large sums of

money for Division I schools.

Study Procedures and Objectives

In the scholarly education research process, multiple steps are taken to produce

research worthy of publication in the academy. I identified my experience with the

proposed research, identified a problem statement that set a basis to be studied, identified

the purpose of this study, and identified the research questions that drove this project.

Procedurally, as the researcher I presented relevant literature related to African American

males/athletes and high-achieving African American males/athletes. Next, I outlined a

methodology and interview protocol asked of participants, and identified themes and

concepts from the responses of my participants and, finally, synthesized the themes of the

findings.

The interviews focused on the participant's familial and educational backgrounds,

academic experiences, self-efficacy, attitudes toward school, and sources of motivation to

persist and achieve academically. This research project and its interviews followed

standard protocol and were supervised and approved by the processes outlined by

Louisiana State University IRB. All interviews were conducted in person or by

videoconference, recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for understanding by the researcher.

In following this presented procedure, I sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To analyze relevant literature regarding African American male students/athletes, provide a historical context of African American males position in higher education;

- To apply Stereotype Threat Theory and Self-efficacy Theory to the context of African American male student athletes' success;

- To identify the sources of motivation African American male students utilize to persist and achieve academically;

- To identify intersections between race, class, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status;

- To expand literature in the area of academic achievement and African American male student athletes;

- To understand the academic experiences of African American male student athletes at Division I PWI's;

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented information and literature based on my research agenda, past experiences that shaped my desire to conduct scholarly research, and hopes for impacting the field of higher education with this research. Additionally, I presented a statement of problem related to the academic success of African American male student athletes at Division I PWI's. I next presented the purpose of this study that qualitatively explored academic experiences of African American males through a phenomenological research design, with a specific focus on how these students experienced school and the sources of motivation that encouraged and fostered academic success. Procedurally, I presented two (2)-research questions and the theoretical frameworks Stereotype Threat

Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory. After the presentation of my research question, I presented a list of study procedures and objectives that I implemented and achieved and that aid in directing this study and answered my research questions. The purpose of the objectives guided the creation of future interview protocol and attracting research participants.

Following is the significance of my study, and how this study might theoretically and practically impact the field of higher education. A list of terms defined from published academic work is included to assist readers of this research project and to shape this study. Many of the definitions are used frequently as acronyms; the explanation of the acronyms and terms anchor the understanding of this study, its participants, and the objectives of this study.

In chapter, two, I present literature relevant to my study that focused on college and athletics, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), African American male student athletes, high-achieving African American students, Intersectionality, GRIT, Stereotype Threat Theory, and Self-Efficacy Theory. Chapter three explores the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative research, explains why this study was best suited for one method rather than another, outlines the methodological study approach, and addresses the epistemology, sampling strategies, and data analysis I utilized to guide this research and the research questions. Lastly, I explore pragmatic realities in the conduction of this study.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Introduction

This chapter presents relevant literature that qualitatively corresponds both the

proposed problem and the theoretical framework that guided the research study. To better

understand the high scholastic achievements and academic experiences of African

American male student athletes, information on Steele's Stereotype Theory and

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory is provided. Creswell (2009) encouraged researchers to

approach selecting relevant literature with a broad synthesis of the literature:

- Turn to journal articles in respected, national journals;

- Turn to books related to the topic;

- Follow this search by recent research conference papers;

- Scan the entries of dissertation abstracts; and

- Utilize the 'web' for helpful materials (p. 32-33).

I included Creswell's approach in finding and synthesizing relevant literature for my

research study. The literature review begins with Stereotype Threat Theory and

Banduras' (1997) Theory of Self-Efficacy, the theoretical frameworks that guided this

study.

Stereotype Threat Theory

Companies that advertise *sports* in the media have failed to realize advertising's

adverse stereotypical effects on African American student athletes. Harrison's (2002)

study examined the effects of the media's stereotypical portrayal of images on African

American male student athletes' perceptions and mindsets of success. Specifically,

Harrison focused on stereotyping of student athletes with a particular emphasis on

stigmas attributed to African American male student athletes through certain athletic and occupational images. Stereotyping is the process of imposing characteristics on people based on their perceived group membership (Harrison, Stevens, Monty, & Coakley, 2006). Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major (1991) indicated that stereotyping allows humans to increase intelligibility of a complex social world, making it easy to fall prey to this behavior.

Student athletes face stereotypes everyday on college campuses (Person & LeNoir, 1997). Often, these students are the most visible on their campus due to their popular revenue generating sports. This visibility fosters increased opportunities for them to be recognized and ultimately stereotyped (Harrison, 2002). Student athletes are often viewed as "dumb" and lacking the ability to keep up with the academic standards of the college or university they attend (Sellers, 2000). Additionally, stereotypes of African American student athletes are different than those of their White counterparts. The expectations of African American student athletes outside of sports are low in relation to their White peers; for example, many tend to believe that African American student athletes have problems making career transitions after sports (Edwards, 2000; Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997).

Education has traditionally been viewed as the principal route to upward mobility in industrialized societies. Indeed, in the past, the position of a given person in the social hierarchy was partly fixed and determined by her or his race, social class, or gender; nowadays this position is mainly determined by her or his academic achievement (Boucher, Rydell, Van Loo, 2011). Although academic achievement is assumed to be disassociated from social origins, researchers have reported that in many societies

members of lower status groups have relatively poor academic performance (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Certain social groups are targeted by reputations of low ability, including African American male student athletes (Boucher, et al., 2011). Few studies have demonstrated the existence of such beliefs (Fiske, 1998). African Americans have the reputation of being hostile, lazy, and stupid (Devine & Elliott, 1995).

There is widespread agreement within our societies about the personality traits that characterize Black male student athletes (Devine, 1989). This consensual knowledge may stem from communicative processes that play a central role in the acquisition of stereotypes (Schneider, 1981). Because stereotypes tend to be widely held people identify them as facts rather than beliefs (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992). For example, researchers have documented that stereotypes of African Americans' academic achievement (Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974) could lead the perceiver to behave differently toward targets and this differential treatment may cause these targets to confirm the perceiver's negative expectations (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1997). According to Steele (1992, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995), when a widely known negative stereotype (e.g., poor intellectual ability) exists about a group, it creates a burden of suspicion that acts as a threat for its members. For example, African Americans male student athletes are subjected to the threat that if they fail an academic exam, their behavior or athletic association may confirm a reputation of lower intelligence. When the stakes are high for the individual, the very possibility of substantiating a negative allegation may in fact impair performance because it is self-threatening enough to have disruptive effects on its own (Boucher, et al., 2011). Depending on the situation of threat, several processes may contribute to this inefficiency of processing – through distraction from the task (Easterbrook, 1959),

interfering self-consciousness (Baumeister, 1984), evaluation apprehension (Geen, 1985), test anxiety (Sarason, 1972), and/or loss of motivation (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1983).

Self-Efficacy Theory

The academic achievement of African American students has long been a topic of conversation in higher education. Within the past 20 years, much of the published research on African American students relative to their academic achievement has been dedicated to exploring the underachievement of this population of students (Steele & Steele, 1995; Choi, 2005). Using Bandura's (1977) Self-efficacy Theory, this study investigated African American male student athletes' influence on their own achievement.

Self-Efficacy is defined as "judgments about how well one can organize and execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations containing many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements" (Bandura & Schunk, 1986, p. 587). Bandura (1977) sought to make sense of how behavior is acquired and regulated (p. 192). Bandura's (1977) emphasized the notion that people who feel efficacious tend to work harder and persist longer when they face obstacles and challenges than those who are unsure of their capabilities (p. 194). According to Bandura, (1977), Self-efficacy Theory suggests that there are four major sources of information used by individuals when forming self-efficacy judgments: (a) Performance accomplishments-personal assessment information that is based on an individual's personal accomplishments. Previous successes raise mastery expectations, while repeated failures lower them; (b) Vicarious experience-gained by observing others perform activities successfully. This is often referred to as modeling, and it can generate expectations in observers that they can

improve their own performance by learning from what they have observed; (c) Social persuasion- activities where people are led, through suggestion, into believing that they can cope successfully with specific tasks. Coaching and giving evaluative feedback on performance are common types of social persuasion. (d) Physiological and emotional states- The individual's physiological or emotional states influence self-efficacy judgments with respect to specific tasks. Emotional reactions to such tasks (e.g., anxiety) can lead to negative judgments of one's ability to complete the tasks. Frank Parajes (1996) further extended the works of Banduras' Self-efficacy Theory by making comparisons between similar constructs. Parajes' (1996) study sought to examine and distinguish self-efficacy from other constructs and intended to differentiate how each can influence human motivation and behavior. Relative to this study, the researcher studied the self-efficacy of African American male student athletes and what sources of self-efficacy were employed to reach academic success. Therefore, self-efficacy uncovered the silenced voices of this population, and provided a more clear understanding of this phenomenon.

College and Athletics

The gap between intercollegiate athletics and the mission and philosophy of higher education has widened significantly over the past decade (Eitzen, 2003). An article in the Chronicle of Higher Education (2001) cited that college sports have drifted from their fundamental mission. Instead of enhancing the academic environment, college athletics clearly limit student athletes from a valuable education in revenue generating sports such as men's basketball, and football (Comeaux, 2008). College athletics have become more commercialized with a greater urgency to produce winning seasons and

secure corporate sponsors at the expense of the student athlete's academic future (Duderstadt 2000; Eitzen 2003; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2006). College and university athletics have become an integral part of our society's growing appetite for sporting events (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). Concomitantly, "the public's image of an institution as well as its attractiveness to prospective students are often influenced by the performance of its athletic teams" (Pascarella, et al., 1991, p.1). Over time, colleges and athletics have been namely referred to as "American higher education's 'peculiar institutions.' Their presence is pervasive, yet their proper balance with academics remains puzzling" (Thelin, 1996, p.1). Studies have determined significant predictor variables such as demographic and educational criteria that influence academic achievement for college student athletes (Lang, Dunham, & Alpert 1988; Ryan, 1989; Sellers, 1992); Simons, Van, Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). Few scholars, however, have examined environmental influences, both social and academic, on student athletes' educational outcomes (Comeaux, 2005; Comeaux & Harrison; Edwards, 1984; Sellers, 1992).

Former President William Funce of Brown University once stated, "We are living in a time when college athletics are honeycombed with falsehood, and when the professions of amateurism are usually hypocrisy. No college team ever meets another with actual fait in the other's eligibility" (Meggysey, 2000, p. 24,). The question that many institutions of higher education face regarding student athletes is the value of their education versus their stellar performance on the football field or basketball court. For many colleges and universities, big time college sports, such as Division I football and basketball, generate massive revenue for the institution. The primary goal for institutions

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of higher education is to enroll students and offer a high quality education that will be beneficial beyond their undergraduate careers; however, for the past 30 years, there has been a decrease in attrition, retention, and graduation rates of college athletes, especially African American male athletes. We see the most glaring contradictions between the avowed educational missions of these schools' athletic programs, their governing organization (the NCAA), and the commercial reality of their athletic departments and the NCAA itself (Meggyesy, 2010). The reality is that athletic departments at top athletic schools are highly profitable sports entertainment enterprises.

National Collegiate Athletic Association

Founded in 1905 in response to the rising death toll in college football and increasing "professionalism" of college sports in general, the NCAA oversees virtually all post-secondary sports programs in the United States. It's mission, then and now, is "to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body" (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2005). College sports programs are conceived as amateur educational experiences that benefit and enhance the overall education of students who happen to be athletes (Meggyesy, 2010). As a non-profit educational association, the NCAA administers college sports and promulgates and enforces rules agreed upon by its 1027 member schools that provide athletic programs for approximately 325,000 athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2005). The NCAA member schools are divided into three divisions (I, II, III) based on school size. Division I is further divided into three Divisions (IA, IAA, IAAA) based primarily on schools' athletic departments' ability to generate revenue, their stadium seating capacity, and their student body size. Presently,

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the NCAA is dominated by the approximately 50 Division IA "power schools" whose athletic departments field the top college football and whose men's basketball teams are profit centers for their universities based on their highly successful sports programs (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2005). At these top athletic schools, football and basketball revenues fund the overall athletic department and their non-revenue generating producing sports programs, and still show a profit.

African American Male Student Athletes

For more than two decades, literature has focused on the dynamics of Black sports involvement and the blind faith of Black youths and their families in sports as a prime vehicle of self-realization and social-economic advancements. Consequently, this has created a complex of critical problems for Black society. At the root of these problems is the fact that Black families have been inclined to push their children toward sports career aspirations, often to the neglect and detriment of other critically important areas of personal, educational, and cultural development (Edwards, 2000). Those circumstances have developed largely because of: (1) a long-standing, widely held, racist, and ill-informed presumption of innate, race-linked Black athletic superiority and intellectual deficiency; (2) media propaganda portraying sports as a broadly accessible route to Black social and economic mobility; and (3) a lack of comparably visible, high-prestige Black role models beyond the sports arena (Edwards, 2000) Consequently, a single-minded pursuit of sports fame and fortune has spawned an institutionalized triple tragedy in Black society: the tragedy of thousands upon thousands of Black youths in obsessive pursuit of sports' goals that the overwhelming majority of them will never attain; the tragedy of the personal and cultural under-development that afflicts so many successful

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and unsuccessful Black sports aspirants; and the tragedy of cultural and institutional underdevelopment throughout Black society, at least in some part as a consequence of the drain in talent potential towards sports and away from other vital areas of occupational and career emphasis, such as medicine, law, economics, politics, education, and technical fields (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001).

As African American males continue to thrive on the football field and the basketball court, little progress has been made in the classroom. Developments at the intersection of race, sports, and education have generated a situation wherein increasing numbers of Black youths have focused their efforts on athletic achievement only to find themselves underdeveloped academically and unable to compete in the classroom (Edwards, 2000). At the collegiate level, the establishment of Proposition 48 was implemented by the National Collegiate Athletic Association; Proposition 48 required that before any athlete could participate in Division I college sports, a student had to have a minimum grade point average GPA of 2.0 in at least 11 courses in core subjects in high school and a minimum SAT score of 700 or ACT score of 17. The rule was instituted to counteract academically lenient recruitment practices, and though the specific requirements mandated under the regulation have been adjusted to accommodate various sliding scales of eligibility over the last decade, the essential thrust and intent of regulatory efforts remain the same today, as does their disparate impact on Black athletes (Edwards, 2000). However, it is now clear that the greatest consequence of Proposition 42, and similar regulations, has been to limit both educational and athletic opportunities that would otherwise be available to Black youths. Those measures were neither

conceived nor instituted with due consideration of Black youths' circumstances beyond the academy and the sports arena.

High-Achieving African American Students

Over the past 30 years, Black students' participation in higher education has fluctuated with periods of growth and decline. Much of the literature regarding African American students at institutions of higher education often highlighted the deficiencies of these students, providing little to no background on how these students successfully navigated through the ranks of higher education. Especially for African American males, it is often difficult to overcome negative perceptions and stereotypes that render them dysfunctional, uneducable, dangerous, and threatening (Cuyjet, 1997; Gibbs, 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992) While much research that concentrates directly on African American students' disposition at institutions of higher education, few studies have captured the experiences of high-achieving African American students who perform well in college.

Despite the fact that more than 75% of Black collegians attend PWIs today, they continue to experience social isolation and other challenges that threaten their success (Pound 1987; Turner 1994). For instance, Black males struggle coping with various forms of racism and discrimination from both peers and faculty. Additionally, high-achieving Black collegians often report feeling undue pressure to prove their intellectual ability to peers and faculty (Chavous, Harris, Helaire, & Green, 2004). While quantitative studies have consistently shown that academically successful Black students encounter negative stereotypes in college (Fries-Britt, 1997; Fries-Britt, 1998), few qualitative studies have uncovered these students' experiences at institutions of higher education.

Therefore, it is necessary and important for research to be conducted that highlights this population of students' experiences and provides implications for faculty and staff.

"*High-achieving*" can be defined in numerous ways in research studies. While there is no actual definition to distinctly describe or explain definite characteristics of high-achieving students, a breadth of published literature separates these students from the masses. High-achieving students are typically defined as having superior intelligence as measured by their IQs, participation in an honors program (Fries-Britt & Griffin 2007), performance on a standardized test (Fries-Britt, 1998), or outstanding academic performance (Freeman, 1993). Although most high-achieving students have been labeled as such, it is often understood that these students do not experience the same issues as their same race counterparts, an assumption based on their high scholastic ability and stellar academic performance. However, the reality is high-achieving Black students face many challenges in their pursuit of higher education (Fries-Britt, 1997, 1998; Person & Christensen, 1996). First, high-achievers often report a lack of a sense of belonging to their institution (Strayhorn, 2009). Fries-Britt (1998) interviewed 12 high-achieving or "gifted" African American students who participated in the Meerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. Findings indicated that these students experienced high levels of isolation from their peers and struggled to overcome subtle forms of racism.

