

RUNNING HEAD: EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FOOTBALL ATHLETES

OUTSIDE THE LINES AND BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: AFRICAN AMERICAN
FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES' EXPERIENCES WITH RACE IN ACADEMIA

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EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FOOTBALL ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

Intercollegiate athletics are a multi-million-dollar business on which many universities strive to become dependent for economic profits and marketing leverage. The increased commercialization and revenues of collegiate sports have drawn attention to the overall college experiences of student-athletes, specifically those in revenue generating sports typically football and men's basketball. Yet, the primary roles of the athletic and academic curricula should be to maximize student achievement, as well as prepare student-athletes for life after college. Like all of their peers, African American football student-athletes find themselves in highly competitive academic and athletic environments. However, they continuously encounter experiences in which their race is made salient, actions that thereby intensify their daily stresses. Student-athlete affairs personnel monitor the academic issues and stressors influencing student-athlete decisions. University student-athlete support services are then responsible for monitoring the effects of such decisions, while also being expected to understand that African American student-athletes encounter various challenges that are engrained within the history of sports in the United States, such as the deeply embedded racial tensions and concomitant negative effects of said tensions in American society. This case study explores how systemic racial inequalities impact the academic experiences of African American college football student athletes at a top Division I football program by utilizing a critical race organizational framework. No comprehensive documentation has been designed to specifically address the services that are required to assist in the academic successes of African American football student-athletes. Therefore, I will conduct one-on-one interviews with four athletic academic advisors who work with football student-athletes, as well as four focus groups each consisting of three African American football student-athletes in order to evaluate their experiences. I will then conduct follow-up one-on-one interviews with each

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focus group participant to give focus to their academic experiences prior to enrolling in college. The goal of this study is to provide university personnel with insights into the current academic experiences of African American football student-athletes at a Division I football program in relation to perceived racial inequalities. The findings will offer implications for policies and procedures impacting the well-being and success of African American college student-athletes, while also encouraging sport practitioners to consider how their beliefs, practices, and the current structure of sport culture may influence the athletic and academic experiences of African American student-athletes.

Keywords: critical race theory, student-athlete, African American, college athletics, football, academic support services, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

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DEDICATIONS

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR THE DISSERTATION

Introduction

The American college football culture often exacerbates racial inequality at the same time universities serve as melting pots for people of distinct backgrounds to learn about difference and openly discuss important topics such as race and inequality. For the African American male athlete, everyday occurrences of racial profiling continue to happen on campuses. On Saturday nights, African American football student-athletes are celebrated as heroes, but throughout the rest of the week, they are forced to navigate through various university settings of racialized stereotypes that directly affect their academic experiences. Through this process, the construction of a personal identity is not only created, but it becomes solidified as a primary aspect of self-perception which is often at the expense of other identities

The study of sports in American history encompasses many cultural themes such as striving for academic excellence, battling stigmas and racism, and aspiring for successful careers beyond college sports. In his article, "Athletics in American Colleges" (1999), William Cowley questions the relationship between college athletics and institutions of higher learning by stating that an institution's social order and primary purpose is the development of intellectual life. His concerns parallel mine, in that institutions at the same time serve as an agency to promote business, industry, and organized athletics on an extensive commercialized basis. The term *intercollegiate athletics* is commonly defined as athletic contests between colleges in which student-athletes earn academic degrees while representing their institutions in competitive games. Today, intercollegiate athletics have become a multi-million dollar business on which many universities strive to become dependent for economic profits. The increased commercialization and revenues of intercollegiate sports has drawn attention to the overall

college experiences of student-athletes, specifically those in revenue generating sports such as football and men's basketball. Harper (2006) explains that these are the two sports that garner the most media attention (which also generate television contracts and corporate sponsorships), attract the most fans (who pay to attend games), and yield the most revenue from merchandise sales (e.g., jerseys and other apparel). The primary roles of the athletic and academic curriculum should be to maximize achievement in the classroom and on the playing surface while also preparing student-athletes for life after college. Therefore, the integration of athletics and academics at the collegiate level should create an environment conducive to overall student-athlete growth.

Like all student-athletes, African American football student-athletes find themselves in a highly competitive environment academically and athletically, but in addition they continuously encounter experiences in which their race is made salient. These racial experiences intensify their daily stresses. Several studies have even demonstrated that African American athletes may also experience difficulties with faculty interactions, negative stereotyping of academic competencies, preparedness, athletic abilities, and personal dispositions accentuated by their athlete status (Bimper and Harrison, 2011; Comeaux and Harrison, 2007). Harper (2009b) states that one could easily summarize their status as those athletes who enroll to advance their sports careers and generate considerable revenue for the institution without learning much or seriously endeavoring to earn their college degrees (p. 701). Some researchers have noted that the overemphasis on athletics that African Americans experience results in less academic motivation and achievement (Sellers and Kuperminc, 1997). I want to understand how these racialized inequalities impact the academic experiences of African American football student-athletes.

The challenge to not only be a Division I African American student-athlete in the college sports world, but also to succeed on and off the field only exacerbates the struggles of personal and career development for these student-athletes. According to Ferrante et al. (1991), the failure to maintain balance among a student-athlete's academic, athletic and personal development may result in personal dissatisfaction, increased stress, psychological problems, and even athletic ineligibility. Coaches are now recruiting athletes who increasingly face challenges of balancing seemingly adult life issues such as violence and death, as well as academic and athletic success. Richard Lapchick, a prominent scholar of these issues, discusses these challenges in his article "Crime and Athletes: New Racial Stereotypes" (2000): "We are recruiting athletes who have increasingly witnessed violent death...who are mothers and fathers when they get to our schools...who have seen friends or family members devastated by drugs...who have seen battering in their home...who were victims of racism in school...and who come alone." Lapchick also emphasizes the need for on-campus professionals who can guide student-athletes through these life challenges.

My past experiences as a student-athlete as well as my previous employment as a NCAA Athletic Compliance Coordinator have introduced me to the challenges that African American football student-athletes frequently encounter. Their differing experiences (as compared to mine) have influenced me to investigate the challenges that they face. A common concern among sport practitioners is that these individuals are "athletes" before they are "students." Because of this model, student-athlete affairs personnel must monitor the academic issues and stressors influencing student-athlete decisions. University student-athlete support services are responsible for monitoring the effects of such decisions while also understanding that African American student-athletes encounter various challenges that are engrained within the history of sports in

the United States, such as the deeply embedded racial inequalities of American society. Therefore, I want to reveal and help us understand how systemic racialized inequalities impact African American football student-athletes' experiences with race and academics at the collegiate level as well as understand how these experiences might be able to improve our athletic academic support department.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I investigate the relationship between racial inequalities, academic experiences and career development of African American football student-athletes. The study provides college athletic support staff with a better understanding of how African American college student-athletes negotiate these relationships. Such understandings will enable college athletic departments to address the academic and career development needs of these students more effectively.

I use a critical race theoretical framework to examine the relationship between race and the academic experiences of African American football student-athletes. According to Ladson-Billings (1996), the examination of race and racism should begin with an understanding that Whiteness has been positioned as the optimal status criterion or standard in this society." DeCuir and Dixson (2004) discuss the importance of examining educational experiences of African American students utilizing this perspective because of the "insidious and often subtle way race and racism operate" (p. 26). Creswell (2013) describes critical race theory (CRT) as, "theoretical attention on race and how racism is deeply embedded within the framework of American society" (p. 31). Using CRT challenges traditional paradigms of race and assists in the understanding of how race affects the academic experiences of African American football student-athletes at a large public Mid-Atlantic University. Donnor (2005) describes the

significance of studying critical race theory: “CRT is an intellectual and methodological perspective grounded in the particulars of social reality based on an individual’s lived experiences, and his or her racial group’s collective historical experiences within the US” (p. 51). Using CRT methodology as a lens for this study can play a key role in revealing any social inequalities that exist within the structure of higher education. As a result, faculty, student affairs professionals, and institutional administrators should be aware of the rooted racism in educational settings and acknowledge the systemic complexities that further disadvantage students of color (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004; Patton et al.). I would expect that this study will be used as a reference for institutions and athletic departments striving to become more inclusive through changes in institutional infrastructures, diversity initiatives, and contact analysis of constricting environments.