Another challenge that high-achieving African American students face is that they are often caught betwixt and between the dominant culture and their culture of origin, which Freeman (1993) referred to this as a "double dilemma" (p. 16). Fries-Britt (1998) found that high achieving Black collegians might find White environments unwelcoming,

as some White students doubt their academic abilities and Black environments make them uneasy, as some Black students taunt them about their success or perceive them as "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

In higher education, the success of high-achieving Black undergraduates often draws great praise; however, research on Black collegians has focused primarily on those who experience academic difficulty (Fries-Britt, 1997; Cornell & Lee, 1991). Particularly, research on the academic performance of Black students has focused on low-achievers, framing their academic motivation as maladaptive and driven externally (e.g., competition or compliance) rather than internally (e.g., love of compliance) and rather than generated forces (Griffin, 2006). Although it is critical to comprehend the experience of Black students who struggle academically, it is also essential to gain an understanding of the within-group differences among Black students. Black high-achievers are typical college students in many ways, yet, the issues of Black students and gifted students can come together to shape their experiences in unique ways (Fries-Britt, 1997, 2000; Lindstrom & Van Sant, 1986; Noldon & Sedlacek, 1996; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Although the literature discusses barriers that Black high- achievers face and the role that social support plays in mitigating the impact of these factors, there is less understanding of what pushes these students to continue to strive for academic excellence and pursue their goals despite these challenges. Kimberly Griffin (2006) used qualitative methods to address the lack of knowledge in this area, and to analyze the responses of a socio-economically diverse sample of high-achieving Black students to learn about their sources of motivation and perceptions of how they contributed to academic success.

While studying high-achieving Black students, it is critical to reinforce the notion that these students demand special attention, as do their same race peers. High-achieving Blacks have been described as "the best and the brightest" and are predicted to achieve the greatest levels of academic and professional success (Fries-Britt, 2007). Because they are labeled as high-achievers, university staff may assume that academically talented Blacks do not need special support services or that they experience the same issues as academically talented White students (Fries-Britt, 1997). Person and Christensen (1996) uncovered that academically talented Blacks often need and report the desire for services that reflect their specific experiences. In addition to the need of social support for high-achieving Black students, it is known that many African American high-achieving students do not persist due to a lack of support and personal connection to their institution. Freeman (2006) emphasized that for many academically successful Blacks, dropping out of college is not related to their ability to do college work or their GPA. Ford & Harris (1995) noted that person-environment relationships are more closely related to persistence rates for academically talented Black students than actual ability, and dissatisfaction with one's social life can have a negative impact on grades and other student outcomes (Person & Christensen, 1996). Because high-achieving Blacks often do not have the opportunity to engage in social activities in their collegiate experience, much of their time is dedicated to academic related work. Person and Christensen (1996) found the high-achieving Blacks in their study to be more satisfied with their academic experiences in college than their social ones, and 90% of the sample expressed a need for an identifiable Black community. Further, these students faced hostile interactions in social spaces with not only White students, but many experienced hatred and taunting

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from their same race peers. In Fries-Britt's (1998) study of Black students in a high profile honors program, respondents expressed feeling shunned by both Black and White students at their university: White students doubted Black students' abilities and claimed that they received opportunities only because they were Black, and Black students believed the Black high-achievers thought that they were better than everyone else.

Aside from experiencing a lack of connection between the institution and a hostile campus and social environment, high-achieving Black students also must balance their academic responsibilities while handling the stressors of racism and social stereotypes. In the larger social milieu, Blacks are often portrayed and stereotyped as criminals, gang members, athletes, and entertainers, but rarely as academics (Fries-Britt, 2007). To some "gifted Black" is an oxymoron; high levels of academic talent are associated primarily with Asian and White students, whereas expectations for the academic abilities of Black students are low (Fries-Britt, 1997, 1998; Steele, 1997). Research literature documents many instances of academically talented Blacks being questioned about their intelligence, and some academically talented Blacks have reported feeling that they were always being watched and judged by both peers and faculty (Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997). Students subjected to these stereotypes often attempt to resist and disprove negative assumptions about their intelligence (Fries-Britt, 1997). Successful Black students interviewed by Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) shared that they often encountered students who made comments based on stereotypical images of Blacks, and that they felt they repeatedly engaged in a "proving process" to establish themselves as worthy and academically able, both in and outside of the classroom. High-achieving Black males participating in Shaun Harper's (2005) national study also noted that their academic

achievement and engagement in campus activities and highly visible leadership positions enabled them to challenge and disprove pervasive stereotypes about Black men held by faculty and staff. While this research is filled with many gaps, it is imperative to give high-achieving students a voice about their experiences at institutions of higher education. The assumption should no longer be that these students do not face issues or require specific services. Higher education professionals must be held accountable for these students' adverse experiences in colleges and universities around the world.

Socialization

Popular culture's deluging society with images of African American males as athletes and entertainers is detrimental to the academic and social growth of this group (Beamon & Bell, 2006). For over 30 years, the media has significantly influenced the goals and aspirations of student-athletes, offering a dream that is not always easily attainable. In fact, popular culture and organized sports have been credited as major contributions to many of the social problems that exist among African American males. These social problems are characterized in the oppositional relationship that has formed between athletic and academic achievement, and the high aspirations and expectations that African American student athletes hold concerning professional sports (Beamon & Bell, 2011). Research has shown that African Americans are overrepresented in the sports arena; yet, there is a lack of interest in the academic facet of their educational experience. In a study conducted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the American Institute for Research, African American athletes were found to have higher expectations for a professional sports career than all other student athletes (Lapchick, 1996). The consequences of this phenomena include an over identification with athletic achievement

to the detriment of academic achievement (Beamon & Bell, 2006). Beamon and Bell (2006) addressed the socialization process as an indicator of the overall success or failure of student athletes. Socialization into sports is a process associated with agents or agencies that are influential in attracting youth to sports (Beamon & Bell, 2011). Early literature on the sociology of sport suggests that athletic role aspirations and behavior are reinforced not only through media images, but also through role models and parents (Harris, 1994; McPherson, 1976).

In addition to socialization being a major factor in the success or failure of African American student athletes, Beamon and Bell (2006) highlighted behavioral issues, which often gain the attention of the media. The behavior of African American student athletes participating in Division I athletics have increasingly made national headlines in the last decade. These observed occurrences indicate that the probability of success for these young people is extremely small (Beamon & Bell, 2002). Beamon and Bell (2006) suggested that African American student athletes place less emphasis on academics than White athletics during their socialization process, as well as having less emphasis on education than White respondents.

The link between the image of the professional athlete and the aspirations of young African American males is well established (Beamon & Bell, 2002). The association between these two phenomena is believed to be a contributing factor in the academic destruction of a generation of African American males (Gaston, 1986). The ultimate effect of the association is a drain of potential talent away from other career options (Harrison, 2000). Moreover, though academic achievement among African American student athletes has been a major topic and emphasis in the literature, most

empirical studies concerning African American athletes focus upon the problems associated with being a student athlete. Socialization has been identified as a predictor in student athlete achievement and is heavily emphasized among families in the African American community. Harry Edwards (2000) theorized that African American families push children toward professional sports aspirations, while neglecting other areas of personal and cultural growth (Lomax, 2000). This single-minded pursuit is detrimental to African American young men and their families, and leads to some of the social problems.

Commercialization: African American Male Student Athletes

"I wanna be like Mike," [a movie about a Black young man pursuing a professional basketball career], is a common phrase relevant to many American youth (Wilson & Sparks, 1996). Too often, African American youth are consumed by mainstream media images and messages (Hoberman, 2000). While media has increased the notion that pursuing a professional sports career is easily attainable, the reality of this concept has not been addressed in recent literature. Edwards (2000) articulated three major realities of African American males in sports: a) the presumption of innate, race-linked Black athletic superiority and intellectual deficiency; b) media propaganda portraying sports as a broadly accessible route to African American social and economic mobility; and c) a lack of comparably visible, high-prestige African American role models beyond the sports arena.

Many African American athletes are believed to possess innate athletic abilities. Harris (1994) argued that the media portrayal of athletes reinforces and perpetuates the theory of the "natural athlete", a moniker given to many successful African American

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athletes. Further, some scholars contend that there is an overwhelming perception that the natural athlete is said to be all brawn and no brains (Gaston, 1986). Related to this notion, Rainville and McCormick (1977) found that White American players received more praise and less criticism than African American players by broadcasting commentators in the National Football League (NFL). Rainville and McCormick (1977) also found that NFL announcers assumed that performances by African American players were due to uncontrollable external forces while performances by White athletes were due to controllable internal forces. In terms of higher education, counselors, administrators, coaches, and the student athletes themselves may operationalize these beliefs that can lead to low expectations in the classroom (Harrison, 2002). Instead of successful matriculation and the attainment of a college degree, African American males, especially in revenue sports, are often "channeled/tracked" into "jock courses and majors" and retained merely for their eligibility to participate in organized sports (Person & LeNoir, 1997).

Academic performance of college athletes, particularly those who compete at Division I institutions, continues to receive attention in the literature and media. Gaston-Gayles (2004) examined the utility of academic and athletic motivation as a key variable in predicting academic performance among 211 college athletes at a Division I institution in the Midwest. At most research Division I institutions, athletes and the entire student body have many valuable resources that are easily accessible, and ultimately improve their academic performance. Despite the academic support services that are strongly encouraged and available for student athletes, not all groups of athletes graduate at the national rate (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). Poor graduation rates and academic performance

associated with various groups of student athletes warrant investigation beyond merely examining the influence of traditional variables (e.g., high school grade point average and standardized test scores) on college GPA and graduation rates. Specifically, Gaston-Gayles (2004) suggested that research on the academic performance of college athletes should focus on factors related to academic success while students are in college, such as social integration and motivation to succeed in college.

Although it is essential to focus on academic performance of African American student athletes, it is equally important to promote the academic engagement and success of Black male student athletes. Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, and Bagley (2014) provided a qualitative look at the factors associated with the academic engagement and success of Black male student athletes in high school. The authors studied Black male athletes because of the unique challenges to their academic success, particularly the high profile athletes participating in basketball or football. Conley (2010) suggested that even before African American student athletes step foot on a college campus, they must identify cognitive strategies that will aid in successfully matriculating through college. Further, Carodine, Almond, & Gratto (2001) argued that students preparing for college must understand the structure of knowledge and big ideas of core academic subjects, develop a set of cognitive strategies as they develop their understandings of key content, possess the academic behaviors necessary to successfully manage and engage with a college workload, and possess a contextual understanding of the navigational and cultural elements of gaining admission to and being successful in college.

While some researchers (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005) have suggested that students participating in extra-curricular activities are more "academically-oriented" than those

who do not, others (Harris, 1994) have posited that such effects can vary upon closer examination across groups, namely Black males. Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, and Bagley (2014) also suggested behavioral engagement as a factor that promotes academic success among Black student athletes. Behavioral engagement has been referred to as active participation in school-based activities (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). It involves the academic activities in which students participate and the amount of time they spend in those activities (Li & Lerner, 2013). Further, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) defined school-related activities as those that entail the learning process within the classroom and other academic tasks. Behavioral engagement activities have also been associated with favorable academic outcomes (Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, & Bagley, 2014). Messacar and Oreopoulos (2013) suggested that student class attendance raises graduation rates and other long-term academic outcomes. Additionally, Richtman (2007) found that school and class attendance have a positive relationship with school success, while Shepard, Salina, Girts, Cox, Navenport, and Hillard (2012) identified that engaging in meaningful academic assignments positively influenced high rates of success.

In addition to behavioral engagement's vital role in the success of African American student athletes, researchers have also correlated parental involvement as a predictor in these students' success. Parental engagement is a term used interchangeably with parental involvement and has several definitions. Zhang, Hsu, Kwok, Benz, and Bowman-Perrott (2011) defined parental involvement as engagement that promotes student educational outcomes. Parental involvement contributes to improving student success (Reynolds, 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994), and has also been linked to student academic performance. Equally important is the overarching concept of *mattering* that

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has been deemed related to student success. Students' mattering to others at school correlates with a healthy school climate and cohesion, which translates into increased academic achievement.

Educator engagement is critical to African American student athletes' success. It is suggested that educators interact with students in such a way that aligns with their expectations of them; in response those expectations are later fulfilled (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson, & Dixon, 2010). As such, when teachers have high expectations of students, students' academic achievement is influenced positively.

Lastly, school counselors/academic advisors have also demonstrated the capacity to facilitate student success when they implement strategic interventions aimed at academic achievement (Dahir, Burnham, Stone, & Cobb, 2010). Documentation exists that positively correlates school belonging, academic self-efficacy, and educational aspirations with academic achievement for all ethnic minorities, including Black males (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008).

Grit

Research has suggested that achievement is not solely based on the cognitive abilities of the learner, but rather on the combination of cognitive ability and personality traits (Wolters & Hussain, 2014). Recent scholars have focused on exploring how grit affects student academic performance and success. Researchers claim that intellectual ability is essential to academic achievement. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) noted that the link between intellectual ability and achievement has been well established; however, intellectual ability is no guarantor of success in completing college programs or later in life. Additionally, Duckworth et al. (2007) argued that these

achievement differences could be explained by personality variables such as trait-like perseverance, or what they term "grit", but the influence of these other individual differences or traits on achievement is unclear. Duckworth et al. (2007) defined grit as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" and stated that grit "entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress" (p.229).

Grit: Academic Success of African American Males

During the past 30 years, college enrollment rates in the United States have increased dramatically. Today, more than 19 million students are enrolled across 4,200 colleges and universities in the USA, making this the largest system of higher education in the world (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In terms of race/ethnicity, historically African Americans have represented a deficit in higher education institutions. Interestingly, African Americans represent 12% of college students nationally, and Black women outnumber their same-race male counterparts by 2 to 1 (Cuyjet, 1997). Research has shown that even when African American students enroll, Black men are more likely than their White peers to begin their postsecondary careers at 2-year community colleges (Strayhorn, 2014), earn lower grades (Dawson-Threat, 1997), devote less time to campus activities and studying (Strayhorn, 2014), and take longer to complete their degrees, or drop out altogether (National Urban League, 2007).

A large part of the discourse surrounding African American males and college completion is high attrition rates among this population. Research scholars focus their attention on factors that influence Black male attrition from college, most of which can be organized into three categories: environmental, social, and psychological.

Environmental factors include aspects of the campus ecology or prevailing ethos that affirm Black male collegians' sense of belonging, facilitate their involvement in the academic and social life of campus, or marginalize them in ways that deny access to supportive networks that are critical for their success (Strayhorn, 2012).

Strayhorn (2014) identified a second line of inquiry focusing on social factors that inspire or inhibit Black males' success in college. For example, Black males' academic success, or lack thereof, is a function of meaningful interactions with diverse peers, supportive relationships with university faculty and staff, as well as frequent and educationally purposeful engagement in campus activities and student organizations (Harper, 2008).

Lastly, Strayhorn (2014) concluded that a third, and smaller, set of studies attempts to identify psychological determinants of student success in college. Scholars have argued that any outcome (e.g., retention, grades) is a function of both cognitive (i.e., what students think) and behavioral (i.e., what students do) traits.

Grit and Academic Performance

Although studies have examined the role of the construct of grit in success, there have been few to no studies that have examined the influence of grit on academic achievement of African American male collegians. Past academic performance has been used both as a proxy for student persistence (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella & Hagedorn, 1999), and for cognitive ability. However, past academic performances are retrospective indicators and say nothing about prospective behaviors. Colleges and universities across the world often base admissions decisions on ACT/ SAT scores and high school cumulative grade point average. Prior research has confirmed that grades and

intelligence are the most reliable measures of student persistence in college and universities (Hartigan & Wigdor, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, there is ample research that demonstrates that abilities such as talent, intelligence, and IQ are not significant predictors of high achievement or later success (Duckworth et al., 2007; Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014). Instead, Duckworth et al. (2007) argued that achievement results from a combination of innate talent and effort. Hochanadel &Finamore (2015) further argued that grittier individuals tend to work harder and longer and are more inclined to engage in deliberate practice to enhance performance or success. Ericsson (2006) compared being *gritty* and *less gritty* individuals and claimed that grittier individuals are more persistent and diligent, not discouraged by setbacks or failure, more focused on a project or goal, and more likely to complete tasks; less gritty individuals are not as persistent or diligent, are easily distracted by new ideas or projects, unable to set long-term goals, and lack motivation or focus for long-term projects.

Intersectionality

In explaining the educational experiences of young African American men, researchers have adhered to deficit-oriented explanations (Bereiter & Engleman, 1966). For many years these explanations have created a distorted image of the 21st century African American male college student. Often these explanations have focused only on deficiencies among African American families and their children rather than on their strengths (Steele & Hilliard, 2003). Moreover, recent literature has highlighted the academic deficiencies of African American male students; little research is dedicated to exploring and understanding high achieving African American male students on college campuses. A few scholars (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Fries-Britt, 1998) focus

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specifically on high-achieving African American students and their academic success. To fully service and understand these particular students, it is essential to recognize their realities, and to service the students in a holistic manner by understanding their experiences.

Experiences among African American males in college are the subjects of an extensive body of literature (Astin, 1982; Cuyjet, 1997; Dancy & Brown, 2007, Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer & Dancy, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Strayhorn; 2008). There is still a great need to understand how African American students experience college and what factors are associated with their academic success. Additionally, it is essential to gain a greater understanding of how intersecting identities help create students' worldview/perspective about their academics.

Dancy (2010) explored spiritual identity constructions and intersections among 24 African American male undergraduate students enrolled across 12 different colleges and universities. Researchers argued that strong spirituality and religiosity among African Americans were grounded in African worldviews of communalism (i.e., human relationships and interrelatedness of people), unity, cooperation, harmony, balance, creativity, and authenticity (Walker & Dixon, 2002; Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000; Watson, 2006). Scholars have defined spirituality in many ways. Watson (2006) described spirituality as an individual's state, quality, or manner of belief in an animated force (i.e., the Holy Spirit, a supernatural entity, the intersections of the mind, and feelings). Mattis (2000) defined spirituality as a supernatural dimension of life in which intrinsic beliefs and values correspond to an understanding of God's will. Other researchers (Love & Talbot, 1999; Sheldrake, 2007) simply described spirituality as a

process of self-discovery with respect to life purpose, deep values, and meaning. A common theme within these definitions is envisioning spirituality as a worldview in which individuals hold a more comprehensive understanding of self and hold belief in a larger reality than that experienced in the natural world.

The role of spirituality and religion in the college lives of all students, African American males in particular, is of interest to those who serve them on college campuses (Astin, 1993; Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2005; Seifert & Holman-Harmon; 2009). In contrast to the earlier mentioned definition(s) of spirituality, Horwood (1985) described religion as the form spirituality takes in civilization. Horwood's work framed religion as a formal search involving external sources (i.e., churches) while spirituality is considered an internalized state. Mattis (2000) argued that religion involves participation in organized, institutional rituals and engaging practices such as reading sacred texts or affiliating with a church, mosque, or synagogue.

The role of spirituality in the lives of African Americans has received increased interest in research and scholarship (Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). Religion and spirituality assume critical places in the political and cultural histories of African Americans. Although there is not much published scholarship that focuses on spirituality among African American college students, there are three main topics in the available literature: (a) academic and professional outcomes, (b) coping and persistence in college, and (c) identity construction.

Academic and Professional Outcomes

For many years researchers have associated academic performance among African American males with factors such as race, age, gender, and sexuality. However,

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few scholars have directly examined the relationship between spirituality/religiosity and academic success among African American college males. Walker and Dixon's (2002) quantitative study measured the extent to which spirituality and religiosity correlated with academic performance among college students. The study sample of 192 college students included 109 Whites and 85 African Americans. The results of their study found that African American students had higher levels of spiritual beliefs and religious participation than Whites. Walker and Dixon's 2002 study found that African American college students with higher levels of spiritual beliefs also had higher GPAs and earned more academic honors.

Coping and Persistence

Scholars contend that as students develop and mature, they use coping mechanisms that encourage them to persist throughout their academic careers. Those coping mechanism can include praying, meditating, exercising, and talking. Interestingly, research found that religious participation and spirituality largely accounted for the coping strategies and problem-solving styles of African American college students (Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002). Constantine et al. (2002) and colleagues reported that more spiritually oriented African American students were likely to use spiritual strategies to cope with college challenges. Additionally, Watson (2006) investigated how spirituality contributed to identity construction and coping strategies among African American males in college. Watson found spirituality and religion as coping sources for students' on-campus struggles and as sources of encouragement as participants strove to attain academic and professional goals.

Similar to Watson's (2006) study, Herndon's (2003) qualitative study investigated how spirituality affected African American college males' experiences in a PWI. The sample for the study included 13 African American college men; the results yielded three themes: (a) Spirituality encouraged resilience, particularly when engaging in religious acts that implied coping strategies; (b) Spirituality provided a sense of purpose; and (c) Spiritual support was provided by African American religious institutions (Herndon, 2003). Participants credited acts of spirituality to their remaining enrolled in college. Specifically, acts of spirituality included prayers, church attendance, and reading scriptures or inspirational writing. Most of all, spirituality provided a sense of purpose for most African American men, reinforcing the notion in Black males that they should persist toward graduation.

Identity Construction

Prior studies of spirituality among African American students considered the role spirituality played in identity construction. For example, researchers Sanchez and Carter (2005) confirmed a link between racial identity and religious orientation for African American students. Religious orientation is defined as one's psychological attitude toward one's particular religious or spiritual beliefs (Mattis, 2000). Included in Sanchez and Carter's (2005) study were 270 African American college students enrolled in two- and four-year colleges in the Northeast where they ultimately found racial identity to be a predictor for religious orientation. Further, Stewart (2005) explored ways in which spirituality impacted Black students' multiple existing identities. Of the five students selected from a rural liberal arts college in the Midwest, Stewart used faith-identity typology to organize and report the data. Faith-identity typology, as defined by Nash and

Stewart (2005), describes the relationships individuals have with others and individual abilities to integrate multiple roles, contexts, and identities within one's self-image or identity. In sum, scholars have found that spirituality has a significant influence on academic and professional outcomes. Both spirituality and religious participation are important supports for African American students in meeting college campus challenges.

Intersectionality: Race & Gender

Intersectionality Theory is a way of understanding the intersecting identities of African Americans lives in American society (Crenshaw, 2015). At the center of this theory lies the assumption that African American males are privileged by their male gender and underprivileged by their African American/Black race. However, additional interpretations stress the importance of context in understanding intersectionality in African American men. For example, African American men are unjustly privileged in African American communities but publicly subordinated beyond these communities (Bell, 1993; Mutua, 2006). Both, however, contribute to over-policing and stress in African American males. Intersectionality Theory requires researchers to study context in determining what identities and identity intersections actually privilege or oppress African American males.

While analyzing the research related to African American males and their college success, it is important to consider race and gender in the context of school. Race and gender often circumscribe the educational experiences and opportunities for African American students, especially for Black males who are too often disadvantaged by this perplexing and misunderstood intersection (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2005). Gender as an expression of a ritualized form of masculinity among young African American males

within the context of school intersects with the boundaries of race (Wright, 2007). The latter is the case when manifestations of African American masculinity are racialized and otherwise viewed as "oppositional" to the culture of school. Examples of such include beltless pants hanging below the waist, manners of talking such as signifying and rapping, and behaviors such as high fives, special handshakes, and forms of greeting (Tatum, 2005).

Unaware that these expressions of Black masculinity may be coping mechanisms (e.g., the cool pose) to mask self-doubt, insecurity, or inner turmoil, school personnel often suspect and engage them negatively within the context of schools (Wright, 2007). This negative treatment by school personnel may contribute to the less than favorable attitudes of young African American males toward school and their place in it (Wright, 2007). Tatum (2005) wrote, "[Black] males respond to schooling based on both their perception of the treatment they receive in school and their perception of what schooling will do for them in the future" (p. 73). Therefore when school personnel respond negatively to the African American male's styles of personal presentation (e.g., walking, glances, dress, hair) by imposing strict rules and prohibition, the message communicated is one of rejection, which may contribute to their psychological discomfort and low academic achievement (Lambert, 1989).

Conclusion

The purpose of the response in this section was to highlight relevant literature related to the research questions and study. The literature review included a thorough analysis of African American male student athletes, as well as high-achieving African American students in general, detailing their position in institutions of higher education.

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Additionally, I presented literature that framed the theoretical frameworks that guided this study: Stereotype Threat Theory and Banduras' (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory. Also presented was literature that highlighted gaps in scholarship regarding the influence of grit on academic achievement of African American male collegians.

In the subsequent chapter, I present information that guided the proposed method to investigate and carry out this study, an explanation of qualitative and quantitative research, and a subjectivity statement detailing my personal connection to the proposed research study. Finally, I defend why a qualitative research approach was most appropriate to investigate this topic and its implications.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY
Introduction

Educational and scholarly research has helped educators understand and evaluate problems within education. Research is the formal, systematic application of the scientific method to the study of problems; educational research is the formal, systematic application of the scientific method to the study of education (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The goal of educational research is essentially the same as the goal of all science: to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena—in this case, educational phenomena. In educational research, researchers commonly use three methods that are referred to as research paradigms. A research paradigm is a worldview or perspective about research held by a community of researchers that is based on a set of shared assumptions, concepts, values, and practices (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Bygrave (1989) introduced the three major educational research paradigms: quantitative research, qualitative research, and mixed research.

Historically, educational researchers used approaches that involved the scientific method. However, over the last three decades, researchers have adopted diverse philosophies toward their research. Quantitative research was the generally accepted research paradigm in educational research until early 1980, when the "paradigm wars" between advocated of quantitative and qualitative research reached a new peak (Guba, 1990; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). During the 1980s, many quantitative and qualitative researchers argued that their approach was superior. Some of the researchers were "purists", in the sense that they argued that the two approaches could not be used together because of differences in the worldviews or philosophies associated with the two approaches (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). This either-or position created the third

paradigm, mixed methods research. This addition to the quantitative and qualitative viewpoints created opportunities for research to be conducted by building knowledge and offered new ways to understand and study the world.

During the 1970s-90s, Egon Guba helped initiate the "paradigm dialogue" between quantitative research and the "new" research paradigm of qualitative research. Guba emphasized that research paradigms are characterized by the following philosophical assumptions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontology is the nature of the knowable, or the nature of reality (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Epistemology is the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable), or the paradigm's theory of knowledge (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Methodology determines how the inquirer should go about finding out knowledge and what methods should be used (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Later, two more dimensions of paradigms were added: axiology—What is the role of values in the inquiry process? and rhetoric—What kind of language and communication should be used in research? (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

Qualitative Research

According to Johnson & Christensen (2000), qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (i.e., nonnumeric) data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest. Creswell (2014) described qualitative research as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Qualitative research methods are based on different beliefs and designed for purposes different than quantitative research methods. Qualitative researchers believe the world has different meanings, and

they do not necessarily accept the view of a stable, coherent, uniform world (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Instead, they argue that all meaning is situated in a particular perspective and contexts; the world has many different meanings, none of which is necessarily more valid or true than another. The process of qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in two ways: (1) Qualitative research often involves the simultaneous collection of a wealth of narrative and visual data over an extended period of time, and (2) as much as is possible, data collection occurs in a naturalistic setting (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). These two characteristics of qualitative research, the simultaneous study of many aspects of a phenomenon and the attempt to study things as they exist naturally, help in part to explain the growing enthusiasm for qualitative research in education. Additionally, it is important to note that qualitative research is used to describe what is seen locally and sometimes to come up with or generate new hypotheses and theories (Johnson & Christensen, 2000; Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is used when little is known about a topic or phenomenon and when one wants to discover or learn more about it. In sum, it is commonly used to understand peoples' experiences and to express their perspectives.

Qualitative researchers tend to rely on the inductive mode of the scientific method, and the major objective of this type of research is exploration or discovery. This means that qualitative researchers generally study a phenomenon in an open-ended way, without prior expectations, and they develop hypotheses and theoretical explanations that

are based on their interpretations of what they observe (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

Qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth

understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants

in the context perceive them. To achieve the detailed understandings they seek,

qualitative researchers must undertake sustained in-depth, in-context research that allows

them to uncover subtle, less overt, personal understandings (Gay, Mills, & Airasian,

2009).

Methods

In the above section, I explained qualitative and quantitative research, as well as

outlined their differences. In this section, I reintroduce from response one the proposed

methodological approach—phenomenological design, and why this methodological

design was most appropriate for this research study. Additionally, I outline a study design

that included steps for participant and site selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Exam questions 1 and 2 presented a problem statement, a theoretical framework, the

statement of the problem, the significance of the study, and two research questions:

(RQ1): What are the academic experiences of African American male student-

athletes at PWI's in the Southeast Region?

(RQ2): What sources do these student-athletes utilize to persist and achieve

academically?

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative methodology approach to explore the presented

research questions in depth. Johnson & Christensen (2000) stated, "Educational

researchers like to explore educational issues using qualitative data, such as open-ended

interviews, that provide data based on the participants' perspectives and their actual words" (p. 18). Further, Creswell (2009) wrote that qualitative research "is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Qualitative research allows for the researcher to explore and understand intersections between race, culture, gender, and most importantly, understand students' experiences; therefore, qualitative researchers using this approach can make interpretations. Lastly, the qualitative research approach supports language and discourse as important pieces of research guided by qualitative method (Donnelly, 2009).

To study the research questions, this study was designed as a phenomenological investigation. Creswell (2009) contended that phenomenology describes the meaning for several individuals of their experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Researchers specifically explore "what" of an individual experience and "how" it was experience. This research study design was based on the premise that the experiences of high-achieving African American male student athletes varied from their White male counterparts, and that there are specific sources that these students utilize to persist and achieve at high levels.

Lastly, Creswell (2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2000) suggested that research guided by an interview protocol is best utilized to construct a study aimed at understand how people construct, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences.

Sampling Strategy

For the purpose of this study, I utilized a purposive sampling method. In purposive sampling, the researcher specifies the characteristics of a population of interest and then tries to locate individuals who have those characteristics (Johnson &

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Christensen, 2010; Palys, 2008). In short, purposive sampling is a nonrandom sampling technique by which the researcher solicits persons with specific characteristics to participate in a research study. When enough participants are obtained, the researcher does not ask anyone else to participate. Participants in this research study were purposefully chosen based on the criteria above and as set out by the researcher. Individuals chosen as a subject of the selected sample met the requirements and criteria established by the researcher to capture data about their experiences, academic motivation and self-efficacy, while being a high-achieving Black student athlete at a PWI.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The participants for the research study were purposefully selected based on the specific criteria established by the researcher. Participant demographics of age, race, sport, major, academic classification, and GPA were assessed when conducting participant selection. Due to the confidentiality of this study, sites are presented in the form of pseudonyms. Prior to beginning the study, I utilized an online survey to ask open-ended questions of participants regarding their perceptions and academic experiences while high-achieving student athletes at a PWI. Participants met the following criteria:

1. Black (African American) student athlete attending a Division I PWI
2. Enrolled full-time and in good-standing with their respective universities
3. Earned a cumulative 3.0 GPA at the time of the study
4. Classified as an undergraduate upperclassman (Sophomore, Junior, Senior)
5. Attended a college/university in the Southeast Region of the United States

Further, I utilized networking opportunities such as Facebook, student affairs list serves, university administrators, and personal contacts to obtain participants for this study. When potential participants were connected, I asked if the participants were knowledgeable of other participants who fit the study parameters. After the initial pilot survey was distributed and analyzed by the researcher, a list of questions were formulated for utilization in semi-structured interviews with participants who self-identified and self-selected himself through the use of the initial pilot survey. Prior to the individual interviews, I was required to complete a consent and disclosure form in addition to a form to capture demographic information.

Data Collection

An interview design was utilized for the collection of data for this study. The semi-structured interview consisted of the distribution of a pilot survey which were used to create a series of open-ended questions to identify trends; these trends were developed into questions that were used during individual participant interviews. The pilot survey was used to test reliability of the study by testing participants in the study. The interviews conducted by the researcher captured the narrative of the participant, which provided clarity related to the study's research questions. The overall goal of the interview was to obtain responses that were an authentic representation of the participants' experiences. Additionally, they provided participants the opportunity to add or clarify responses submitted in the pilot study.

Lastly, I conducted interviews of up to 60 minutes with each participant, and allowed opportunities for the participants to speak freely and openly about their experiences. Creswell (2013) wrote that in qualitative research involving an interview

protocol and data gathering, the questions should be relevant to the study, the participant, and research question. I used an audio voice recorder, and typewritten notes to accurately record the participants' responses.

Interview Design

Researchers use interviewing while conducting research as a stronger method of receiving pertinent and visual information from participants. Additionally, interviewing is strongly connected to people and their ability to make meaning of language, power, and culture, which is indicative of post-structural epistemologies (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2001; Davis 2004). Interviewing should be guided by interaction and conversation, rather than rigid and structured like a survey (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In this study, I conducted 60-minute interviews with participants using the following interview protocol.

Interview Protocol

1) Tell me about some of your life experiences: where did you grow up, attend college, kind of family you grew up with, and experiences and involvement in college?

2) What factors influenced your decision to attend college?

    a. What factors influenced your decision to attend [respective] college?

3) What/who influenced your decision to play sports?

    a. Did either of your parents play sports (in high school or college If so, what sports?

4) What expectations did you have of [respective] university prior to enrolling? What kinds of experience were you expecting to have?

    a. Which of those expectations have been met?

    b. Which of those expectations have not been met?

5) Tell me about your academic experiences at [respective] university.

    a. I see that your major is [INSERT MAJOR]. Tell me what that's like.

6) What does being a high-achiever mean to you?

    a. Is this an accurate perception of you? Why? Why not?

7) What does it mean to you to be a high -achieving student athlete at this institution?

8) Why do you think that you are academically driven?

9) At what point did you know you could excel academically at this institution?

10) What has been your source(s) of your motivation to perform well academically in college?

    a. How do you persist and maintain your momentum towards academics?