Research Questions

Two core objectives frame this study: 1) to examine the role race plays in the academic and career development of African American Division I football student-athletes and 2) to provide Athletic Academic Advisors an updated vision of the student-athlete experience so as to further contribute to the academic growth and development of the African American football student-athlete population. Three themes found in the literature guide the primary research question and subquestions below regarding African American football student-athletes: lack of preparation, maintaining eligibility and achieving academic excellence, multiple stigmas, and black ticket out: unrealistic aspirations. The following central research question and subsequent sub questions guide my research:

1. How do systemic racial inequalities impact the academic experiences of African

American college football student athletes at a top Division I football program?

- a. SUB1 How have racialized inequalities in American society impacted the education of these students?
- b. SUB2 What are the racialized experiences of African American football student-athletes?
- c. SUB3 What are the aspirations of these students after college? Do they only aspire to be professional athletes or do they have a viable alternative plan? How are they preparing themselves for their future?

These guiding research questions provide the study participants opportunities to answer open ended questions in a manner that voices their individual stories. The participants' personal stories are the foundation of this study and will contribute to the creation of guidelines for university personnel who work with this particular population.

Conceptual Framework

The unrelenting misconception that race is concrete, fixed and objective requires that one thinks of race as an element of social structure that differentiates human groups based only on skin color. Omi and Winant (1994) define race as a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies. They also argue that strictly thinking about race as an ideological construct denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on "raced" people in their everyday lives. In their piece "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) discuss the significance of analyzing education through a critical race theoretical lens. Utilizing the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* civil rights decision, Ladson-Billings and Tate illustrate the shortcomings of this court case starting with the fact that students of color are more segregated than ever before.

These authors explain that although African Americans represent 12 percent of the population, they are the majority in twenty-one of the twenty-two largest urban school districts in which the opportunities for better education and a better future are slim to none. This cycle of inequality and disadvantage continues to exude modes of exclusion, inferiority, subordination and exploitation which requires continued research and policies/procedures examination.

Critical race theorists argue that social reality is constructed by the formulation and exchange of stories about individual situations (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). These experiences and stories serve as an interpretive structure by which we can understand societal differences. CRT also confronts “race-neutrality” in policy and practice and acknowledges the value of the “black voice” that is often marginalized in mainstream theory, policy and practice (Hylton 2008). Using a critical race theoretical lens to understand institutions like sport will challenge the seemingly legitimized racial actions and benign practices in the higher education sports culture.

Utilizing critical race theory to guide this study gives a voice to the constantly marginalized African American football student-athlete. This theory helps to analyze how racialized inequalities and racialized experiences shape the educational and athletic experiences of African American football student-athletes. I also explored how concomitant inequalities create stigmas for this particular population as well as how these racialized and educational experiences have shaped their future career aspirations. CRT provides the framework for this study that challenges the existing power structures of white privilege that perpetuate the marginalized people of color by providing the opportunity of African American football student-athletes to tell their stories. The participants’ stories continue to impact me as a researcher, educator, and citizen by challenging my beliefs, past experiences and future understandings of

African American athletes. Their personal accounts of systemic racial inequalities throughout their lives assisted in the creation of guidelines for individuals working with African American football student-athletes.

Background

Competitive intercollegiate sports were not introduced into postsecondary education in the United States until the nineteenth century (Zimbalist, 1999). “The first popular college sport was crew (boat racing), which was quickly surpassed by football by the late 1880s, when media coverage and sponsorship for athletic events began to take form and become a lucrative business” (Watt and Moore 2001, p. 8). More often than not, student-athletes participating in college football and basketball, more often than not, are engrossed in a culture that encourages and prioritizes athletics over academics. In college athletics programs across the country there is a tension between athletics and academics. The stresses are exacerbated for African American football student athletes, in particular because this population arrives on college campuses disproportionately underprepared, which increasingly causes them to simply take “easy” courses or majors in order to remain eligible to compete instead of aspiring for academic rigor and challenging courses. For example, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill was cited by the Division I Committee on Infractions in 2012 for violations in its athletics program (James, 2012). Such violations included improper benefits and academic misconduct stemming from a tutor completing coursework for student-athletes, unauthorized grade changes, as well as student-athletes enrolling in classes that required very little teaching. Instances such as the UNC case only reinforce stigmas, which create barriers to academic success, thus encouraging unrealistic aspirations of playing professional sports while undervaluing their time in college.

The benefits of college athletic programs to the university, include support for the educational mission of the university, the promotion of the physical, social, and mental welfare of students, the enhancement of the reputation and visibility of the university, and the fostering of both alumni support and campus spirit (Despres et al., 2008, p. 200). Although college sports provide developmental value to students, detractors feel that intercollegiate athletics undermine the institution's ability to educate and that they are a strong negative force on campus (Brand 2006, p. 10). In other words, the lack of an effective system to govern the intercollegiate athletic culture is palpable. As stated by Hill et al. (2001), "[t]he emphasis on winning and its relationship to money contributed to systematic problems such as relaxed admission standards, underprepared students, falsification of grades, falling graduation rates, improper benefits to athletes, hush money, increasing costs, and recruiting scandal" (Blum, 1994; Brown 1996; Zimblis, 1999, p. 66). In the absence of a comprehensive and uniform structure, individuals involved become vulnerable to various internal and external forces that are unaligned with the academic missions of universities (Hearn 2002, p. 22). Student-athlete affairs personnel can play a vital role in reducing these forces to create an environment focused on learning and development.

A college athletics program incorporates not only university policies and practices, but also athletic department standards, team dynamics, and the NCAA rules and eligibility regulations (Fletcher, Benshoff, and Richburg, 2003). Since the 1980s the NCAA, for example, has passed several academic requirements for those students participating in intercollegiate athletics (e.g., core grade point average and test score sliding scale, minimum course work, degree designation, and progress towards degree percentage). That is, athletes must meet initial eligibility requirements as well as progress towards degree percentages to remain eligible to

practice and compete. Universities must also report the graduation success rates of each sport using the graduation success rate (GSR) model, which compares graduation rates of student-athletes with the overall student body (LaForge and Hodge, 2011). Also, in 1991, the NCAA passed legislation requiring all member institutions to provide academic counseling services to all student-athletes. The rationale was that failure to succeed academically could jeopardize eligibility, opportunities for athletics scholarships and the overall goal of graduation. More recently, in 2004 the NCAA implemented an academic progress report (APR) to focus on retention rates of student-athletes in order to make progress toward the ultimate goal of college graduation (Satterfield et al., 2010). These regulations have forced universities and athletic departments to realign with their mission statements and create positive educational and athletic experiences for all student-athletes, while maintaining an atmosphere of compliance with the NCAA rules. Within the confines of the NCAA rules, athletic academic advisors actively participate in the advising and counseling of student-athletes.

Traditionally, the advising and counseling of intercollegiate student-athletes focused on three main areas: class scheduling, academic tutoring, and time management (Broughton and Neyer, 2001). These areas of focus have recently expanded to include academic/athletic evaluation, support, and guidance in every aspect of a student-athlete's academic and athletic careers (e.g. Bylaw 16.3.1.1- Academic Counseling and Support Services, Bylaw 16.3.1.2- Life Skills Programs). The expansion of the academic support department provides student-athletes with more opportunities to excel in the classroom and on the field. With the assistance of athletic academic advisors, student-athletes can develop the interpersonal skills needed to act in their own best interests and then use those skills to manage their own affairs. These academic, athletic, and personal affairs are common headlining stories for the media, especially in the sports of

football and basketball whose cultures are always questioned due to varying degrees of corruption.