11) Tell me about a time when you started to question or lose confidence in your academic skills/talents.

12) Who has been the most supportive of your academic achievement at this university?

13) How do you balance the demands of your classes and participating in your sport?

    a. Discuss the challenges of balancing academics and athletics.

14) Tell me about your interactions with faculty members on campus.

    a. How would you describe the ways in which your professors perceive you as an African American student, athlete, and/or person? Can you share some examples with me?

      b. How do faculty treat student athletes? Do they treat student athletes the same as non-athletes? If not, what are the differences?

      c. Do professors treat African American and White student athletes the same? If not, what are the differences?

15) Has there ever been a time that you were stereotyped by faculty, staff, students, teammates, or coaches?

      a. How did you navigate this encounter?

16) Have your interactions with faculty affected your desire to persist academically?

17) What kind of impact has your athletic participation at [respective university] had on your academic success?

18) How have your coaches influenced your academic progress/achievement?

      a. In what way do coaches encourage academic achievement?

      b. How do coaches actually stifle or hinder academic achievement?

19) Talk about your relationship with your teammates.

      a. Do they encourage/discourage you to do well in the classroom?

20) In what ways are you different than your teammates?

21) In what ways are you different from other African American male student athletes at this university?

22) Discuss your relationship with students who are non-athletes at [respective] university. Explain why these relationships/friendships are important to you.

23) Tell me about your relationships with other African American male students on campus.

    a. How has your status both academically and athletically affected these interactions?

24) Other than athletics, are you involved in any other extracurricular activities on and/or off campus? (i.e., clubs, debate teams, fraternity) If so, what are they? If not, why not?

25) What are you planning to do after college?

26) Do you believe that [respective] university/college is preparing your for your future goals/plans? If so, how? If not, why?

27) What resources and support do you need to help you achieve your future plans/goals?

28) What academic achievement tips would you give to a first-year African American male student athlete? [PROBE]

29) What recommendations do you have for university officials about ways to improve the academic experiences of Black student athletes?

30) Do you have any questions for me?

31) Are there any other high- achieving African American student athletes at [respective] institution to whom you think I should talk?

**Follow up questions will be based on participant's responses.

Interview Logistics

Interviews for this study were held within a one-month time frame specifically designed for the recruiting, screening, interviewing, and transcribing of the interviews. This allowed me the opportunity to transcribe interviews so that any necessary follow-up was completed in a timely manner.

Participants were then pre-screened by phone or email. Pre-screening allowed me to communicate the purpose of the research to the participants, to assess their interest in participation, and present the consent form in advance; if the interview was conducted in person, it was scheduled as a one-hour interview time. Pre-screening also allowed the researcher the opportunity to secure a private location for the interview to take place.

As required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the interviews were guided by a research protocol; however, I was allowed to ask probing questions that the participant could decline to answer. Interviews were transcribed and the participants were given the option to either self-select a pseudonym name or be assigned one. Finally, interviews were conducted in person, by videoconference, Skype, Oovoo, Google hangout, or FaceTime. Participants were given this array of options due to travel constraints and the limited number of participants available that fit the study criteria.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves summarizing data in a dependable and accurate manner, and leads to the presentation of study findings in a manner that has an air of undeniability (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Lacey & Luff, 2001; Myles, 2015; Odell, 1997). Moreover, "data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of

coding, and finally representing the data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 180). This approach was most appropriate for data analysis since the proposed methodological approach included interviews.

The data analysis strategy for this study followed a procedure advanced by Creswell (2013):

- Sketching ideas

- Taking notes

- Working with words

- Identifying codes

- Reducing codes to themes

- Relating categories

- Creating a point of view

- Displaying data (p. 181).

Given the narrative, descriptive, and nonnumeric nature of the data that are collected in a qualitative study, it is not possible to number crunch and quickly reduce the data to a manageable form, as in quantitative studies. After the initial collection of the pilot survey, I identified trends associated within the responses provided by each participant. Next, I developed a set of interview questions that were utilized through interviews with the sample population. Once all data was collected from study participants, I self-transcribed the responses, and identified thematic areas for further exploration. Research appropriate statements were then isolated from the transcripts so that I could make sense of the data. Next, I coded the statements using a thematic approach and grouped each theme based on the identified phenomena. Themes are "broad

units of information that consist of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186); codes and themes bring procedure and consistency to the data obtained in qualitative inquiry.

At the end of coding and creating themes for the collected data, the next step was interpretation. Creswell (2013) defined interpretation as, "Qualitative research involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to larger meaning of the data. It is a process that begins with the development of codes, the formation of themes from the codes, and then the organization of themes into larger unites of abstraction to make sense of the data" (p. 187). Abstracting the data puts the pieces of the puzzle together to make meaning of the collected data. The proposed abstraction process contained codes and themes, but also direct quotes from interview participants that connected to the themes of the study. The trends and phenomena identified by the participant were juxtaposed and analyzed in search of broader trends.

Subjectivity Statement/Research Bias

Sports are integral and major assets in America's institutions of higher education. Current students and alumni at many Division I institutions invest their finances in the institution itself, and provide substantial donations to the athletic departments. African American student athletes are often recognized and praised for their athletic abilities; however, little to no attention is dedicated to their academic capabilities. Black student athletes are a valuable resource for universities, but often to the detriment of their academic careers. African American male student athletes are studied and viewed from a deficit perspective, highlighting only their academic failures and other adverse characteristics that may be associated with the title of "student athlete". However, little

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empirical research has been conducted on high-achieving Black male student athletes at PWI's who excel while simultaneously carrying out the responsibilities of being a "student" and an "athlete". Additionally, there is a paucity of research that explores this population of students' perceptions and academic experiences while being a high-achieving student athlete at a PWI. Therefore, this study was created to add to the existing literature of high-achieving African American student athletes around the world.

As a former college track and field athlete at a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) who maintained and graduated with a cumulative GPA of 3.99, I experienced first hand the stereotypical attitudes expressed by my same race peers. I heard often, "He's an athlete; I doubt if he makes the debate team", or "Your professors must give you grades; it's no way you have time to study and make good grades". As a high-achieving scholar athlete, I did not allow the negative opinions and perceptions of others to dictate my academic motivation towards success and completing a college degree. There were times that I did take these statements personally and tried to prove my peers wrong, but after a period of self-reflection, I realized it was not a battle worth fighting. Although I did not attend a Division I PWI, I did attend a graduate from university where there was great emphasis on athletics. While interacting with other athletes, I realized that there were a few athletes at this particular university who performed well academically and athletically; yet, there was no platform for these students to share their experiences or have their voices heard. As a researcher, a former high-achieving college athlete, and African American male, I am compelled to expose and highlight the academic successes and capabilities of students who work extremely hard against daily competing interests. I recognize that this study and its results have the

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potential to bring about informed change of how athletes are perceived not only in mainstream society, but also in colleges and universities across the United States. Addressing this issue uncovers larger implications for improving the overall image of African American student athletes, and provides exploration of the perceptions, motivation, and self-efficacy of high-achieving Black student athletes at Division I (PWI's) in the Southeast Region.

Ethical Considerations

Conversely to quantitative research (Creswell, 2009, 2013), qualitative research demands interpretation by the researcher and reader. Because qualitative research is subjective as compared to quantitative research, it is crucial that interviews and other collection methods are conducted and reported transparently, accurately, and reliably. Moreover, Kyale (1992) stated that research should produce findings that are generalizable even if study participants are limited. Therefore, researchers are encouraged and required to conduct research with an ethical approach. Researchers must present themselves authentically, allowing participants the opportunity to explore the nature and purpose of the study, the research procedures, and to outline the ethical considerations. Additionally, the researcher should inform all participants about how the data will be used and analyzed throughout the research process. The research questions outlined in this study and the interview questions did not pose any anticipated risks to the participant. Additionally, the interview protocol did not include questions about sexual practices or items related to their health and well-being. Lastly, participants' identities were kept confidential; any personal identifying descriptions were removed from this study, and

information was kept in a secure location only accessible by the researcher and his major advisor.

Conclusion

This study is based on my research agenda and past experiences that have shaped my desire to conduct scholarly research, and hopes for impacting the field of higher education with this research. Additionally, I have presented a statement of problem related to the academic success of African American male student athletes at Division I PWI's, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, and two research questions. Also, I presented two theoretical frameworks that guided this study: Stereotype Threat Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory.

To better understand student's motivation to succeed I included a section that discussed "GRIT", and how intersectionality can be conceptualized to better understand the participants in this study. Also included in this dissertation were the participant sampling, criteria, recruitment, and selection. The data collection method and interview protocol were identified, as were the reasons why this process is appropriate for this study, and how the data was analyzed. Lastly, I explored researcher subjectivity, bias, and the ethical considerations related to this proposed study.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS
Findings

The purpose of the phenomenological study was to investigate the academic experiences of high-achieving division I Black male student athletes who attended predominately White institutions in the Southeast Region. Findings from five semi-structured interviews with high-achieving Black male student athletes are presented in this chapter. Participants were assigned pseudonym names to protect confidentiality.

Throughout this chapter, the experiences of the student-athletes are presented verbatim from participant transcripts. These findings provide a rich and significant perspective of what it is like to be a Black male student-athlete at a PWI. Although participants attended different universities, many of their responses were consistent. The initial data analysis reported a number of themes, which were then condensed to three major themes and subthemes:

- "I'm Not In This Alone": Sources of motivation to persist and be a high-achieving student athlete

- "We're Not Your Average Joe": Microagressions and Stereotypes

- "I'm Here To Earn My Degree": Purposeful engagement inside the classroom

Theme 1. "I'm Not In This Alone":

The first major finding related to participants' role of self and individuals who had an impact on their academic success. Each of the participants' responded by describing himself as being self-motivated; however, each credited his academic success to various individuals- mother, father, family members, friends, coaches, community members, and academic advisors/counselors. They spoke about the sacrifices their

parents made to ensure they received a quality education, which inspired and motivated them to achieve at such a high level. Although most participants included their parents as sources of motivation, almost every participant described the importance of making his community proud. They believed that providing a positive image of a Black male would be rewarding for other young men in their communities, and also perceived this as a way of *reaching back*. The findings in this theme and subthemes provide a response to research question 2: *What sources do these student-athletes utilize to persist and achieve academically?* This theme is comprised of three subthemes: *Here On A Wing & A Prayer, We're Rooting For You, and It's Harder Than I Thought*.

Here On A Wing & A Prayer

Participants' referenced keywords such as *prayer, faith, religion, and God* throughout their interviews. Despite being popular athletes on campus, and in some instances popular across the world, the participants remained humble and credited their academic success mainly to their family members and their faith in God. Participants described their relationship with God as something personal and meaningful in their quest to be high-achieving at their respective institutions. Being told to trust God and always seeking spiritual assistance in times of struggle and doubt encouraged these student athletes to make positive decisions about their education. With lingering reminders from family members that with prayer anything is possible, these high- achieving students persisted and maintained high grade point averages, while actively involved in their sport and other extracurricular activities. Corey Bailey, a student-athlete at Central Region University, explained his feeling about his spirituality and his desire to achieve.

I grew up in a low-income neighborhood known as Midland, which is one of the projects in my hometown. I have overcome a lot of obstacles to get to where I am now, but I am grateful for all the opportunities that I have had. My mother was a single parent; my dad died when I was seven years old, so my mom pretty much had to work two, three jobs my whole life just to make ends meet for me and my two sisters. So I know for sure, I'm only here on a wing and a prayer, and I must take advantage of whatever resources it'll take to be successful.

Three participants discussed at length how their religion and spirituality impacted their academic success. They explained how their socialization was directly related to their belief in God, ultimately their source of motivation to achieve and persist. Jeremy Scott, a sophomore kinesiology major at Lake Wood University, discussed how his parents struggled financially to support his dream of becoming a college football player. Jeremy, the oldest of three children, understood first hand the sacrifices his parents made to ensure he received a quality education while pursuing a football career. Jeremy believed that God has played a major role in providing opportunities that he was told would never become possible. "When my mother dropped me off at my dorm room, she helped me carry my bags, trophies, and medals. Her last words to me as she drove off were, "No matter how good you do here, remember that prayer and remaining faithful is a requirement to achieve your goals." The need to stay yoked to his spiritual beliefs was important as he matriculated throughout his freshman year and earned a 3.6 cumulative GPA.

Though religion and spirituality played a major role in these student athletes' academic success, two participants explained their lack of spiritual guidance prior to

enrolling in college. One participant described prayer as an *opiate*, explaining that prayer was a newly learned hobby that he found to be effective. Mike Stevenson, a junior and mass communications major at University of Southeastern, described himself as someone who was not religious or spiritual before attending his respective institution. "When I got here, I really was focused on staying on the basketball team. I have one teammate, who happens to be my roommate and his dad is a pastor. I went to his church one time and I've been going ever since." Tyrone Wells, a senior sociology major at Lakewood University, believed that his religion and belief in God came later in his college career. "I started out going to the church on campus, but I couldn't really relate to the doctrine. I just keep my relationship with God personal and reminded myself that I'm only here because of his grace."

Participants described the emotional stressors that come with being a student athlete that can become overwhelming. The high expectations of coaches, practice three times a day, maintaining a personal goal of achieving a high GPA, and the constant threat to keep their athletic positions were realities for these student athletes. Constantly carrying out the same routine daily became an issue for most participants, many of whom struggled with a balance between personal life, and school related responsibilities. Three participants explain the meaning of their experiences.

> I'm not sure if you were an athlete in college, but man, it's really hard to keep a sane mind with all the stuff I have going on half the time. I mean I'm only one person and I do need time for me. Sometimes I think I'm just going through the motions, but at the end of the day, I know I have a main goal. So at times like

that, I have to keep my head and pray, even if that means calling my mama or

grandmother because I'm not that good at it, but I'm learning. (Tyrone).

Corey explained his brief disconnection from his faith, which took a turn for the worse.

He admitted that he had not been as focused and obedient as he should, and described

how it impacted his academics.

> I've done a lot of things that I know I shouldn't have done. Shit, sometimes I
>
> wonder why am I even here doing all this work and I'm not guaranteed a spot in
>
> the Olympics or run track professionally. Toward the end of my sophomore year,
>
> things got rough for me and my grades slipped. But I remember my high school
>
> Biology teacher fussing at me for getting this tattoo right here on my arm [*pulls
>
> up right sleeve*]. The scripture is from John 3:16; I can do all things through
>
> Christ that strengthen me. So whenever I get stressed or start to worry too much, I
>
> think about what this scripture means to me and it helps me do better.

Despite receiving negative feedback and enduring unconstructive comments about his

academic abilities, Mike persisted and continued to excel in both his classes and on the

basketball court.

> I know I'm not Einstein, but at some point I realized that I needed additional help
>
> along the way. Having to deal with people telling me what I can't do, I get tired of
>
> hearing that. My mama always taught me that: Faith is the substance of things
>
> hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. So whenever I get aggravated from
>
> being told what I won't achieve, or how hard it will be to get a decent GPA and
>
> be a star athlete, I'm somehow redirected to my faith, man, and that's all I can
>
> count on at this point.

While it is unrealistic to assume that being a student athlete is an easy task, the participants explained how their faith was connected to their desire to maintain and persist academically, despite adverse conditions. Spirituality and religion were essential factors in how these student athletes made daily decisions that affected their academic status at the university. Some participants concluded that being closely connected to a higher power is comforting, and for some, provides a since of encouragement aside from other support systems such as family, friends, coaches, teammates, and community members.

"We're Rooting For You"

The participants consistently gave credit to and discussed how their parents, mainly their mothers, had a significant impact on their outlook of being successful and acquiring a quality education. Each discussed how his parents expected him to perform nothing less than great, and often asked about grades. More importantly, participants thought they owed it to their parents to attend and complete college. Tyrone stated, "For me, it's really all about making my mama proud. I've watched her get me to where I am; now I can finally pay her back by finishing college." For some participants, college was never a priority of their parents, partly because they did not attend themselves.

> Growing up I knew I wanted to be someone that could always help other people. Of course at the time, I didn't really know the name of it or even know how to get to where I wanted to be. Even though my mom was strict, she never forced me to attend college, but she always encouraged me to pursue a college degree, something she wasn't able to do. To be honest, no one in my immediate family has ever attended college or even has a degree. It wasn't part of the conversation,

but when I began talking about going to college, my mother was immediately on board and as helpful as she could be in the process. That's why I love her (Corey). In contrast to Corey's experience, participants Kevin and Jeremy were forced to do well both athletically and academically. Kevin's mother was strict throughout his high school career. Using negative consequences as a way to ensure a secured spot into a top university, she often chastised him for earning a B. Kevin stated, "I felt like I couldn't let my mom down, but at the same time I felt pressured. I know it was all love though." The pressure was a reminder that academics were first—athletics were a luxury.

Unlike other participants' parents, Tyrone explained his mother's attitude toward education as demanding and mandatory. This type of motivation encouraged Tyrone to excel, mainly because he was able to understand the passion his mother had for upward mobility.

As for Jeremy, encouragement to attend college and achieve was presented in a masked way of tough love. Jeremy recalled a conversation that he had with his mother during his senior year.

> It was like an angry woman telling me, "You have a dead end here. There's nothing here for you but trouble." My mom never really cared too much about my athletic career, but my uncle did. He would bring me to all of my practices, and sometimes my mother would think of things for me to do that kept me away from football. All she really cared about was my schoolwork, and I feel like I let her down when I graduated number 2 in my class as Salutatorian. So that's why I'm making sure I do what I need to do to get out of here, but I know I have a few more years to go.

The pressure to achieve served as motivation for most participants. Being constantly reminded that the only way to make better of their circumstances required them to advance their education, for most, was a deciding factor in their decision to attend college. "Moving away to college is the best think that could've happened to me. Anything beats being stuck at home waiting to hear back from local jobs and restaurants," added Mike.

In addition to recognizing their parents for their academic success, participants were also explicit about their role in being a high-achieving student athlete. Each participant spoke about his self-confidence, which ultimately drove his academic success. "I know I'm smart; people tell me that all the time. But I know if I don't tell myself that I'm smart, and genuinely believe it, then no one else's opinion even matters," stated Mike. Participants discussed how having self-assurance helped in times of adversity. "I use to doubt myself in high school, but when I realized my potential, I capitalized on it for the better," said Tyrone. Almost all of the student athletes talked about having pride and not settling for less. They strongly agree that having pride is internally controlled. Having pride encouraged these students to push themselves beyond their comfort zones.

> I remember taking my first class in psychology. It wasn't very many males
> my department, especially Black males. My professor would always make it point
> to acknowledge that I was one of the very few Black guys in the class. I really felt
> uncomfortable when he would state that, but I thought maybe I should take pride
> in being the one of the only Black males. It couldn't be a bad thing. (Corey)

Although participants realized that their role was vital in their own success, they consistently referenced their local communities, friends, and role models as integral

components in their academic success. They discussed in detail how important it was to them to be a great product of their community and continue to set positive examples. Each participant expressed his love for his hometowns, and acknowledged that without the help of others, he never would have made. "I really just think about all the love and support I get back home. It's like I'm a celebrity. It's a good feeling, but at the same time I want to channel that energy in a good way and give back," said Kevin. Jeremy stated, "When I graduated from high school all I really wanted to do was play football. I didn't have any money to buy anything, but my people had my back. Everybody came together and made it happen, so I owe them." Tyrone mentioned his success was encouraged by his community, and credited their acts of kindness as motivation to succeed. He stated, "People I didn't know would always tell me how proud they are of me. That really meant something to me. I met a lot of good people and for that I'm grateful."

Not only did participants discuss how impactful their communities had been toward their success, but they also discussed their plans to reciprocate the love. Emotionally forthcoming, Corey recalled a moment when the mayor of his hometown encouraged him.

> The track team was invited to eat at one of the nicest banquets that were held in the town. Nobody really knew why we were going there, we were just told to dress up and look presentable. When we got there, everything was laid out real nice and it had a lot of important people there. We ended up getting recognized for winning all conference titles, and the mayor acknowledged me in front of the crowd. He talked about how proud he was of me in particular for achieving such a high GPA while being an athlete. That really made me happy and it gave me a

greater sense of my abilities to do well. It was really an honor and I'll never forget that moment as long as I live.

While expressing their gratitude toward their communities, participants were intentional about acknowledging their high school guidance counselors as essential in their high academic achievement. Guidance counselors were recognized as being supportive, patient, and trustworthy. Kevin stated, "My guidance counselor really was the bomb. She stayed on me and made sure I had everything I needed by the deadline. She would even call my mama if she thought we wasn't moving fast enough." It was apparent that guidance counselors were influential to these student athletes. Jeremy asserted, "I'm not gone lie; I was real lazy when it came to the actual process of college. I knew I was going, I just didn't know where and I was overwhelmed with decisions, so I procrastinated. My guidance counselor called me out on my slacking and challenged me to do better." Although acknowledged as being supportive in the academic achievement of these student athletes, Kevin discussed the lengths to which his guidance counselor went to ensure he applied and was accepted to college. He admitted that she might not have been the nicest person in the world, but she was adamant about the success of all students in the school.

> Half the time I didn't even know what she was talking about when she would ask me about my financial aid. I just figured I was going to college for free since I was so good at basketball. My guidance counselor kept pressuring me to take the ACT, but I knew the test was hard so I avoided it. I felt like my guidance counselor was a second mom. She took out her credit card, went to the ACT website, asked me for my personal information, and signed me up on the spot. She even asked me if I needed a ride to take my test, and agreed to take me. From

that point on I knew she had my back and was a person I could trust to be in my

corner always.

In addition to these student-athletes' supportive guidance counselors, participants noted how impactful, supportive, and encouraging their coaches were toward their academic success. Because these athletes were on contracted scholarships, their coaches as well as their professors had high expectations. Most participants discussed their difficulty adjusting to constantly altered practice times, and explained how it impacted their academic performance—both negatively and positively. Some participants mentioned how coaches encouraged them both on and off the court/field. Providing incentives for good grades and rewarding academic milestones were common experiences for most participants. Jeremy stated, "I'd consider myself new to the team and still learning how to balance my school work and my football schedule. But my coach is flexible and he always get us extra workout equipment [Nike bags, under armors, etc.,] as a gift if he felt we did something worthy." Tyrone discussed the competitive and supportive relationship he shared with his teammates. He stated, "No matter how much we compete with each other, at the end of the day it's all about helping the next person. My coach taught us that the moment we became part of the track team, and we all understood that." Coaches were described as individuals who were strict, but also willing to lend a helping hand whenever these student athletes experienced any adversity, whether academically or personally.

Although some participants discussed how essential their coaches had been in their academic success, two participants explicitly discussed the challenges they experienced with their coaches. While most coaches were empathetic relative to these student athletes' academic concerns, others were less willing to be flexible with practice schedules. Jeremy spoke about

his difficulties in making the transition from high school to college. "My coach would tell me put my big boy pants on and handle whatever is thrown at me. He feels like sleep is for lazy people and that I should always be up working at being great. But I don't know if he really understood how that impacted me as a newbie not only on the team but at the school period."

Other participants were not afraid to communicate how their coaches could have been better supportive in their academic pursuit.

> I would literally come back to my room at about 11-11:30 every night, and still had to stay up late and make sure I got my homework done. When practice was switched from 8am to 6am, which really threw me off because it wasn't enough time to nap and I was falling asleep in class. When I explained to my coach that I wasn't properly resting he asked me how many hours were in a day. When I told him 24, he later said "and half of those 24 hours belong to basketball, so feel free to do whatever else with the other 12" (Mike).

The notion that it truly *takes a village* was apparent in the participants' experiences. Through analyzing the data collected, it was evident that these student athletes utilized multiple sources of motivation and encouragement to persist and maintain their high academic achievements. Although it can be concluded that participants' mothers were vital in their educational pursuit, the participants were intentional in recognizing everyone whom they believed had an influence on both their athletic and high scholastic academic achievements.

It's Harder Than I Thought

Despite being identified as high-achieving, participants expounded on their academic experiences, and detailed the struggles they endured. Some made connections between their high school academic curriculums and the rigor of their college curriculum. A few

participants expressed that they felt somewhat academically prepared for being both a student and an athlete, but they did not realize or even image the magnitude of work ethic and commitment required to be successful. Some participants described not feeling smart enough and having feelings of doubt about their academic abilities. Kevin mentioned, "It really got to the point where I thought I was gone have to make a decision between being on the basketball team or keeping my academic scholarship. I knew if I lost my academic scholarship, my coach wasn't giving me any extra money because of the budget." Kevin felt as though his dreams were falling apart because he was not able to manage being both a student and an athlete. However, after visiting with staff members in the Office of Academic Support, he devised a plan tailored to his practice and school schedule.

Another athlete described how being involved in multiple organizations became a struggle for him, even having to resign from his elected position. He explained his feelings of embarrassment and contemplated withdrawing fully from the organization.

Honestly speaking, it was kind of embarrassing having to step down from my position as Vice President of the National Pan-Hellenic Council. At my school, our organizational advisors really believe in putting academics first, and when my GPA suffered the fall semester of my junior year, I knew I had to make some changes. I'm used to stuff being real easy for me to figure out, but I really couldn't balance my time between all these organizations and being an athlete. I began to question myself and ask, "*Am I really smart enough, or am I just perpetuating what people think about me?*" So I had to buckle down and realistically narrow down what I could be involved in. I mean I still have above a 3.0 and this is my last year, so I'm really focused on getting into graduate school on a free ride (Tyrone).

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Although all participants noted that they were self-motivated and confident in their academic abilities, one student in particular highlighted a moment where he felt as though college was too difficult, and that maybe he should have considered a community college before attending a university. This moment of self-doubt resulted in a conversation with both a faculty advisor and the head coach.

> One of the main reasons I even committed to Lakewood University is because I was offered a good amount of money to pay for my schooling. I didn't really think about how hard the work was going to be; I just wanted to major in kinesiology, make good grades, and play football. But when I actually got into the introductory classes for some of my core-required classes I realized it was a gap in what I knew and didn't know. So that mean I had to work extra hard just to achieve what I'm normally used to earning a 4.0. And trust me that didn't come easy. I even thought about leaving after my first year to go to a community college to kind of get a firm foundation, but I wouldn't be able to play football. But I plan to have at least a 3.8 by the end of this upcoming year. I think I'm being a perfectionist and too hard on myself. (Jeremy)

The majority of participants were upperclassmen and were able to delve deeper into what they considered to be *hard* or *difficult* throughout their academic journey. Many of these student athletes are first-generation college students. Some had parents who attended college, but did not finish, and others have parents who had a minimum of a high school education. Therefore, being knowledgeable about the actual process of enrolling and being retained in college was ambiguous to most of the participants. One student added, "I've been attending this school going on three years, and I still have a hard time figuring out what offices are for what" (Mike). In some instances, college students are not knowledgeable about the many campus resources that are

offered. Student athletes' schedules are especially hectic and there is rarely a chance to do anything outside of their class and athletic obligations. One student explained his anger and discomfort regarding an assignment that was given by a professor.

> Sometimes I felt like I was a burden on people, you know? Asking too many questions, or just being real needy. But I was just seeking help because I know it's out there. I was assigned a research paper for my Introduction to Sociology course. At my high school we didn't write papers much; everything was pretty much hands on, so I admit I struggled in that area. But I had a hard time getting my professor to even sit down with me and explain to me the content of the assignment. She would get an attitude and act as though I'm inconveniencing her by asking for extra help. Man, it was really hard for me making that adjustment, and then, having to deal with extra bullshit that came with being on the track team, I was kind of over it all. I had to figure out a solution. I had been solving all my other problems; this one was just added to the list. (Corey)

Making adjustments to new environments can be difficult but it can be harder for some than others. Emotional stress can take a toll, and the overall of feeling of being an imposter can be harmful to one's academic achievements. As a student-athlete, the better one is athletically and academically, the better the chances of being offered opportunities. Kevin described his experience as one that he will never forget. He asserted, "Going to college far away can really be scary, especially not knowing anyone. It's like you are thrown to the wolves and forced to figure out how to survive. I feel like I'm just getting the hang of this and I'm about to be a junior, despite doing well so far." The common feeling shared among all participants was the difficulty of adjusting and transitioning from high school to college. Providing a solution to the

presented problem, Tyrone shared an idea to ensure academic success among all student athletes.

> Instead of focusing on how to help student athletes bring their grades up, I think coaches, professors, anybody involved, should make an effort to make sure we have what we need so that there will be no excuse for our grades to go down. I mean they used to have study hall, but after a while they stopped enforcing it for athletes, or people just chose not to come and took whatever consequence—if any. But being the responsible person that I am, I still went to study hall and held myself accountable, but it was still hard. And knowing that you really don't have anyone that you can blame for your failure but yourself, I think that's what really motivated me to get on my A game and step it up a notch and focus on what's after college.

Theme 2: "I'm Here To Earn My Degree"

The second major finding in this study related to the academic experiences of high-achieving Black male student athletes at PWIs. As referenced in the literature review, images of Black males in higher education have not been positive for approximately the past 30 years. Enrollment numbers for Black males remain low, and many colleges and universities around the world struggle to increase retention rates for this population of students. Moreover, Black males are rarely referenced positively in terms of academic success. Exploring deeper into the experiences of Black male student-athletes who perform well must be a priority for scholars seeking solutions to this educational crisis. Moreover, the findings in this theme and subthemes provide a response to research question 1: *What are the academic experiences of African American male student-athletes at PWI's in the Southeast Region?* Participants responded to a series of open-ended questions regarding their academic experiences, mainly focusing on their academic

involvement, in-class experiences, and interactions with faculty and staff. This theme consists of three subthemes: *I Feel Negative Energy and I Had To Justify My Belonging.*

I Feel Negative Energy

When asked to explain their academic experiences at their respective institutions, many participants felt strongly about things they experienced through their academic careers. As the researcher, my job was to ensure the confidentiality of all participants; informing them that everything discussed would remain confidential opened the opportunity for candid conversations. Although some of the questions seemed broad, all participants made an effort to give clear and vivid examples of their responses. To truly understand students' experiences, they were allowed to express whatever they felt comfortable sharing at the moment. Some felt as though this was an opportunity to help better their academic situation, with hopes of seeing resolutions in the future for students similar to them.

While conducting interviews with participants, it was evident that many of them were passionate about making connections with students outside of their sport. Using class sessions as a way to engage and critically exercise the mind was a hobby of most participants. In contrast to the deficit perspective often discussed in literature regarding Black male student athletes, these students had a different outlook on their education. Most of them attended school outside of their home state, and were unfamiliar with culture in their new locations, which had the potential to bring about separation anxiety and nervousness. Tyrone discussed his first interaction in his college experience and described feeling thick tension from other students in his sociology course.

> I literally felt like I was invading someone's privacy by the way I was getting
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> stared at in class. Everyone looked at me as though I didn't belong. One girl even
>
> had the nerve to ask me why I'm taking the class. As if it's a crime to be enrolled

in a Sociology class—my damn major. But I just took it as her being curious, and never thought anything about it. Later on in the class, the professor asked us to pair up with a neighbor and learn facts about them so that we could introduce our new "friend" to the entire class. Well, let's just say it was hard for me to find a "friend". Seemed like everybody was avoiding me and didn't want to learn anything about me I guess. So I felt isolated the rest of the semester; it wasn't really a big deal.

Other participants in the study spoke at length about overall campus climate as it related to their academic experiences. Similar to Tyrone's encounter, Mike explained a situation regarding a student in his media course. He stated, "I didn't know anyone in the class, and seemed as though they had no interest in getting to know me. You ever felt like someone just purposely went the other way to avoid you? I bet if they knew I was an athlete they would've been all over me." While trying to understand these student athletes' experiences, it became apparent that most of them felt as though the only way they could make a good connection or run across a good friend [other than teammates] would be outside of the classroom. Interestingly, Mike provided an elaborative response about a bittersweet experience he faced at his respective institution.

I think I'm smart enough to know that I'm not the brightest person at Central Region University, but I'm also no dummy. For as long as I can remember, I've always been really vocal and expressed how I felt. It was a time in class where we were expected to each respond to a question projected on the Promethean board. Because it was a seminar type of class it was only about 10 students total enrolled. When the professor asked for my response, I swear it was like "all eyes on me". I normally don't get intimidated, but at that moment, I felt outnumbered and

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thought I would say something wrong and make myself look really crazy. Even

though I knew the professor had an idea that I was nervous, I still kept a confident

attitude. After class one of my classmates told me how great of an argument I

created, and that she thought I should be more assertive in my delivery, and I

appreciated that. They weren't all bad.

Although most participants stated that they felt tension and negative energy from students,

some stated that they received the same attitudes and levels of discomfort from their professors. The

participants cited instances where they felt as though their professors were not supportive, and did

not feel as though they were interested in helping them maintain their academic success. When

responding to questions regarding their expectations of faculty, some of the students had high hopes

of positive experiences, but instead, encountered the opposite. Jeremy stated, "Before coming here,

I really thought I was going to get hands-on attention and the chance to really talk to my professors.

To keep it real, I don't even know if my professor knows my name, and that's not cool to me."

Feelings of isolation and separation became the reality for many of the participants. Corey added,

"It's just the idea of not really knowing who truly has your back or who really wants to see you do

well academically is what bothers me. If I'm doing good on the track field, it's all cool, but if I have

a question about an assignment or anything, it's like I'm brushed off."

Contrary to existing literature regarding Black male student success, participants in this study

exuded qualities that were not commonly reflective of Black male student athletes. The willingness

and desire to learn became more evident when discussing relationships between their professors and

themselves. For all of the participants, a challenge was something that was frequently welcomed—

especially academically. These student athletes experienced adversity their entire lives, but

ultimately used their self-motivation and persistent attitudes to overcome obstacles. However, one

student noted his unwillingness to accept no as an answer to his professor. After experiencing multiple semesters of *going through the motions*, this participant explained his frustration with his professor, who also happened to be the department chair.