Not only do college athletics encourage athletics over academics, the college sport culture also fosters an environment that hinders student-athlete identity, which stunts their personal and social development (Despres et al., 2008). These environments create a need for athletic academic support staffs in order to grasp and engage the academic needs of student-athletes, especially African American athletes. Often thought of as a homogenous population, student-athletes are in fact one of the most diverse student groups (Ferrante et al., 1996). Diversity on college campuses not only manifests itself ethnically, but also by socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, type of scholarship received, and educational paths, “[r]acialized issues are rarely discussed within sports except in discourse about the elimination of the color barrier (e.g., Jackie Robinson in major league baseball) or in reference to outlandish statements (e.g., John Rucker’s comments about New Yorkers),” (Brown et al., 2003, p. 164). Black athletes often have to struggle with many degrading stereotypes that can directly affect their educational experiences. Edwards (1984) notes that black athletes often have to contend not only with socioeconomic hardship and the educational mediocrity or failure of student-athletes in general, but also the stereotypical caricature of the “dumb jock.” In light of the context of college athletics in the United States the questions remain: How can the needs of African American college football student-athletes be met most effectively by the university they represent? What are the specific needs of African American college football student-athletes? Are they arriving underprepared for college? How can the university most effectively balance the rigors of a football student-athletes’ athletic schedule with the need to provide athletes with a rigorous academic program? What role does race play in the college career of African American football student-athletes? Very few of

these athletes will be able to go on to play professionally. Is college preparing them for their future?

Today's popular culture places much media attention on intercollegiate athletics, especially so-called revenue-producing sports such as football and basketball. Johnson and Migliaccio (2009) note that the media plays an influential role in black youth identity development by limiting and focusing on sport icons as positive role models for the African American community (p. 100). Lapchick et al. (2010) concluded that Black men comprised of just 6.6% of head coaches in NCAA Division I sports. They also found that only 7.4% of athletics directors at Division I colleges and universities were Black. That being said, Sailes (1996) reported that African Americans account for only 12 percent of the population in the United States, but African American male athletes account for 67 percent of the athletes playing NCAA Division I basketball and 44 percent of the athletes playing Division I football. A large proportion of African American college athletes in the sports of football and basketball are at a great disadvantage without African American men leading their teams and universities. By investigating the current academic experiences of African American football student-athletes, I plan to provide a clearer understanding of how to best accommodate their needs as well as develop strategies to enhance the Athletic Academic Support Services at the University.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Sports have evolved into key social institutions of the American society. For decades, researchers in sociology and sport have recognized the significance of sport for the African American family and community. Because many African American boys find themselves in extreme poverty and with a lack of obtainable resources, the quality of educational experiences prior to enrolling in college are affecting their academic experiences during college. Edwards (2000), suggested that the overemphasis on sports has drained Black talent away from other areas of economic and cultural success. He also argues that the push toward athletic success is hindering the social and cognitive growth of African American youth (Edwards, 1983, 1988, 2000). Several scholars have noted the economic, educational, athletic and racial difficulties that arise for African American males in competitive sports (Benson, 2000; Edwards, 1988, 2000; Harrison, 2000; Hoberman, 2000; Lapchick, 1996; Lomax, 2000; Sellers and Kuperminc, 1997; Siegel, 1996). Although participation in athletics has been considered a golden opportunity especially with the pressure to “get out of poverty,” the serious involvement in college sports has hampered the overall development of African American males in areas such as academic and occupational achievement (Lomax, 2000). This lack of development has helped create an inferior academic stigma associated with African American male athletes by the college community, which heavily defines their educational experiences.

The socio-economic hardship, educational mediocrity and failure of student-athletes in general, shape the stereotypical caricature of the dumb jock (Roper and McKenzie, 1988). The historical origins of the dumb jock stereotype can be traced back to 500 B.C., when Greek

athletes were criticized for the excessive amount of time they used in preparation for athletic competitions and for neglecting their intellectual development (Sailes, 1993 p. 89). Furthermore, Beamon and Bell, (2006) state that African American males are overrepresented in the sports world, which has recently been attributed to the intentional and intensive socialization of the African American in sports (p. 393). Harrison et al. (2011) discuss the overrepresentation as it relates to stereotype threat. They describe stereotype threat as a situation when one is fearful of being negatively judged by others because of the prevailing stereotypes of one's group affiliation. Their study about the relationship between race and athletic identity concluded that although being viewed as an athlete is not necessarily detrimental, there is a negative connotation attached to being perceived mainly as an athlete as it fails to acknowledge other coexisting identities and magnifies prevailing stereotypical views (Harrison et al., 2011). Thus, the negative academic stereotypes associated with being an athlete, especially an African American male athlete, are directly related to poor academic performance. With little emphasis on academic achievement, many African American male college athletes find themselves aspiring to play professional sports as a the only viable career option.

Far too often sport is framed as the red carpet pathway out of poverty into fame and fortune. While few do achieve their professional athletic dreams, the vast majority is rudely awakened by the fact that they have forgone their opportunity to secure valuable education for little success in the professional leagues. Today, some African American athletes seem to view professional sports as the only viable vocational career option free of racial barriers because of the over-promotion of athletic achievement (Edwards, 1994). It is likely that the lack of career preparation (beyond that of professional sports) provides ample fuel for the overdevelopment and sustainment of athletic identity. By overinvesting time and energy into athletic success while

neglecting other skills (such as academics), the chances of succeeding beyond athletic ability are slim. The common trend of aspiring to play professional sports presents universities the opportunity to revise policies and practices to reflect more career training opportunities that offer a vast majority of career options for the African American football student-athlete population.

This literature review (shaped by a critical race theoretical perspective) will cover the following categories: 1) Academic Eligibility: African American football student-athletes' lack of academic preparation prior to enrolling in college and maintaining academic eligibility in order to compete versus achieving academic excellence 2) Multiple Stigmas: African American football student-athletes experiencing the double stigma of not only being an athlete, but also one of African American descent and 3) Black Ticket Out: African American football student-athletes utilizing college football as a means of escaping poverty and aspiring, often unrealistically, to continue their playing careers in the National Football League. These categories frame my problem of practice: How do systemic racial inequalities impact the academic experiences of African American college football student athletes at a top Division I football program?

Lack of Preparation, Maintaining Eligibility, and Achieving Academic Excellence

The sociocultural factors that shape and impact the lives of African Americans are deeply rooted in the historical and contemporary reaction to white racism and discrimination which has directly affected their culture (Sailes, 1996). According to Comeaux and Jayakumar (2007), at the community level, the African American people have been marginalized through policies that explicitly and implicitly deny them equal access to resources, giving them less qualified teachers, poor schools, and setting up racial micro aggression, all of which combine to contribute low academic performance of the children of color (p.44). Shropshire (1997) even contends that the

initial eligibility standards mandated by the NCAA function in a “colorblind manner” in which the recognition of the disproportionate negative impacts experienced by African Americans are not considered. This segregation of educational experiences prior to college places African American students at an immediate disadvantage before even stepping foot on campus (Simiyu, 2012, p. 54). Therefore, a high proportion of African American students attend college with the mindset of maintaining eligibility to compete versus excelling in the classroom. Comeaux and Jayakumar (2007) conclude that this focus on athletic versus academic success in the African American community is a positive response to the negative socio-historic forces that shape identities in a form of institutional racism.

Upthegrove et al. (1999) found that racial concentration and background differences are influential in shaping the likelihood of academic difficulty for basketball and football players when compared to their nonrevenue counterparts. Harrison and Lawrence (2004) examined the attitudes of 301 college students from a Midwestern University enrolled in an introductory communication class in terms of how they perceive the success of the African American athlete. They hypothesized that the perceptions would be biased and uneducated. Using a 53 question survey (of which 45 were used in a Likert scale format), two semi-structured questions and six demographic control items, their findings indicated that the media is accountable for common societal viewpoints concerning the image of the African American athlete. More specifically, their study illustrated that the media is responsible for perpetuating societal stereotypes and affected participant perceptions of “black discrimination, lack of educational resources attainable by blacks, and socioeconomic status of blacks” (Harrison and Lawrence, 2004, pp. 42-43). These perceptions cause African American athletes to feel a sense of isolation and concern that they are viewed as academically inferior. This sense of academic inferiority is closely associated with not

only sociocultural factors that influence the experiences of African American athletes but also the socioeconomic and poverty aspects of life. These factors directly impact their academic and athletic performance.