> One expectation that I hoped for was fully experiencing my academic career, in every way. Some classes were a lot easier than others, but in some of my core classes, I had trouble understanding the material and I feel like my professor didn't give a damn if I understood or not. I can really say that I felt as though I walked out of some classes not fully understanding the material. Of course I passed, but I don't feel like I completely understood what was being explained in there. There really wasn't any further explanation outside of the classroom. This kind of frustrated me, and I asked my professor to go into depth. He said that he would have the teaching assistant email me about doing an Adobe connect session. I refused to accept this, and practically had to make demands to get things accomplished. It shouldn't have to be all that. (Kevin)

Being fully engaged and present in class was important to each participant in the study. Almost all participants discussed a time when being fully engaged brought about positive outcomes from both professors and classmates. Jeremy stated, "If you look prepared and ready to learn, then some professors will take you serious. Like in my human sexuality class, my professor knew I liked the subject, so he would always make sure to call on me." One participant even stated that he enjoyed being in his professors' class so much that often he would stop by just to wrap up conversations that weren't finished in class. Tyrone stated, "I did have this cool professor though; he knew I was smart so he would always call on me to answer questions. I appreciated that. I use to hang in his office between classes and practice and he didn't even

mind." When asked about their experience regarding how professors were influential, Corey provided this response.

> I really do understand that it may not be the professors' job to walk us through every single step of college, or even care for that matter. But I do think at some point, as a professional, and certainly as a human being, that you should give a damn about your students. Especially if you're an educator. Like I said earlier, adjusting to practice times and waking up early was a real struggle for me. I use to always fall asleep in class, and I didn't realize that I was reinforcing what people had already thought of me. I tried my hardest to stay on top of things, but if it wasn't for Dr. Johnson staying on me and not allowing me to use my sport as an excuse, I really don't think I would have made it. During class time, he didn't care how tired I was, he made an effort to engage me in the class lecture. He taught me that the only way to successfully make it through his class was to show him I'm as interested in what he has to say, as much as I listen to my coach and I'd be better in the long run. And that made so much sense to me.

I Had To Justify My Belonging

While being a student athlete can have its positive side, athletes discussed a major challenge related to their academic success. Many of the athletes thought they had to justify their belonging at the university—outside of their respective sport. Although it is rare for Black male athletes to excel both academically and athletically, these student athletes believed that they would forever have to explain why they belonged at the university. Tyrone responded, "I really don't care what people think about me personally. I'm just here to better myself, and help others along the way. It's always the White kids that's asking me why I chose here. I just think that's crazy." Other participants discussed the need to "*fit in"* or prove their worthiness. Mike

explained how not only his classmates doubted his academic abilities, but also his professors. He stated, "I have my days when I want to participate in class. Sometimes I feel like being bothered, other times I don't. But what I don't like is when people doubt me based on my nonchalant attitude."

Participants also held the perception that other classmates were reluctant to interact with them on academic assignments. When asked to find a partner for assignments, participants stated they noticed their peers always excluded them. Kevin mentioned "To keep it real, I didn't care if they didn't want me to work with them anyway. I can do most of the assignments on my own, but it's the principal of the matter. Don't automatically exclude me because you think I'm not smart enough." A few student athletes discussed how their past life experiences were connected to the experiences that they had while a student athlete at their respective institutions.

> Growing up where I'm from, I was always looked at as the youngest and weakest of the group and I was always told what I couldn't do. I really got tired of people doubting me. I sometimes used that doubt as a way to prove people wrong or show them why I deserve something, no matter what the case may be. And I feel like when I got here it was the same thing all over again. Especially having to deal with the attitudes of some professors, knowing they really don't want to help you, but you still have to deal with it. I'm capable of performing just like the rest of the other 50 kids in here. Never judge a book by its cover. (Jeremy)

The need to justify their academic work and their role as students became exhausting for some student athletes. A few stated that they had to work twice as hard to be recognized or taken seriously, but that still did not stifle or impede their academic success. Two students specifically mentioned how some professors alluded to offering extra credit, before grading the initial

assignment. Mike stated, "It's the ultimate slap in the face when a professor asks you in front of everyone in the class if you need extra credit. I wanted to feel embarrassed, but I kindly told him, 'No, I'm doing great in the course and even in the position to help others'." Mike used this energy as motivation to excel and eventually finished the course with an A+.

Corey was forthcoming with his experience as it related to skepticism and doubt from his professor.

> I'm gonna be a junior this year and I think I've been doing pretty good for myself being that my schedule is so hectic. Most times I would need to leave class a little bit early to make it to practice on time, but it was no more than about 5 minutes early. When I scheduled an appointment to meet with my professor about an absence that I would have due to a track meet, he greeted me with the wrong name, and proceeded to ask me if I needed an extension on the assignment. I thought maybe he was genuinely trying to help me, but when I really thought about it, it seemed as though he was treating me like an academic welfare case. I didn't like that feeling at all.

The participants unanimously confirmed that they all experienced doubt, skepticism, and the need to prove and justify their belonging or academic abilities. Because they experienced challenges most of their lives, they remained steadfast throughout all adversity. Even in instances when they felt isolated or felt tension between professors or classmates, their self-motivation fueled their academic success and achievements. One student athlete recalled a moment when he was faced with adversity from a White peer in a heated classroom discussion.

> Everybody pretty much knew what the deal was when it came to group work. If the professor split us up into groups, he would normally assign us based on random order instead of wasting time letting everybody pick their own partner. This White girl said,

"Why can't we work with whoever we want? I don't want to be with anyone that's not

going to carry their own weight." I knew she was talking about me, so I immediately

called her out on it. She then acted as thought she meant it in a different way. It's typical

shit like that, which really pisses me off. (Tyrone)

The study participants clearly faced challenges related to perceptions of their academic skills

and abilities. With little, some, or no academic support from peers and professors, these student

athletes managed to successfully navigate the stressors of being a student, an athlete, and managing

a social life.

Theme 3: "We're Not Your Average Joe"

Stereotypes and Racism

The third theme identified in participant's responses recounted situations where student athletes

thought they experienced stereotypes or racism from faculty, staff, and peers. In every interview,

participants stated multiple instances where they observed stereotypical and racist attitudes. For

many, these attitudes were experienced in class as opposed to out of class. Participants stated that

they always felt the pressure to either conform or resist stereotypes, regardless of the time or place,

while attending their respective institutions. Some participants spoke at length about hostile

classroom environments and situations that occurred both inside and outside of the classroom,

discussed how their academic abilities were always impacted, how they endured challenges by

faculty and peers due to their participation in athletics, and how they internalized the stereotypical

and racist attitudes and actions from various individuals on campus. Sub-themes in this section

include: *I'm Not A Slacker* and *Did You Really Just Say That.* Furthermore, the findings in this

theme and subthemes provide a response to research question 1: *What are the academic experiences*

of African American male student-athletes at PWI's in the Southeast Region?

I'm Not A Slacker

While many athletes are perceived as being lazy, "get-overs", slackers, and notorious for being stereotyped as having little to no academic abilities, participants in this study shared how these perceptions were internalized, and, most importantly, how they successfully navigated such experiences. Student athletes discussed the challenges they endured during classroom instruction and their interactions with faculty, staff, and peers. Most of the participants thought that some professors did not give them a chance. A few stated that the pressure of being a student did not compare to the challenges and adversity experienced in their respective sports. Corey noted, "Half the time my professors automatically thought I was trying to get over on them. I remember when I presented my schedule to my Biology teacher and she brushed me off and said that athletes get no special treatment." Although the participants in the study did not wish to seek "*the easy way out*", they faced hardships and stereotypical treatment from faculty and peers.

Some student athletes spoke about how intentional they were in the classroom relative to their learning and academic achievement. One of them most difficult stereotypes that student-athletes discussed was the need to prove to not only their professors that they were not slackers, but to their peers. "Imagine being an athlete at a predominately White school like Lakewood University. It really ain't easy. I feel like my professors are harder on my just because I'm an athlete. It's like they expect me to slack or something," noted Jeremy. For many of the participants, having an "*off day*" was never an option. One student recalled a situation where he felt tension and stereotypical treatment by his professor, also an honors society advisor, and also by the dean of his academic college.

> I remember when specifically when I broke my ankle and was in a cast for a little over three months. I really wanted to give up because most of my professors wouldn't work

with me. I'm not gone lie; sometimes I was late to class because I had to wait on either

my teammate or girlfriend to help me get to class. One day I was late to class and had a

quiz. Typically if you're late the professor won't let you take the quiz, but for me I

thought he would be a bit more compassionate and understanding about my situation.

Instead, he embarrassed me in front of the class and asked me to wait outside until

everyone was done with the quiz. After class was over, he fussed at me about being a

slacker and even said he would make a recommendation that I drop the class if I was late

again. He wasn't trying to work with me at all. I just feel like that's real messed up,

especially coming from him [his professor]. (Corey)

Equally frustrating, as described by participants, was the stereotype that typical athletes do not

"*carry their weight*", i.e. fulfill academic responsibilities. Because athletes are known to have busy

schedules (early morning/afternoon/evening practice, full-time class schedules, and common

traveling expectations), faculty and peers always questioned their ability to uphold classroom

obligations. In some instances, participants were assigned to random groups for class presentations

and felt uncomfortable due to stereotypical attitudes and comments from their peers. The pressure

to perform at a certain level academically, and to maintain a high grade point average, became

difficult for some student athletes. Tyrone stated, "It's one thing to think it your head that I'm not

capable of doing this type of work. But to tell explicitly tell me that I'm in this group because I fit

in with these students is a slap in the face." Being categorized and placed in certain learning and

experimental groups was all too common for these participants. Mike described his experience

while visiting the academic writing center.

When I got to the writing center, I asked if there was someone available that could help

me with my persuasive argument paper. I'm guessing the young lady at the circulation

desk was a student worker or maybe a volunteer or something. She didn't even ask me

for my ID or nothing. The only thing she told me was that the lady who normally works

with athletes was not there on that day and she wouldn't be returning until 2 days later. It

really had me confused because I never identified myself as an athlete, nor did I have on

anything that would recognize me as such. Initially, I was really mad, but after thinking

about it, I realized it was a learning opportunity. I could easily get mad but what would

that solve? It's like you kind of have to roll with the punches here. Sometimes you run

into good people and other times it's the opposite. But that wasn't the first time that

happened to me though.

Aside from stereotyping in classroom settings, participants also discussed moments outside of the

classroom where they experienced both racism and stereotypical treatment from individuals on campus.

Racism and stereotyping were experienced not only in classroom settings, but also across campus.

Whether in the cafeteria, student union, library, or academic resource centers, being stereotyped and

treated differently/unfairly were common experiences of the study participants.

For most participants, study hall was a requirement, unless otherwise directed by coaches. Student

athletes were expected to complete a minimum of 20 documented study hours. One athlete discussed

his experience with a member of the library staff in an attempt to be cleared from study hall

requirements.

The rule was clear cut and written in stone. If you have over a 3.0 GPA and hold the

status of a sophomore or higher, you were exempt for study hall. I see the White dudes

get exempt all the time with no trouble. After talking to my coach and getting the

approval to be exempt from study hall, it was like hell getting the library staff to approve

it. One lady told me she wouldn't approve me to be exempt from study hall because of

certain situations that occurred in the past with sophomore student athletes' grades

declining. I had a White teammate that I was really close to and we both had really high

GPAs. He had no trouble getting the exemption. But for me, the lady talked about how

sometimes when they give exemptions they see students fall into habits that make their

grades slip. She acted as though she was concerned but at the end of our conversation she

explicitly stated "and besides, being in study hall is a good thing. It doesn't leave any

room for you to slack, right?" (Tyrone)

Participants also expressed the importance of proving to their White peers that they were equally

capable of performing at a high level, regardless of the rigor of content. They mentioned how some of

their classmates made statements about their work ethic, and sometimes intentionally excluded them

from communications about assignment duties. Corey added, "How is it that you can automatically

determine that I'm not gone come through with my part of the assignment? I mean I've made it this far

with better grades than half the class. But I'm not tripping; it's just the principle of it." Although

frustrated with their experiences of being perceived as a *slacker*, participants discussed ways in which

they either coped or navigated the situation. Kevin asserted, "The key to it is not letting it get to you

mentally. I know how hard I bust my ass, so it really doesn't matter what anybody else think of me.

I'm gone shine regardless." Taking a similar stance, Jeremy added, "My mama always taught me

never to react to negativity with a negative response. Instead, show people what you're capable of, so

next time you won't have to tell them." For Jeremy, combating stereotypes took the form of positive

retribution. He did not believe that it was necessary to prove to his White peers in a hostile way that he

had the skills requisite to be successful. However, he used the negative stereotypes and labels as

motivation to persist and maintain his academic achievements, despite doubt from faculty, staff, and

peers.

Without question, the participants in this study were cognizant of the negative stereotypes and racist attitudes held by White counterparts and faculty at their respective institutions. Instead of perpetuating already existing stereotypes about student athletes, most were adamant about proving their academic abilities. A few participants discussed at length the obstacles they faced when in academic settings. To some, it was not about proving themselves to White counterparts; instead, their goal was to recreate the perception of the Black male student-athlete.

During the interviews, I was overwhelmed by the passion and desire of these student athletes. Even in the face of adversity all participants discussed how being stereotyped contributed to their academic achievement. All participants stated that neither stereotypical comments, nor race interactions with individuals on campus, stifled their ambition to succeed. Mike added, "When I stepped foot on this campus, I knew what I was here for. People told me all my life what I couldn't do, but look at me now. So the racism and stereotyping that I get every day is only building me to become better." As a former student athlete, hearing these sentiments of student athletes was encouraging and further validated my reason for this study. The participants concluded with statements about how their experiences at their respective institutions taught them to adapt in places of discomfort, and how to thrive in spaces that are systemically designed for them to fail.

Did You Really Just Say That?

Participants consistently discussed both their in-class and out-of- class experiences while attending their respective institutions. Some student athletes spoke highly about their social experiences; however, many were unhappy with their academic experience. When asked to explain their in-class experiences and interactions with other students and professors, some were hesitant to respond. Although each participant was reminded of the confidentiality of the study, some were

unwilling to be explicit in their responses. Kevin, however, spoke about a situation that occurred in class.

> It was really no secret. Everyone knew I was an athlete. I'm sure they've seen me on television before, but you know, some people just like to have conversations regardless. I'll never forget when I was in my research methods class and I was having a conversation with the girl on the side of me. I didn't know her, and had never seen her in class before, which I thought was odd. Anyway, she went on to ask me my major and stuff like that. Before I even told her I was an athlete, she automatically assumed I played football. I guess because of my weight, but I was offended because everywhere I go at this school they stereotype me as your typical athlete. And that's really what I try to avoid. Even though we were discussing this in class, while we were off task, I still think it was rather odd for her to ask me that out of the blue.

These student athletes' in-class experiences emphasized a lack of peer support. Often in the classroom environment, students feel compelled, if not required, to work and collaborate with other classmates. For some student athletes, making connections with students who are not athletes is difficult. The stereotype that Black male student athletes are lazy, low achieving, and academically incapable motivated these student athletes to achieve. In spite of being victims of racial comments made by peers, and sometimes professors, participants used their self-motivation to persist and to excel. Corey noted, "You can tell it was always tension between the White kids and the Black kids. Nobody wanted to work with the Black people because they think we all are dumb. For me, I had it bad because I was Black and an athlete, so nobody even looked my way." Because participants held the dual roles of student and athlete, others perceived them as *dumb*, or not having much to offer.

Talking in class and having to make statements addressing the entire class was always something I feared. Not because I don't speak well or anything like that, because I do, but because I know someone is going to have something to combat my statement or try to argue me down in anyway. I've seen it happen to many times before. But this particular instance, we were discussing crime and deviance in my Sociology class. One of my classmates responded to my statement about crime saying, "Black people put themselves in situations, so I don't really feel sorry for them. Make better decisions." I immediately addressed her about her statement, and she proceeded and called me a "token boy". This was the worst experience of my life. It was blatant racism.

Mike was amazed also by remarks made by of some White counterparts. Attending a PWI, Mike could not recall many instances in which he felt stereotyped or experienced racist attitudes and behaviors. He explained how his upbringing and parental socialization helped him navigate difficult and uncomfortable situations. He also spoke at length about his relationship with his older cousin, who was educated about diversity and culture. Using university resources as an outlet to vent about his frustration, Mike found it easier to educate his peers, as opposed to becoming offended by their remarks. He recalled, "How can you get mad if someone truly doesn't know or have an idea that they were being racist or stereotyping you? It's really something that you have to deal with personally, kind of like picking your battles." An advocate for picking your battles realized that no matter how offended he would get as a student athlete, he had no immediate power to change how people perceived him.

Jeremy discussed his many interactions with racist faculty, staff, and students at Lakewood University. His experience was not his best relative to interactions with others on campus; however, he was adamant that being at his respective institution taught him how to persist in the face of adversity.