Socialization of the lower class population is shaped by the economic and social conditions experienced on a daily basis. "Socioeconomic status is important because it shapes parental resources, active school participation, and household culture, each of which is conducive to educational success" (DiMaggio, 1982; Lareau, 1989; Teachman, 1987; Upthegrove et al., 1999). In their piece titled, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education* (1995), Ladson-Billings and Tate argue that three factors influence social and school inequality: 1) race continues to be significant in the United States, 2) U.S. society is based on property rights rather than human rights, and 3) the intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity (1995, p. 48). They continue by stating that the cause of poverty in conjunction with the condition of schools is a form of institutional and structural racism that continues to challenge the African American community (p. 55). According to the 2010 census, there are approximately 40.2 million people who identified themselves as African American or a combination of African American and one or more other races (Rastogi, 2011, p. 3). Of the 40.2 million African Americans in the United States, 27.4% are at or below the poverty level (DeNavas et al., 2011). Extreme poverty and lack of obtainable resources directly impact the quality of education.

Crouse and Thrusheim (1988) found that economically disadvantaged African Americans were educationally disenfranchised as a result of their economic status (Sailes, 1996). By examining family income and SAT scores, they concluded that "the longer a family remained impoverished, the greater the likelihood that lower SAT scores, lower grade point averages,

lower high school graduation percentages, and unlikely college matriculation would prevail (Crouse and Thursheim, 1988). Harrison and Lawrence (2004) also found that the concept of *Black limited opportunity* existed amongst their participants. The participants recognized that the lack of resources and opportunities, especially in lower class neighborhoods, affected educational attainment. The lack of value placed on academics during the foundational years of schooling is carried into the next phase of life during the college years. Harrison (2008) found that the idea of African American athletes “majoring in eligibility” was prevalent in his study. Athletes were taking courses only to remain eligible to compete on the field instead of taking courses required to graduate. His results paralleled many other authors (Childs, 1999; Davis, 1996; Duderstadt, 2000; Edwards, 1984; Lapchick, 1996; Lapchick, 2001; Kirk and Kirk, 1993; McMillen, 1992; Morris, 1992; Rooney, 1980; Sailes, 1998; Shropshire, 1996; Shulman and Bowman, 2001; Smith, 1990; Sparks and Robinson, 1999; Sperber, 1990; Wetzal and Yaeger, 2000; Wilson, 1983; Wolff and Keteyian, 1991). Roper and McKenzie (1988) express concerns with the lack of black graduation rates in comparison to their white peers and the inability of the institutions to retain black student-athletes at the same level as white student-athletes. They indicate that there are inadequacies in educational programs and more research must be conducted on the overall college experiences of African American student-athletes in order to address issues such as retention. Because African American men are so overrepresented in college athletics, the subtle reminders of their racial status undermine their academic performance. These constant racial barriers and challenges not only define African American student-athletes’ educational experiences, but they also shape the identity development process as well.

Multiple Stigmas: African American, Male, and Athlete

Researchers have long known that the stigma attached to African American student-athletes as inferior academically by the college community impedes trust and motivation, which hinders their college experiences (Comeaux, 2007). These distinct socialization experiences significantly impact and define the education of African American men. “The well documented history of racism in the United States has also manifested in the stereotyping of Blacks in collegiate sports” (Hodge et al., 2008, p. 204). As cited by Stone, Harrison and Mottley (2012), research shows that most faculty, administrators, and other “traditional” students view college athletes in terms of the “dumb-jock” stereotype, which characterizes athletes as less intelligent, motivated, or prepared for college courses compared to traditional students who do not play sports (p. 99). Furthermore, Harper (2009b) contends that this myth also negatively affects those students who are not student-athletes, as their White peers and others (e.g., faculty, alumni, and administrators) often erroneously presume that they are members of intercollegiate sports teams and stereotype them accordingly. Today, the sports of football and men’s basketball have evolved into a multimillion-dollar business venture in which legitimate avenues for the expression of masculine dominance exist (Hall, 2001). Burden (2004) found evidence of race-based stereotypic beliefs in their interviews with Black and White college students regarding race sport preferences. Burden reported that 33% of the Black and White college students interviewed held stereotypic beliefs on Black athletic abilities). Extensive media coverage reinforces negatively these race-based athletic stereotypes.

Stereotypes of athletes as dumb jocks or as criminals are fairly common in American society. Evidence of these negative stereotypes abounds in popular culture, such as in the film “Varsity Blues,” sports magazines and websites (Jameson et al., 2007 p. 69). Simons et al.

(2007) note that the dumb jock stereotype implies that athletes lack the motivation and intelligence to succeed academically at the intercollegiate level (p. 252). Based on this stereotype, media portrayals and experiences with underprepared athletes whose behavior conforms to the stereotype, Black athletes are constantly stigmatized in higher education (Simons et al., 2007). In their study of 538 athletes, Simons et al. (2007) addressed how athletes were perceived and treated by faculty and non-student-athletes. Their findings indicated that the closer an athlete appeared to be an African American male involved in football or basketball, the more they were stigmatized and likely to receive negative treatment (Simons et al., 2007, p. 257). The African American athletes also reported a much higher degree of negative perceptions and treatment as compared to White and other athletes meaning that African American athletes are subject to a double stigma of being black and an athlete (p. 257). Fueled by the media, the African American athlete at the collegiate and professional level will constantly battle the African American athlete stigma. These experiences faced by African American male athletes can be described as a form of “stereotype threat.”

Steele (1997, p. 616) defines stereotype threat as the event of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in that has relevance to one’s self-definition. He contends that “the present definition stresses that for a negative stereotype to be threatening, it must be self-relevant. Then, the situational contingency it establishes will possibly conform to the stereotype and become self-threatening in which the individual accepts the stereotype as part of his own identity. (Steele 1997, p. 617). Harrison et al. (2011) explain in plain words that stereotype threat exists when one is fearful of being negatively judged by others because of the prevailing stereotypes of one’s group affiliation. Their study

about the relationship between race and athletic identity concluded that, although being viewed as an athlete is not necessarily detrimental, there is a negative connotation attached to being perceived mainly as an athlete as it fails to acknowledge other coexisting identities and magnifies prevailing stereotypical views. Stereotype threat produces numerous consequences, most of which are negative in nature. Many studies have replicated and extended the findings of Steele and Aronson (1995) which continue to challenge educational practitioners. Several of the findings include, but are not limited to, decreased performance, internal attributions for failure, reactance, ironic effects, self-handicapping, task discounting, distancing the self from the stereotyped group, disengagement and dis-identification and altered professional identities and aspirations (Stroessner, Good, and Webster, 2015).

In regards to athletics specifically, Jameson et al. (2007) cite research demonstrating “that African American participants underperformed on a difficult intellectual ability test when negative stereotypes about their group’s intellectual ineptitude were made salient or when the test was characterized as diagnostic of ability” (p. 70). Thus, the negative academic stereotypes associated with being an athlete, especially an African American male athlete, are directly related to poor academic performance. Not only do negative racial stereotypes impact the idea that African American males are dumb jocks, but the aspirations of playing professional sports also hinder academic performance. The unrealistic aspirations to play professionally create conflict in the identity development as well as the career development of these individuals. Although the dreams and goals of playing professionally should never be dismissed, student-athletes should always explore viable career options that interest them. For many African American males, sports are the means of combating a never-ending cycle of racial oppression and socioeconomic depression. Richard Lapchick (1982) contends that the black family is seven

times more likely than a white family to push a male child into sports. These and other forces impact the black family and channel black males into sports.