I'm never looking for a handout. I work hard for everything that I have. I really hate

being in class with my White peers and being looked at crazy just because I'm enrolled in

an honors section. It's like I've committed a crime just for being smart. I mean can a

Black man have a brain too? I remember being sectioned off by our professor for our

group presentation, which was 35% of our final grade. One White student in the group

stated that she had already completed most of the project because she didn't trust us [two

other Black students] to do it. I was so puzzled, I asked her to repeat herself and she

wouldn't. I stared in awe like, "Did you really just say that?"

Another essential aspect related to these student athletes' experiences relative to stereotyping was

the notion that student athletes can only thrive in majors that were not deemed rigorous.

Stereotypically, student athletes major in areas that are considered less academically demanding;

however, these study participants majored in Psychology, Sociology, Kinesiology, and Mass

Communications, none of which are uncomplicated major. Some stated that they were automatically

perceived as being dumb or lazy when paired with other students in the class, based on their

appearance and academic major. Corey noted, "A young lady asked me my classification and my

major. When I told her I was a psychology major and I spend most of my time working out and

studying, she asked, 'You're an athlete and a psychology major?', as though these two things were

mutually exclusive." Corey shared with his classmate that not only was he involved and interested in

sports, but he desired to excel academically and welcomed any type of challenge associated with being

successful.

Kevin discussed his plans after college.

I really don't like to think about what's gone happen after I graduate college because it's

scary. Always being told what to do is something I had to get away from. When I got to

college I wanted to major in Kinesiology. It's something that I like, and I don't think majoring in general studies will really prepare me for what I want to do. But the part I don't like is when people find out I'm an athlete, they automatically think I'm a general studies major, when in actuality I'm really not. Even some of my professors have made statements like, "Are you sure you can handle this class while being an athlete, you might have to choose?"

The doubt and discouragement from others only accelerated his Kevin's drive to academically achieve.

Although most students discussed being stereotyped by other students, some participants were transparent about their stereotypical conversations and interactions with faculty. Since student athletes are held to high expectations, it is common for student athletes to communicate with their professors regarding class assignments and it is required to be proactive in completing lessons. However, for some participants, these interactions and conversations with professors were not always positive. Tyrone stated, "I was going have to miss class for three days because we made it to the championship Olympic qualifying meet, so I had to let my professor know. She immediately thought I was trying to get over on her and stated, "Yeah I expected you to come ask for an extension, but my mind is made up." Tyrone later explained that he was not attempting to get an extension on his assignment; rather he was being proactive and informing his professor about his latest athletic success, and informing her that he would have his assignment submitted earlier than the deadline.

Other participants described the negative tension held between some student athletes and their professors. Mike's observed blatant racism toward Black students/athletes and favoritism toward White student/athletes at his institution and said it was common practice. HE explained that in many cases, the professor would single out Black student athletes, and use their grades as examples of what could happen to other students who were deemed or perceived as lazy. Mike asserted, "It's not always good

to judge a book by its cover. It could be true that the guy that was singled out had bad grades, but I think it's irresponsible when a professor makes an erroneous assumption that athletes lack skills that require critical thinking."

Equally frustrating for most participants was the inadvertent racist attitudes held by some faculty members at their respective institutions. When asked about their interactions with faculty members, almost all participants stated that they had experienced some level of racist attitude, even if it was minimal. Some spoke at length about their interactions, describing how unintentional it could've been, but still feeling some level of discomfort. Corey stated, "Most of my professors had warm spirits, but there is one that I really can't stand; she's evil. She would always make remarks regarding the integrity of athletes, and stressing the point that if she catches anyone paying others [athletes specifically] to complete their homework, they would be submitted to the University Office of Integrity and Ethics." This did not pertain to Corey, simply because he completed his own assignments; however, all of the athletes enrolled in the course were Black student athletes.

Kevin was adamant when he explained a time that he thought his professor was encouraging, yet racist and stereotypical.

> I don't really expect anything from anyone anymore, nor am I ever surprised by everything. I really needed to be excused from class so that I could go to physical therapy with the entire team instead of paying a separate fee. Because it was convenient for me to go with the team, I figured I'd ask to be excused for that particular class session, but I did not know how my professor would respond. Well, after asking for her permission, she gladly granted me the okay, but followed up with a statement that left me feeling some kind of way. She said, "Kevin, of course you can go. **YOU'RE OUR BIGGEST ASSETS**." I found this rather odd because it seemed as though she was more concerned

about me being an asset and revenue generator for the school, instead of genuinely being

concerned about my health and well being.

Despite the undesirable and negative experiences of the participants in the study, each student

athlete provided valuable insights that would be beneficial in resolving the presented problem. Although

it is not realistic to have a college experience that is filled with all positive and great memories, these

student athletes made and continued to make the best of their undergraduate careers, while being both a

student and an athlete. In terms of motivation and persistence, participants relied on their self-motivation

to navigate difficult situations. The expectation of performing well academically and athletically can be

extremely stressful, and, for some, overwhelming. However, the participants in this study successfully

managed dual roles while remaining high-achieving scholars in the classroom.

Summary of Findings

The primary research questions guiding this study asked: What are the academic experiences of

high achieving Black male student athletes at Division I Predominately White Institutions in the

Southeast Region, and what sources do these students utilize to persist and achieve academically? Data

interpretation indicated that respondents in this study attributed their success to various individuals, all

of whom were impactful. Relentless support and encouragement from family and friends, positive

reinforcement from parents, the need to make a difference, support from coaches and teammates, and

the persistence and self-motivation to succeed and achieve were factors that contributed to the student

athletes' academic success. Despite their experiences at their respective institutions, all student

athletes had joy and take pride in their universities. Most participants agreed that their institutions

adequately prepared them for professional careers and graduate programs.

Although the study participants acknowledged a host of individuals who contributed to their

academic success, every participant recognized his mother as being his biggest supporter and

motivator. Some thought their self-motivation, coupled with a strong sense of belief from their mother, was necessary to succeed. Community members and church members were also critical in the academic success of study participants. All student athletes stated how important it was to them to uphold a positive reputation in their churches and communities. Serving as a role model to younger Black males in their respective communities was identified as a priority for most student athletes. Reciprocating the same love and support they received from individuals created a sense of accountability in most. The unwillingness to accept the odds of negative societal stereotypes and expectations became routine for these participants, and therefore, they self-motivated toward academic success.

While describing their academic experiences, all athletes admitted that there were instances in which they observed stereotypical behavior from not only their White peers, but also from faculty and staff at their respective institutions. Most thought they were treated unfairly based on the color of their skin and their affiliation with sports. Study participants expressed feeling negative energy in classroom settings, and also described instances in which they were blatantly and publicly stereotyped. Instead of reacting adversely to such behavior, players used the negative energy as a source of motivation to excel academically.

When explaining their passion to rise above mediocre standards embedded in society regarding Black male student athletes, most students described challenges associated with achieving their goals. Constant pressure from parents to maintain good grades, lack of sleep due to long and frequent practices, the ongoing need to justify their belonging in academic spaces, and being perceived by White peers, faculty, and staff as "average Joes", motivated student athletes to capitalize on not only their athletic abilities, but also their academic opportunities.

Lastly, the participants in this study stressed the importance of not only being physically present during classroom instruction, but also mentally present. For some, the feeling of not being genuinely welcome in a space, especially a classroom, was uncomfortable. However, these students described their problem solving skills when faced with uncertainty about any situation. Instead of conforming to the beliefs of their White counterparts, many participants intentionally engaged in class discussion, therefore, resisting stereotypes commonly held by society. To aid in solving the problem and creating positive experiences for student athletes at Division I predominately White institutions, participants contributed possible solutions relative to high-achieving Black male students. These recommendations included solutions pertaining to their White counterparts, university staff, faculty, and others who frequently interacted with this population of students.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSION

Five Black male student-athletes' academic experiences at three Division I Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) in the Southeastern Region were investigated in this phenomenological study. Each participant in the study was on a full athletic scholarship, held a GPA of 3.0 and above, was an upperclassman, and a member of basketball, football, and track and field athletics. This chapter provides an overview of the study, including methods, findings, discussion, implications, and conclusion. Lastly, this chapter further explains students' perceptions about their academic experiences, and the effect they had on their future outlook.

Study Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a clearer understanding of high-achieving Black male student athletes' academic experiences at Division I PWI's in the Southeastern Region. In its current state, there is a paucity of literature highlighting these students' experiences, often creating a distorted perception of how these students experience school. Stereotyping often occurs because of the lack of scholarship in previously published literature addressing high achieving Black male student athletes' academic experiences. Low retention rates, lack of motivation, racism, discrimination, and a host of other labels are attributed to Black males in general, and, therefore, create a false perception of this population of students. As a result, little information is available regarding African American male student athletes who excel, achieve at high levels academically, and accomplish goals that their non-athletic peers do not.

Discussion

Scholarship relative to high-achieving Black male student athletes is almost non-existent. A few researchers (Beamon, 2009; Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013; Howard-

Hamilton & Sina, 2001) have dedicated time to investigating the educational achievement of Black male student athletes. This study attempted to magnify and explicitly add to already existing literature regarding high-achieving Black male student athletes at PWIs. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the academic experiences of high-achieving Black male student athletes. However, in addition to understanding these students' experiences, the researcher sought to investigate sources that these student athletes utilized to persist and achieve academically.

The following research questions guided this study: 1) What are the academic experiences of African American male student-athletes at PWI's in the Southeast Region? and 2) What sources do these student-athletes utilize to persist and achieve academically?

To investigate the research questions, the researcher employed qualitative research methods. Specifically, the researcher utilized a phenomenological approach to collect and analyze data. Creswell (2009) contended that phenomenology describes the meaning for several individuals of their experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Researchers specifically explore "what" an individual experiences and "how" they experience it. To successfully and accurately capture these student athletes' experiences, the researcher utilized semi-structured interviews with five high-achieving student athletes at three institutions in the Southeastern Region— Central Region University, University of Southeastern, and Lakewood University.

Student athletes were selected based on specific criteria established by the researcher— race and gender (Black and male), a fulltime student in good standing, earned cumulative GPA of 3.0 or >, classified as an upperclassman (sophomore, junior, senior), and attended a Division I PWI in the Southeastern Region. Participants were identified and contacted using emails, telephone, FaceTime, and social media. Procedurally, each of the five student athletes was

thoroughly briefed on the topic of the study, offered the option to withdraw at any point, and explained the minimal risks associated with the study. Additionally, each student athlete signed a consent form, which provided the researcher with permission to collect and analyze data. Further, each student selected a pseudonym name for the purpose of confidentiality.

Each student athlete engaged in a one-hour face-to-face or virtual interview. At the end of each interview the research self-transcribed the data, which was coded later. To provide a clearer understanding of the collected data, the researcher used specific data analysis strategies—sketching ideas, note taking, analyzing words, identifying codes, reducing codes to themes and related categories, creating a point of view, and lastly, summarizing and displaying the data.

Based on the data collected from participants, the researcher identified themes and subthemes. Three overachieving themes were identified in student athletes' responses: "*I'm Not In This Alone*": Sources of motivation to persist and be a high-achieving student athlete; "*We're Not Your Average Joe*": Microagressions and Stereotypes; and "*I'm Here To Earn My Degree*": Purposeful engagement inside the classroom. Each theme was discussed further using subthemes. As a phenomenological study, it was important that the researcher allowed participants to freely express their thoughts regarding their academic experiences. Open dialogue was created for participants to discuss uncomfortable situations, which these student athletes described as part of their persistence and self-motivation to be academically successful. During the research process, the researcher was attentive and intentional while collecting and analyzing data, and thus provided accurate and truthful accounts of these student athletes' experiences.

Overall, the participants stated that their experiences as high-achieving student athletes had been met with challenges and adversity; however, with their strong support systems, both on campus and in their communities, they persisted beyond hardships. As participants reflected on

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their experiences, it was apparent that self-efficacy and self-motivation were vital components in their academic achievements. All student-athletes described their motivation, some explicitly detailing their passion to achieve and remain successful. Self-efficacy is defined as "judgments about how well one can organize and execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations containing many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements" (Bandura & Schunk, 1986, p. 587). In most instances, participants agreed that when faced with ambiguous and stressful situations, they relied on not only the confidence and belief of others, but also their own sense of self and capability.

When asked to describe what it meant to be a high achieving student athlete, most participants defined it as an individual who is ambitious, strong willed, courageous an overcomer, and a conqueror [against societal stereotypes]. All participants spoke at length about the difficulty of being a student athlete at a PWI. The expectation to excel and perform well athletically, coupled with demanding practice schedules added to their academic responsibilities, were described as the everyday reality of a Division I student athlete at a PWI. Athletes described navigating their rigorous academic curriculums while simultaneously maintaining a reputable collegiate athletic career. Additionally, all participants stated the importance of prioritizing and committing time specifically focused on their academics. Their passion for furthering their education was evident in their responses. Many student athletes aspire to achieve professional careers as opposed to academic careers, beyond undergraduate studies. However, participants' explained the importance of achieving beyond average, and some went further and explained their five-year goals.

In addition to describing their self-motivation to academically achieve, participants also discussed how their confidence level impacted their academic success. For most, confidence was

an intricate part of their academic success. Collectively, all participants discussed confidence in their interviews, concluding that without confidence in one's self, it would be nearly impossible to attain academic recognition. As participants described their academic experiences, many stated challenges associated with classroom environment [tension between White classmates and faculty] and an unwelcoming campus outside of their athletic association. When asked about interactions with White counterparts, participants described being stereotyped at first sight. Stereotyping is the process of imposing characteristics on people based on their perceived group membership (Harrison, Stevens, Monty, & Coakley, 2006). Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major (1991). Student athletes described being stereotyped in classes that were not courses commonly taken by athletes. Most students discussed having difficult conversations with professors based on their perception of athletes being lazy. Additionally, participants also stated they observed unfair treatment between Black and White athletes, specifically, experiencing less leniency toward Black athletes, and more leniency toward White athletes.

Although such negative experiences occurred during these student athletes' collegiate careers, most agreed that the negative energy and feelings of isolation empowered them to perform well academically. Despite being perceived as lazy and incompetent, student athletes described how these feelings triggered the urge to not only perform well academically, but also to resist and ultimately change these perceptions. Participants stated that while being a student athlete is not an easy task, being stereotyped piled on an additional burden as they progressed academically. Although stereotyped by White counterparts, faculty, and staff at their respective institutions, most participants described this as a reality. Due to each participant's willingness and passion for upward mobility and academic success, they stated that their self-motivation and confidence contributed to their academic success.

Implications For Practice

Findings from this qualitative study lend insight and provide implications for various individuals and groups among colleges and universities. The main goal of this study was for Black male student athletes to describe their academic experiences at Division I PWI's in the Southeastern Region. Therefore, the results of this study can be further replicated with hopes and expectations of creating positive improvements in institutions of secondary and higher education. The following recommendations are offered to assist parents, college and university faculty and staff, and Division I head coaches.

Parents

Commonly mentioned in this study were testimonials from participants regarding support from parents, family members, and their respective communities. Though participants credited their academic success to many individuals, all participants described their parents as being vital in their academic success. Without the physical and emotional support from their parents, most participants stated that they would not have been as academically driven or successful. Equally important to consider is the structure of the Black family. At the root of these problems is the fact that Black families have been inclined to push their children toward sports career aspirations, often to the neglect and detriment of other critically important areas of personal, educational, and cultural development (Edwards, 2000). For most study participants, the career as an NBA or NFL player was not their main priority. For many years, the media has influenced the goals and aspirations of student athletes, often offering a dream that is not always easily attainable. In fact, popular culture and organized sports have been credited as major contributors to the social problems that exist among African American males. Therefore, it is essential that parents embed academics as a priority for Black males, as opposed to athletics.

Secondly, most participants stated that their parents were former athletes. A few parents played basketball and football at the high school level and one played at the collegiate level; subsequently, having an idea of the two competing interest of sports and academics. Therefore, it is essential for parents to express to their children the importance of both academics and athletics. Additionally, parents should be transparent in their experiences and encourage their sons to make informed decisions about their academic careers. Most parents described in this study were active in their child's academic career, but more importantly, they were invested in his long-term success. Despite not having completed college themselves, these parents always encouraged and reinforced the importance of a quality education in addition to being a student athlete, and are role models for parents of perspective student athletes.

Lastly, parents should also be cognizant of the oppositional relationship between academics and athletics. While it seems obvious that academics should be the priority, parents must constantly reinforce this message. Additionally, athletes described the need foe positive encouragement from parents. While parents were identified as the biggest influence in these participants' academic success, participants shared examples of encouragement followed by negative reinforcements or ultimatums. If student athletes feel that they are equally supported, encouraged, and motivated by not only themselves but by their parents, I conclude that more student athletes would be encouraged to excel academically.