“Black Ticket Out”: Unrealistic Aspirations

Harrison and Lawrence (2004) investigated college students’ perceptions, myths, and stereotypes about African American athleticism. One subtheme of their study consisted of the “Black ticket out” in which the idea of using sport to get out of poverty was prevalent amongst their participants. That is, African American men perceive that few opportunities exist through traditional channels; thus, sports are a viable opportunity to achieve success in the American society (Sailes, 1996). Because of the pressure to “get out of poverty,” African American athletes tend to use higher education institutions to achieve this goal.

Even though many college athletes possess the skills and desire to play professionally, the statistics published by the NCAA state that the likelihood to “make it to the league” is slim. According to the NCAA, men’s college basketball players have approximately a 1.2% chance of being drafted by the NBA and college football players have a 1.8% chance of being drafted by the NFL (Tyrance et al., 2013). Certainly, being drafted does not ensure that the players are going to make the team and sign a profitable contract. These statistics suggest that the majority of college athletes will retire from competitive sports once their eligibility has expired and will need to develop career plans during the course of their collegiate enrollment. Put differently, over 98% of these student-athletes will need to pursue career options after college other than professional sports activities. Even the NCAA recognizes these figures by creating a slogan that states, “There are over 400,000 NCAA student-athletes, and most of the student-athletes will go pro in something other than sports.” Harper et al. (2013) advise African American student-athletes and their families to resist the seductive lure of choosing a university because it appears

to be a promising gateway to careers in professional sports. Yet still, some African Americans seem to view professional sports as a viable form, perhaps the only form, of upward social mobility and perceived success.

There has been a long-standing, yet ill-informed presumption that African American men are athletically superior, intellectually deficient, and pushed toward athletic careers propagated by the dominant White culture (Simiyu, 2012). Enhanced by media propaganda, the misconception of broadly accessible routes to social and economic mobility for African American men through sports has blossomed within the century. The media bombardment characterized by high earning African American athletes tends to promote sports dreams and downplays educational and scholarly related opportunities (Edwards, 2000). Sellers and Kuperminc (1997) investigated whether African American male college student-athletes focus their career goals unrealistically on professional athletics to the detriment of their academic pursuits. Utilizing 702 African American male student-athletes from 42 NCAA Division I universities, they found that only 5% of the sample expected to play professionally. Even though less than two decades have passed, this study is likely outdated, especially given the large increase in profitable television contracts for the sports of football and men's basketball. A more recent study conducted by Tyrance et al. (2013) examined the relationship between athletic identity, race, gender, sport, expectation to play professionally and career planning attitudes among 538 Division I student-athletes from four institutions. They found that over 26% of the student-athletes surveyed believed that they were going to continue their athletic careers at the professional level. "If student-athletes have not considered or prepared for careers other than professional sports, their ability to adapt to the changing world of work could prove to be more challenging" (Tyrance et al., 2013, p. 30). As defined by Crites (1978), career development is the

formation of mature, realistic career plans grounded in assessing one's career goals, interests, and abilities and awareness of vocational opportunities and requirements. Lally and Kerr (2005) suggest that student-athletes need to relinquish the athlete role to invest more seriously and explore non-sport careers. Professionals, such as Athletic Academic Support staff members, can reassure student-athletes that investment in both is possible without compromising one or the other. However, a common reality for African American male student-athletes is that they have unrealistic goals regarding playing professional sports.

A national study conducted by the NCAA found that approximately 52% of African American Division I football and basketball student-athletes felt they would play professional sports (Sailes, 1996). Sellers and Kuperminc (1997) state that “[t]here is some concern that too many African American young men are focusing too much on athletics and that this is manifesting into unrealistic aspirations for professional sports careers.” Those researchers found that African American male student-athletes view professional sports as a viable vocational option and is relatively free of racial barriers. Beamon (2010) notes that the lack of African American role models outside of sports and entertainment has created an environment where the pursuit of professional athletics careers has become an easily distinguishable form of possible achievement for African American males. Furthermore, she contends that the mass media inundates society with images of African American men who garner success and fame through sports, lending support to the stereotype of African American males as exclusively athletically talented. “Although African American men are underrepresented in just about every traditional avenue for upward socioeconomic mobility in our society (such as education), they are significantly overrepresented in professional sports such as football and basketball” (Sellers and Kuperminc, 1997, p. 7). This overrepresentation only reinforces the goal of playing

professionally. African American male athletes are betting against the odds and foregoing their education with a very small chance of playing professionally. The relationships between the above contributing factors and the overall academic and athletic success of African American football student-athletes have sparked my research interests to explore their intercollegiate experiences and even suggest ways of enhancing them.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

The purpose of this case study is to explore, through a critical race theoretical framework, the relationship between race and the academic experiences as well as career aspirations of African American football student-athletes at a large public Mid-Atlantic University. To accomplish my inquiries, I interviewed four athletic academic advisors that work directly with the student-athletes. Then four separate focus groups were conducted with twelve African American football student-athletes to allow participants to explore complex life issues while sharing similar background experiences and ideas. I followed-up each focus group sessions with one-on-one interviews that deepened my understanding of their individual educational experiences. Finally, I shadowed three of the four participants from 8:00am to 10:00pm to better understand their daily lives. None of the sophomores agreed to be shadowed. Data was also collected on the following: institutional demographics, information on academic services programs, academic monitoring, personnel, physical space, fiscal support and administrative support.

Significance of a Case Study

In qualitative research, case studies are used to develop an in-depth understanding of a single case or to illustrate the exploration of a specific issue or problem. Case study research allows an investigator to explore a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple cases over time, through detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information such as interviews, focus groups and observations (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Case study methodology is best suited for the critical race theoretical framework and my research questions because it

allows me to explore discriminatory practices through the perspective of African American football student-athletes. Because race is a fluid social construct, using case studies to challenge traditional paradigms of race provides African American men the opportunity to discuss their individually lived experiences through narratives and storytelling.

Research Setting

Data for this case study were collected at a large public Mid-Atlantic University. The pseudonym Mid-Atlantic University will be used throughout this study in order to protect the Athletic Department staff as well as the student-athletes' identities. The University is centrally located and is one of the largest institutions of higher learning in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States. As one of the oldest universities in the United States, the University has established itself as a premier public research institution. The University offers 24 sports and has over 600 intercollegiate student-athletes from all over the world. The institution continues to be one of the national leaders in both production on the field and in the classroom.

Mid-Atlantic University is known for its commitment in institutional diversity. Recently, the university established the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion which advocates for inclusiveness, diversity, and equity to achieve university visions and goals. With students from more than 115 countries studying at Mid-Atlantic University, the 2015-16 entering class was one of the largest in the school's history. Table 1 below illustrates the enrollment statistics from the university's website:

Table 1: 2014-15 Enrollment Statistics

Demographic	Percentage
White	45.2%
Asian	20.2%
Latino	11.7%
African American	10.2%
International	6.3%
Other	7%
Male	47.2%
Female	52.8%

The Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion not only partners with other departments to create, promote, and implement university-wide policies to advance diversity and inclusion, but it also provides students with resources and learning opportunities such as internships that prepare them to engage in a diverse society.

The large public Mid-Atlantic University was chosen for its well-known large, racially and socioeconomically diverse student and student-athlete population as well as the ease of access to the participants. It was also selected because there has been commitment to compete at the highest level of amateur athletics in higher education while enhancing the educational experiences of its student-athletes.