College and University Faculty and Staff

The reality of being a student athlete is that there is never a *normal* day. The pressure to attend classed regularly, expectations to attend all scheduled practices and games, coupled with other academic responsibilities were all expressed during participants' interviews. The gap between intercollegiate athletics and the mission and philosophy of higher education has

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widened significantly over the past decade (Eitzen, 2003). Therefore, college administrators and faculty must close this gap, taking into consideration the lived experiences of Black male student athletes at PWIs. D All participants discussed a feeling of negative tension between faculty and staff members toward Black student athletes. Faculty and staff need to recognize the damage of stereotyping the behavior of these students. Stereotyping students based on false perceptions further complicates the relationship between the parties. Students' expressions of their feelings of intimidation from faculty but reinforce that do not faculty appear student friendly.

Although participants in this study were considered high-achieving, they needed student support services and resources. Because practice times often conflicted with the regularly scheduled hours of most student affairs services, many athletes thought it would have been helpful for their respective institutions to implement plans of action geared toward the academic component of their collegiate careers. It is often difficult for Black male student athletes to overcome negative perceptions and stereotypes that render them dysfunctional, uneducable, dangerous, and threatening (Cuyjet 1997, Gibbs 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992) Therefore, students stated, with the assistance of university faculty and staff, providing available and convenient resources that aligned with their hectic school and practice schedules would have been beneficial to their academic experiences.

The intersection of race, sports, and education have generated a situation wherein increasing numbers of Black youths have focused their efforts on athletic achievement, only to find themselves underdeveloped academically and unable to compete in the classroom (Edwards, 2000). Because this is most Black student athletes' experience, faculty and staff play a dynamic role in ensuring academic development for all students, including student athletes. Therefore, faculty and staff must genuinely and intentionally interact with student athletes. Participants

thought that many of their professors did not focus on their best interests outside of the sport with which they were associated. Having professors who expressed and demonstrated their expertise in welcoming and student-friendly ways was an implication from the participants' perspective.

Division I Head Coaches

Division I head coaches are individuals whom student athletes often consult first when faced with any issue, either academic or athletic. Therefore, aside from parents, coaches often are student athletes' biggest supporters and advocates. The relationship between a student athlete and his coach remains individual, and thus it is essential that Division I head coaches encourage student athletes to perform well academically. While two participants discussed being encouraged and positively rewarded for their academic accomplishments, other participants described their coach's lack of academic motivation relative to academic success. Instead of supporting student athletes and encouraging them to excel academically, some coaches referenced in this study exhibited neither quality. Moreover, while it is not unusual for coaches to promote athletic mobility for student athletes, it should be a requirement that coaches and assistant Division I coaches regularly monitor student athletes' academic standings. Often players are deemed ineligible due, in part, to their own lack of academic motivation, but also due to low expectations from coaches related to academic success.

Additionally, coaches should be supportive of student athletes' goals and aspirations outside of their respective sports. Aside from being a student athlete, it is necessary that these students take advantage of the experiences their campuses have to offer. When asked about involvement other than their respective sports, some participants explained that extracurricular activities did not fit into their hectic schedules. Coaches should be considerate of student

athletes' developmental growth rather than stifling these opportunities. All students discussed their excitement about being both a student and an athlete; however, most felt as though they were limited in their experiences due to being a member of an athletic team. As college students, student athletes need and deserve opportunities to hold leadership positions, the option to be part of intramural clubs, and the privilege of representing their respective institutions in activities other than sports.

Lastly, Division I coaches need to be intentional regarding students' academic status. Most student athletes discussed the requirements and expectations for study hall hours. At some institutions, study hall was embedded into the athletes' schedule, which was feasible; for others, study hall was merely an option, which ultimately was not reinforced by either coaches or athletic directors. Division I coaches must take responsibility and require student athletes with an average of 3.0 and lower to attend a mandatory study hall session. Further, Division I coaches must be interactive and involved in student athletes' academic obligations. Because many students become ineligible due to poor GPA's and a lack of academic motivation, coaches should collaborate with university faculty and staff to implement incentives for those student athletes who excel academically. In this study, participants recalled being praised by coaches and other athletic staff for superb performances in their respective sports; however, less time was dedicated to recognizing and acknowledging those who student athletes who performed above average academically. Intentionally recognizing student athletes will increase their confidence level, and also encourage those who are not excelling to put forth effort and to achieve at the same rate as their White counterparts.

Future Research

Future studies should examine the graduation and retention rates of not only high-achieving Black male student athletes, but also athletes who are not as academically successful as the participants in this study. Although much research has already been dedicated to exploring Black male students' experiences in college, it is essential to gain a holistic understanding of how/if athletics stifle the academic success of Black male student athletes. Because most of the research participants expressed being overwhelmed and mentally exhausted by their everyday routine, it is essential to further explore factors related to being a successful student athlete with competing academic and athletic obligations at a PWI. Additionally, researchers should examine expectations and realities of Division I coaches at PWIs. Dedicated time to understanding the components of student athletes' experiences, while tailoring changes and implications, should promote an increase in student athletes' graduation and retention rates.

Secondly, the current study should be expanded to include the experiences of high-achieving Black female student-athletes at Division I PWI's in the Southeastern Region. Comparing literature published about Black male student athletes and their academic success, Black female student athletes are perceived differently, and are seemingly more academically motivated than their Black male counterparts (Harrison, 2008). After completing this study, I believe researchers should examine explicitly how Black female student athletes experience college at a Division I PWIs. Although existing research details a broad anti-deficit perspective on the academic ability and success of Black female student athletes, few studies examine these students' self-efficacy and self-motivation toward academic success. Further, researchers should examine Black female student athletes' experiences relative to interactions with faculty, staff,

and White peers at their respective institutions. Therefore, a general comparison could be made between the experiences of male and female Black student athletes at Division I PWI's.

Lastly, more studies should further examine high-achieving Black male student athletes' success beyond graduation from their respective institutions. Because scant research is dedicated to exploring the academic achievement of student athletes, I believe it would be beneficial to capture the progress of former student-athletes post graduation; this information would better inform faculty, staff, coaches, and other stakeholders about strategies used to attain and maintain success after completing college. As a former athlete, graduating college summa cum laude was a wonderful experience; however, I was not provided the opportunity to openly share my experiences. Therefore, examining student-athletes' status post graduation will provide an insightful outlook at what a high-achieving student-athlete could achieve aside from athletics.

Conclusion

The expectation would be that five high-achieving Black male student-athletes in this study should experience success beyond college and in their professional careers. Moreover, their self-motivation, coupled with their drive and willingness to achieve academically, indicate that they should thrive and excel, while encouraging students alike to perform equally or better. Findings from this study validate the notion of self-efficacy and self-motivation as they related to academic success among this study's participants. Additionally, results from the study indicated the passion, perseverance, and persistence student athletes had toward the pursuit of academic success. The idea of being academically successful and achieving above the average was not only a priority for these student athletes; it was an expectation from their parents. My goal in completing this study was to use the findings to benefit current Black male student athletes, parents, Division I coaches, faculty, university staff, and other stakeholders. I am grateful to have

interacted with and gained these student athletes perspectives relative to their academic experiences at their respective institutions. I envision success for each student athlete in this study, and offer words of encouragement and my support as they continue to excel and to meet their goals and expectations as a scholar student athlete.

Limitations of Study

Limitations arose throughout the research process of this study. The first limitation pertained to availability and convenience of student athletes outside of their busy schedules. For three of the five participants, scheduling and maintaining an interview date was difficult. Although the ideal was to interview participants face-to-face, the reality was that it was sometimes impossible to achieve. Due to unforeseen circumstances beyond participants' control, the researcher was forced to reschedule interviews, which ultimately conflicted with other participants who already agreed to participate in the study. Additionally, participants were limited on how much time they could spend interviewing, which caused some student athletes to provide responses that required a follow-up question; however, most participants provided responses that were adequate to include in the data analysis process.

The final limitation related to participant selection, specifically the sample size of this study. High-achieving Black student athletes are a rarity, especially at a Division I PWIs, thus few participants were eligible to participate in the study. In pursuit of a strong sample size, the researcher identified a lack of high-achieving Black male student athletes at the universities approached. Twenty-nine institutions were invited to participate in the study; three schools accepted the invitation to participate in the study. As a result, the researcher was invited to interview at the following universities: Central Region University (1 eligible participant),

University of Southeastern (2 eligible participants), and Lakewood University (2 eligible

participants).

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Document

Title: **A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT ATHLETES AT PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS IN THE SOUTHEAST REGION**

Description: This study is an attempt to examine the academic experiences among high achieving African American male student-athletes at predominantly White NCAA Division I institutions in the Southeast region. Most existing literature regarding African American student-athletes at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) have examined their experiences by highlighting major deficiencies of this groups academic abilities. Therefore, this study will serve as a platform for high-achieving African American male student-athletes, and will provide their experiences and perspectives—which have been silenced for the past few decades

Risks and Benefits: Benefits of the study include supplementing literature that reframes the current narrative surrounding high-achieving African American male student athletes at predominately white institutions. There are no anticipated risks concerning participation in the study

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research is completely voluntary. There will be one audio taped semi structured interview held. Interviews will be transcribed and quotations from the interviews may be included in the dissertation, however no identifying information will be included. Interviews will take place either in person (as travel permits) or over skype.

Confidentiality: Questions asked in the interview may be sensitive and personal. To maintain your confidentiality, you will be assigned new name and any other identifying information you share will be replaced with pseudonyms. Your name will only appear on this consent form and will not be linked to your responses. Interviews will be recorded in private and the recordings will not be shared. Your responses will be transcribed anonymously and all information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. Your responses will serve as data for this study

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. At any time during the study you are free to withdraw your participation. There will be no ramifications if you choose to withdraw.

Informed Consent: I, ___[Insert Name]_____ (please print), have read in full the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Each of these items has been explained to me by the investigator. The investigator has answered all of my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. My signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this experimental study and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the investigator.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Runell J. King at (225) 620-7718 or by email at rking26@lsu.edu, or Dr. Kenny Varner at (225) 578-2918 or by email at varner@lsu.edu For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Dennis Landin, Chairman, Institutional Review Board at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803 at (225) 578-8692 or irb@lsu.edu.

APPENDIX B

Gatekeeper Solicitation Email

Greetings (NAME OF GATEKEEPER),

My name is Runell J. King and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Leadership & Research program at the Louisiana State University, where I am currently working on my dissertation. I am interested in the experiences of high achieving Black male student athletes at Division I, Predominately White Institutions in the Southeastern region, I would like to invite them to participate in this study:

1. Black (African American) student athlete attending a Division I (PWI)

2. Must be enrolled full-time and in good-standing with their respective universities

3. Must have earned a cumulative 3.0 GPA at the time of the study

4. Must be classified as an undergraduate upperclassman (Sophomore, Junior, Senior)

5. Must attend a college/university in the Southeast Region of the United States

For the study, participants will be asked to fill out an information sheet and take part in one interview to discuss their experiences as a Black male, student athlete, and their academic experiences at their respective institutions. The interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. Participation in this study is voluntary and potential participants may choose to not answer any question(s), stop or withdraw at any time with no consequence. Responses to all questions will be completely anonymous. If you know of any Black males who meet these criteria and are willing to participate in this research study, please respond to this email by (INSERT DATE). If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email at rking26@lsu.edu or by phone at 225-620-7718 or my advisor─Kenny Varner, Ph.D. at varner@lsu.edu. Thank you for your assistance, Runell J. King, Ed.S., Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership & Research program at Louisiana State University.

APPENDIX C

Participants Profile Information

Participant Profile Information

PSEUDONYN	AGE	MAJOR	CLASS	G.P.A.	UNIVERSITY	SPORT
Corey Bailey	21	Psychology	Junior	3.7	Central Region University	Track & Field
Kevin Harris	21	Kinesiology	Junior	3.5	University of Southeastern	Basketball
Mike Stevenson	21	Mass Communication	Junior	3.5	University of Southeastern	Basketball
Jeremy Scott	20	Kinesiology	Sophomore	3.6	Lakewood University	Football
Tyrone Wells	22	Sociology	Senior	3.2	Lakewood University	Track & Field

APPENDIX D

Participant Information Sheet

NAME: _____

AGE: _____

CELL PHONE:_____

EMAIL:_____

HOMETOWN (City, STATE):

_____

HIGH SCHOOL:

_____

HIGH SCHOOL TYPE (*Please check one*)**:**

PUBLIC_____ PRIVATE _____ OTHER:

_____

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY:

_____

_____

_____

CLASSIFICATION (*Please select one*)**:** □ SOPHOMORE □ JUNIOR □ SENIOR **MAJOR(S):**

_____

_____ **MINOR(S):**

_____

_____ **SPORT** (*Please select all that apply*): □ BASKETBALL □ FOOTBALL **POSITION(S):**

_____

_____ **HIGH SCHOOL GPA:** _____ **CURRENT GPA:** _____

AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS (*Please include the year received and amount if possible*)**:**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CLUBS & ORGANIZATIONS (*Please include the leadership positions*):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (*Church, community service, etc.*):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1) Tell me about some of your life experiences, where did you grow up, attend college, kind of family you grew up with, and experiences and involvement in college?

2) What factors influenced your decision to attend college?

   a. What factors influenced your decision to attend [respective] college?

3) What/who influenced your decision to play sports?

   a. Did either of your parents play sports (in high school or college)? If so, what sports?

4) What expectations did you have of [respective] university prior to enrolling? What kind of experience were you expecting to have?

   a. Which of those expectations have been met?

   b. Which of those expectations have not been met?

5) Tell me about your academic experiences at [respective] university.

   a. I see that your major is [INSERT MAJOR] tell me what that's like?

6) What does being a high-achiever mean to you?

   a. Is this an accurate perception of you? Why? Why not?

7) What does it mean to you to be a high achieving student athlete at this institution?

8) Why do you feel that you are academically driven?

9) At what point did you know you could excel academically at this institution?

10) What has been your source(s) of your motivation to perform well academically in college?

   a. How do you persist and maintain your momentum towards academics?

11) Tell me about a time when you started to question or lose confidence in your academic skills/talents?

12) Who has been the most supportive of your academic achievement at this university?

13) How do you balance the demands of your classes and participating in your sport?

    a. Discuss the challenges of balancing academics and athletics.

14) Tell me about your interactions with faculty members on campus

    a. How would you describe the ways in which your professors perceive you as an African American student, athlete, and/or person? Can you share some examples with me?

    b. How do faculty treat student athletes? Do they treat student athletes the same as non-athletes? If not, what are the differences?

    c. Do professors treat African American and White student athletes the same? If not, what are the differences?

15) Has there ever been a time that you were stereotyped by faculty, staff, students, teammates, or coaches?

    a. How did you navigate this encounter?

16) Have your interactions with faculty affected your desire to persist academically?

17) What kind of impact has your athletic participation at [respective university] had on your academic success?

18) How have your coaches influenced your academic progress/achievement?

    a. In what way do coaches encourage academic achievement?

    b. How do coaches actually stifle or hinder academic achievement?

19) Talk about your relationship with your teammates.

      a. Do they encourage/discourage you to do well in the classroom?

20) In what ways are you different than your teammates?

21) In what ways are you different from other African American male student athletes at this university?

22) Discuss your relationship with students who are non-athletes at [respective] university. Explain why these relationships/friendships are important to you.

23) Tell me about your relationships with other African American male students on campus?

      a. How has your status both academically and athletically affected these interactions?

24) Other than athletics, are you involved in any other extracurricular activities on and/or off campus? (i.e., clubs, debate teams, fraternity) If so, what are they? If not, why not?

25) What are you planning to do after college?

26) Do you believe that [respective] university/college is preparing your for your future goals/plans? If so, how? If not, why?

27) What resources and support do you need to help you achieve your future plans/goals?

28) What academic achievement tips would you give to a first-year African American male student athlete? [PROBE]

29) What recommendations do you have for university officials about ways to improve the academic experiences of Black student athletes?

30) Do you have any questions for me?

31) Are there any other high achieving African American student athletes at

[respective] institution that you think I should talk to?

APPENDIX F

Institutional Review Board Form

ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST

LSU

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

TO: Kenneth Fasching-Varner
            Education

FROM: Dennis Landin
            Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: July 6, 2016

RE: **IRB#** 3748

TITLE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT ATHLETES AT PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS IN THE SOUTHEAST REGION

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review type: Full _____ Expedited _X_   **Review date:** _7/5/2016_

Risk Factor: Minimal ___X___ Uncertain _____ Greater Than Minimal_____

Approved_____X_____ Disapproved_____

Approval Date: _7/5/2016_ **Approval Expiration Date:** _7/4/2017_

Re-review frequency: (annual unless otherwise stated)

Number of subjects approved: _5_

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable)**:**

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman _____

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:
1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc.**

All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb

VITA

Runell J. King is a native of White Castle, Louisiana. Runell received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology with a minor in Mathematics in 2013 from Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana. He continued his education at Louisiana State University (LSU) by earning a Master's Degree in Higher Education Student Affairs Administration in 2015. During that same year, Runell accumulated dual hours in pursuit of his Education Specialist Degree (Ed.S.) focusing on Educational Leadership, which he earned in August of 2015. Upon graduating from LSU with his Ph.D., Runell hopes to engage in critical research at the collegiate level, and earn tenure at a Research I institution.