Participants

The participants in this study were four athletic academic advisors who work directly with football student-athletes and 12 African American football student-athletes (three incoming freshmen who attended classes on campus during the summer of 2015, three sophomores, three juniors, and three seniors). The academic support services program structure is designed to change as participants learn the university system, mature, and take ownership of their academic experiences. The participants' academic support services experiences are different in every grade level which is why I interviewed multiple participants at different grade levels. Purposeful sampling was used to identify 12 football participants based on three criteria: 1) self-identified as African American at their beginning of the year Compliance meeting. The self-identification process allowed me to quickly eliminate participants during the selection process who were not African American. 2) currently enrolled (freshmen enrolled in classes on campus during the summer of 2015), sophomore, junior, or senior all enrolled in at least one summer school course. By selecting participants who were currently enrolled in summer school, I was able to ask questions about their daily academic advising experiences while they were presently utilizing them. 3) required to attend mandatory study hall sessions and academic meetings at some point during their collegiate career. Ten of the 12 participants are from New Jersey, New York, or Pennsylvania. Two participants are from Florida. All of the participants have at least one parent with whom they have lived at some point during their childhood. A majority of the participants live with one parent and a step parent or both biological parents. All of the participants have at least one sibling and 83% have two or more siblings. All of the participants have extended family living in the same or neighboring town and indicated that they see them frequently. Nine of the 12 participants attend church on a regular basis. Three of the participants went to a private

high school and the other nine participants attended a public high school. All of the football student-athletes range from ages 18 to 25 (see Appendix A for demographic information). I used purposeful sampling to contact the four athletic academic advisors. The Executive Director (white male), Assistant Director of Academic Support (white female), and two Academic Advisors (African American males) were chosen because they work directly with African American football student-athletes on a daily basis and have been at the University for an extended period of time.

Role of the Researcher

I was the key instrument in conducting this qualitative study. As a Caucasian female with a Bachelor's degree in Sports Management and a Master's degree in Educational Administration, I am currently pursuing an educational doctoral degree. Since the research setting is within my workplace, I acted as an insider participant, but also an outsider as I am a white female investigating the experiences of African American men. By collecting data, examining documents, and interviewing participants, my role as the researcher was the most challenging component of the study. Because I am a white female researching African American males, the risk of internal bias as well as the authenticity of the participant's responses was challenging but humbling. I participated in a bracketing interview in order to identify my own biases, assumptions and stereotypes. Van Maanen (1983) states that "[b]racketing means to suspend one's theoretical presuppositions prior to engagement with the phenomenon under investigation in order to understand the phenomena from the perspective of those who experience it by sensitizing my own biases that might change the interpretive vision" (p. 92). The research in which I engaged is shaped by who I am, and as long as I remained reflective throughout the process, I was shaped by it, and by those whom I interviewed. There are various disadvantages

as well as advantages when conducting a study within a place of work. Several disadvantages include, but are not limited to: role duality (compliance officer/researcher), overlooking certain themes, making assumptions about the meanings of events or feelings and not seeking clarification, assuming I know the participants' views and issues, and closeness to the situation hindering my perspectives and the ability to see all dimensions of the bigger picture while collecting data. Numerous advantages include, but are not limited to, issues such as speaking the same insider language, understanding team values, knowledge and taboos, knowing the formal and informal power structure, obtaining permission to conduct the research, interviews, and access to records for the research process.

Qualitative research seeks to provide an understanding of a problem through the lived experiences of individuals. As a member of the dominant culture in multiple categories, it is important to establish trust with the participants. I was mindful of the fact that conducting a study that highlights issues of difference may contribute to feeling of continued marginalization of the participants. My relationship and rapport with the student-athletes was an important aspect of this study, one in which was an asset. I needed to create an environment of trust and openness. Engaging in conversations that reveal similarities and not differences (such as the challenges of being a student-athlete, including excelling in the classroom as well as on the field, managing a structured and scheduled life around sport participation, tensions between player and coach, teammates and peers) between me and the participants helped to build trust. I had a distinct advantage because I understand the Athletic Department due to being a former student-athlete and have even been a part of conversations about the struggles of racism and prejudices with previous African American football student-athletes. I am also a friend of several ex-football student-athletes from the university who could validate my trustworthiness for the participants. I

attempted to express a sincere interest in their lives and want to give them a voice. This opportunity to engage in a discourse of inclusion derived healthy feelings and reflections about race and academia. There are several components that support my relationship with the participants. First, I speak the same insider language and easily engage in conversations on a daily basis with these athletes. I understand the team values, knowledge, and taboos. Also, I understand the value of trust in a team environment and appreciate the formal and informal structure of an athletic department. Because of my relationship with the Athletics Director and Head Football Coach, I was able to obtain permission to conduct this study which illustrates their trust in me. Finally, I have had easy access to staff members with whom both the student-athletes and I work with on a daily basis.

Protection of Subjects

To protect the confidentiality of the participants, the coaches were not informed of who participated in the study. The head coach did know the content and purpose of the study I needed permission to access the participants. However, I agreed to provide a copy of the findings and dissertation to the head coach as well as the athletic director as requested. The identities of the athletic academic advisors and student-athletes were disguised in order to protect the confidentiality of the subjects.

All participants in the study gave their written consent to participate. I informed the participants of their rights before the interview commenced, including the ability to withdraw from the interview at any time, refraining from answering questions that induced discomfort, and stop the audiotape. I explained the significance of confidentiality in research because many of the participants expressed concerns about revealing their identities. I informed the participants

that their names would not be published in any document and pseudonyms would be used throughout all research materials.

The informed consent and audio consent forms (Appendices A, B and D) also outlined the highly unlikely event that the participants might have an emotional reaction to the experienced of discussing potentially sensitive topics. If necessary, the appropriate referrals would have been made for psychological treatment with the athletic psychologist. By the end of the data collection, no participants reported psychological distress as a result of the interviews or shadowing

Data Collection

Institutional Data

Information was collected on the following: Institutional demographics, academic services programs offered, academic monitoring policies and procedures, personnel demographics, physical space, fiscal support and administrative support. Data was also collected from the registrar's office regarding the focus group participant's grade point average broken down by semester, pending and completed coursework, degree programs, and academic accolades. These data provided me with current academic standings for the participants.

Focus Groups and Interviews

A focus group is an informal discussion among a group of selected individuals about a specific topic (Wilkinson, 2004). Broadly speaking, focus groups are collective conversations in which the examination of topics from people of similar social and cultural backgrounds helps an investigator understand meanings and interpretations. Focus group methodology encourages a wide range of responses which provide a greater understanding of attitudes, behaviors, opinions,

and perceptions of participants. Focus group sessions provide participants the opportunity to voice what is relevant and important in their lives while also allowing the researcher an in-depth closer look at the data. This particular research method is important in my study because it allows me to explore what people think, why they feel certain ways, and how they view the world. Discussing dense and complex topics such as race in a focus group setting provides me the opportunity to examine how the participants function in a social network of peers while addressing sensitive conversations.

Interviewing in qualitative research consists of a series of steps in a procedure. In *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (2013), John Creswell describes the interview data collection process by outlining the following steps: 1. Decide on the research questions that will be answered during the interview. Utilizing open-ended questions allows participants to provide in-depth stories and data in their answers. 2. Identify interviewees who can best answer the questions based on purposeful sampling. 3. Determine what type of interview is practical and will net the most information. During the one-on-one interview sessions, individuals are encouraged to speak openly about their experiences and ideas. To build rapport with the participants, I conducted focus group sessions followed by one-on-one interviews. 4. Use adequate recording the procedures. I utilized a hand held recording device as well as my cell phone to document the focus groups and interviews. 5. Design and use an interview protocol. The interview protocol from this study is attached. 6. Determine the place for conducting the interview. I conducted the interviews in a space that is quiet, free from distractions, and familiar to the participants. 7. After arriving on site, obtain consent forms from the participants. Each participant received an email with their signed consent forms attached after the interview process concluded. 8. Use good interview procedures consisting of respect, courtesy, and the ability to

listen. One-on-one interviews allow the participants to discuss their personal history on a deeper more meaningful level.

The four athletic academic advisors were interviewed separately and individually at the beginning of the study. Prior to being interviewed, each athletic academic advisor reviewed and signed the informed consent form as well as the audio consent form. (see Appendices A and B). Interviewing the advisors first allowed me to grasp their experiences with this particular population to enhance the focus group discussion questions. The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured lasting approximately one hour. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The interview protocol (see Appendix C) consists of open ended questions, created by the author of this dissertation, based on a review of the literature regarding the relationships of college student-athletes and their athletic academic advisors. Prior to reviewing the literature, I created a list of questions which warranted answers relevant to the nature of the study. The unanswered questions after reviewing the literature became the basis for the interview protocol. The questions required participants to reflect on their roles within the department, experiences with diversity in the workplace, and their relationships with African American football student-athletes. Each athletic academic advisor was contacted via email to ask for participation. Interviews with the athletic academic advisors took place in their respective offices when they were available and addressed questions regarding their roles in the academic success of African American football student-athletes as well as their experiences with race in the workplace.

Prior to participating in the study, the 12 football student-athletes reviewed and signed the audio/video consent form as well as the informed consent form (see Appendices B and D). The 12 African American football student-athletes took part in one of four focus group sessions. Each session consisted of three total athletes: group one (three sophomores), group two (three

juniors), group three (three freshmen) and group four (three seniors). The groups were not in age or class order due to ease of access to the groups on specific days. Every football student-athlete focus group was conducted in one of the academic rooms at the football stadium at a time in which the group just ended study hall or they were all conveniently available. All focus group sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. The study's research questions were broken down thoroughly to guide the focus group discussions. Questions were open-ended and designed to elicit candid responses (see Appendix E for focus group protocol). The study's focus group session design consisting of three athletes was chosen because exploring complex life issues through this methodology provides participants opportunities to share similar background experiences and ideas. I made every effort to interview participants in a conversational and exploratory fashion, which allowed participants to be comfortable with expressing their perceptions, expectations and values regarding race and their academic experiences.

For this research, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the 12 African American football student-athletes in the study after the focus group sessions. Individual interviews took place in an academic room at the football stadium. Similar to the focus group questions design, the one-on-one interview questions were also open-ended and designed to elicit candid responses (see Appendix F for the interview protocol). Every effort was made to interview participants in a conversational and exploratory fashion, which allowed participants to be comfortable with expressing their perceptions, expectations and values regarding race and their academic experiences.

Observations

Observations are an essential tool for collecting data in qualitative research. The observer is able to utilize his or her five senses to note a specific phenomenon. Observations based on the

research questions can consist of viewing people, things, activities, conversations, interactions, behaviors etc. in a physical space. Creswell (2013) indicates four types of engagement styles when observing: 1. Complete participant. The researcher is fully engaged with the people he or she is observing. 2. Participant as observer. The researcher is participating in the activity at site. 3. Nonparticipant/observer as participant. The researcher is an outsider of the group, watching and taking field notes from a distance. 4. Complete observer. The researcher is neither seen nor noticed by the people under study. Because of my current role within the athletic department, I immersed myself completely with the participants and their activities. To ensure trust, I engaged in full, open conversations and interactions with the participants throughout their observations. The observations took place after each focus group and one-on-one interview to wrap up any final questions I had about their daily lives.

Three of the African American football student-athletes took part in one day of individual shadowing beginning at approximately 6:00 a.m. and ending at approximately 10:00 p.m. Shadowing was used to gain understanding of the individual's behavior, opinions and drivers as well as to understand his role and paths through experiences with other objects or people in a given setting.

Data Analysis

At the completion of the data collection, interviews were transcribed with the assistance of Rev.com and analyzed with the assistance of Dedoose, a password-protected data analysis software program. Qualitative research methods such as rich descriptions, analytical memos, coding, classifying, and interpreting were used to analyze the data (Creswell, 2013). Descriptions of the interview and focus group sites as well as the participants were recorded in short hand during each session and thoroughly expanded upon after the sessions end. These descriptions

were added to the transcriptions and analytical memos. They were then uploaded and organized in the Dedoose software program. Inductive coding was used to identify emerging themes throughout the interviews and focus groups (Creswell, 2013). Codes such as stereotypes, experiences with diversity, career aspirations etc. helped label excerpts from the interviews and focus groups during the transcription process for analysis. Axial coding was used to defragment the data by making connections between categories and subcategories which allowed the researcher to understand overlapping themes from the interviews. The final coding procedure required refinement and development once expanded.

Validity

Creswell (2013) suggests ensuring the following components are considered when confirming threats of validity: Consider and explain how one plans to substantiate the accuracy of one's accounts, employ multiple procedures to ensure validity, find standards of quality within the tradition of the study, put standards in the report and reflect on how the study does and does not meet them and most importantly, detail every step taken. Embedded within the design of the study is the use of multiple data sources: institutional data, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews. Before coding and analysis, I critically examined myself as an investigator. This self-examination process, known as *epoche*, allowed me to remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions (Patton, 2001). In addition, I was able to compare the different data sources together in order to triangulate the data and provide a more accurate sense of the outcomes. It was critical that I maintained a positive relationship with my professional colleagues, while also being accurate with the data. Ultimately, the goal was to produce a study that is fair to the employers, but also useful.

Limitations

As with any research, this study is not without limitations. The mere fact that the evaluation is a case study and only focuses on a single unit, will not generalize in terms of findings. However, this study could raise issues that might be similar in other contexts and disciplines. As with any qualitative research, the sensitivity and integrity of the evaluator can be a limitation. Because I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, I relied on instincts and abilities throughout most of the research, while also staying aware of biases that can affect the final product. I am also a young, white female who works in the athletic department at the institution of study. I needed to earn the trust of the participants by ensuring them that any inside information would not be disclosed without their permission. I earned the participants' trust by premising the study with the significance of being open about any and all experiences. The participant's reactions to the controversial and sometimes uncomfortable topics of race were not as challenging as I anticipated. I equate this ease to the trust I earned throughout the study.

Risks and Benefits

The only risk is possible breach of confidentiality. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about participants and this information will be stored in such a manner that there exists some linkage between the participants' identity and the response in the research. All data are stored and secured on a password-protected computer and in a password-protected software program. Participation poses no known risks to participants' jobs, athletic scholarships, playing time on the field or access to academic support services. Every effort was made to protect any identifiable information and participants' confidentiality. Pseudonyms were given. All raw data including audio recordings, documents, transcriptions, and

consent forms will be retained for three years after the conclusion of the study and then destroyed by shredding and burning. Not everyone who participates in a research study will benefit personally. Sometimes the only benefit will be to society by helping researchers learn more about a specific phenomenon. Possible benefits due to participation in this study include the opportunity to reflect upon and gain insights about academic needs and how better serve student-athletes.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study indicates that African American football student-athletes experienced multiple situations of systemic racial inequalities which impacted their academic experiences. Systemic racial inequalities found in American culture frequently challenge African American college football student-athletes. In many cases, the distortion of historical information about people of color leads to assumptions that may go unchallenged (Tatum, 1997). In this study, I found that while African American college football student-athletes endured many racial micro aggressions such as discriminatory professors, peers and teammates, they rarely acknowledged or addressed the micro aggressions. Most of the time, the racial micro aggressions that they experienced were completely ignored. I found that African American college student-athletes' racial experiences prior to enrolling in college directly affected how they handled racial experiences while enrolled in college. The student-athletes' family expectations impacted whether or not the participants challenged racial micro aggressions or ignored them. The participants' racial experiences prior to enrolling in college also affected their athletic and academic relationships on campus. The participants were challenged by meeting minimum requirements to compete or striving for academic excellence. These academic challenges reinforced racial micro aggressions and multiple stigmas such as the dumb jock stereotype. The participants also experienced multiple teammates securing professional football contracts, the overrepresentation of African American professional football players in the media, and illusion of major financial gains. These components were three of the driving forces behind the participants' desires to play professional football. Many also indicated that coming from a lower socioeconomic class motivated them to pursue dreams that would afford them the opportunities to not only support their families, but to

escape poor socioeconomic predicaments. The racial and academic experiences that they described guided my analysis and findings.

Based on the analysis of my findings, the institutional practices at Mid-Atlantic University contributed to the reproduction of inequality. These inequities shaped the experiences, opportunities, and career aspirations of the participants. The athletic academic support structure and practices encouraged the student-athletes to focus heavily on their athlete identity while dismissing stereotypes and feelings of isolation. More often than not, the athletes found refuge from many harsh effects of multiple stigmas and stereotypes by brushing off discrimination and "kept it movin'" when challenged with racial micro aggressions. The athletes' responses and experiences reinforced the idea of securing a professional contract to escape dismal socioeconomic conditions, and forgoing an optimal education by maintaining eligibility versus striving for academic excellence.

Institutional Practices Contributing to the Reproduction on Inequality

Support Structure: Focusing on Athletics vs. Academics

The lack of academic and life skills preparation experienced prior to college by the most of the study participants indicates the need for a re-evaluation of the recruiting process that heavily influences the experiences of high school athletes. College coaches are starting to recruit elite athletes at a very young age which hinders other developmental life stages. The constant focus on remaining eligible to compete in football at the high school level transpired at the college level. Eleven of the 12 participants indicated that they had never held a job and viewed football as their job. Later in the interviews, I asked each participant if they identified more as a "student-athlete" or as an "athlete-student." Eight of the 12 participants identified themselves as an "athlete-student." These same participants (along with a majority of the participants) agreed

that high school did not prepare them for college. The curricula were designed in a “read and regurgitate” fashion which lacked skill development of comprehension and understanding. Schools also failed at addressing the skills needed to succeed during life after college. Since high school, most of the participants found themselves in academic settings that did not focus on striving for academic excellence. A majority of the participants relied on their athletic abilities and mediocre grades to get them through high school. I asked the participants to discuss their high school experiences.

I don't feel like it prepared me for college. The teachers, they weren't really ... Like they didn't work with the kids as much. They were just giving a certain curriculum and then they just gave it out and we had to learn and memorize it and that was it. It didn't prepare us for real life or it didn't rain our work ethic or nothing like that. (Charles)

I went to the biggest daycare ever. My dad spent 14 G's a year to send me to a school that fucking didn't do anything but get me a scholarship here honestly...I wouldn't say I struggle, because I'm a lazy student. I work when my back's against the wall and I need to work but if I don't have to work I'm not really going to do any extra work. It's weird because I'm the exact opposite when it comes to football ... As a student I'm just cool with getting a C because when I've been growing up, that's how it's always been. (Ken)

I wasn't ready at all when I came in. I came from a failing school district so the state took over my school. Our curriculum was basically like getting prepared to pass all the tests so we can keep getting money. I remember having math teachers teaching writing and things like that so. (John)

I would say it did not prepare me at all. It's kind of the same thing, like its high school so you don't really care about academics that much. I didn't care about academics at all. My grade point average was so low. I was never dumb, I just really didn't focus and I went to a public school so I'm focused on like the girls in class and in the hallways. I just really didn't care. It didn't prepare me but when I got here I guessed I kicked it up after my freshman year. (Luke)

The majority of participants described poor college preparation throughout high school. Many of their concerns surrounded the lack of focus on skill development of communication and writing, as well as a lack of access to resources. Some of the participants elaborated more about their lack of college preparation during the one-on-one interviews.

Challenges as a student ... I guess the transition from high school. The workload was a lot. I'm saying as far as academically itself. I wasn't used to doing that much work in high school. I remember when we came in, I failed Basic Comp twice before I passed it. And then I ended up passing it with a B and so...I think it slowed me down but I caught back up with it. (Evan)

High school was honestly a joke...we did not have access to resources and no one helped me with homework. (David)

The combination of minimal academic preparation and significant time demands of football illustrates the familiar lives of college Division I student-athletes. More specifically, the participants found themselves clustered in certain majors for various reasons such as scheduling difficulties, math and writing deficiencies, unknown interests etc.

Academic clustering, or the practice through which academic advisors encourage or force student-athletes to take specific classes or declare certain majors in order to maintain their

NCAA eligibility, is common around high profile football programs. Sometimes choosing these majors becomes appealing to student-athletes as the workload might be rumored as less demanding which could potentially allow the student-athlete to focus on his or her sport. In order to grasp how the football student-athletes choose a major at Mid-Atlantic University, I asked the athletic academic advisors about the major declaration process. I also asked the student-athletes how they chose their majors in order to compare and contrast views on the process.

When asked about the major declaration process, all of the athletic academic advisors indicated that they evaluate the student-athlete's math and writing abilities while also allowing the student to discover their passions and interests. Sometimes students hold unrealistic goals of declaring a certain major that requires proficient math skills when their math abilities are weak. The advisors also indicated that the athletes frequently change their interests and often do not realize a lack of interest in a field until they enroll into an introductory course on a specific topic. That being said, I wanted to grasp how and why student-athletes choose specific majors. One advisor discussed his views on the significance of evaluating the math and writing skills of the athletes:

... the leadership academy does a great job of tryin' to get those kids in career fairs, major fairs and understand what you can do with this major. Uh, math determines a lot of things. You tell the kid up front and that's where I think our coaches do a horseshit job and a disservice...in the recruiting process, they'll tell you we have all these things and you can do it but then you look at the transcript and go this kid can't do math...the math kinda dictates a lot of things. The bridge program is huge but again, if a coach gives you a kid that's horrible in math and writing, it's like what are they gunna be successful at academically? (Advisor, Steve)

Although the athletes might possess poor math and writing abilities, these are skills that can be developed over time with practice, similar to football skills. Depending on the advisor, some students are “given the chance” to prove and or improve their abilities. Advisors are often found in tough predicaments as they have a job to do (ensure academic excellence) while also striving for student-athlete intellectual development. The student-athletes also find themselves struggling with choosing a major of interest versus one that poses a greater chance for success. One advisor stated that the athletes tend to gravitate toward majors in which they feel that they have a chance for academic success. This same advisor indicated that the labor studies major offers a Bachelor’s/Master’s program that entices many athletes, especially if they already know that they will be granted an extra year of eligibility via redshirting.

Um, our popular majors are criminal justice, labor studies, human resource management, which is a fairly new one. Um, we have history majors. We have a couple exercise science majors and there are some communication majors, sociology majors. So there’s a lot of different majors. The university offers about 80 to 90 different majors here. Um and a lot of students kinda, the football players, kinda gravitate to where, you know, they think that they have a good shot of doing well on their classes. Um. Labor studies has been a great program for us because the students are able to do, ya know, the program complete everything in the four years and then have a year of eligibility left. The labor school program has a graduate program that if they’ve done well enough that they can apply and get into the graduate program and walk out after that fifth year with their masters. Um, so that’s been a very good one. Criminal justice, we’ve had a lot of students interested in law enforcement and want to be police officers so they go that route and they want to be in there. A lot of students want to be sports commentators and they sorta

like the year round sports. Communication and journalism are, ya know, the big popular ones. A lot of students want to ya know, coach and learn about how to, ya know, put things together, organize so they do the sports management option. So depending on what the student's interests are, ya know, we kind of work with them, help them get to where they need to get to. (Advisor, Bob)

Two of the advisors indicated that academic clustering is common at the university. Yet, they believe that it is not necessarily the advisors that are doing the clustering, but rather the athletes are choosing to be clustered for various reasons such as increased chance of academic success, an interest in taking classes with teammates, and curiosity based on previous teammate's experiences.

I do feel like there's some similar majors that a good portion of kids will go here. I think it goes in waves, though, too. I see that changes. When I first started out, there were a lot of kids in one major. It seems that we're moving toward another. There's some outliers in there, kids who are in, engineering or science. We got kids sprinkled in there too, but I do feel there are some clustering, and I think they like taking classes with their teammates, and they talk to each other, not just in football but sports all around. They know each other, have a lot of contact with each other, and they get some information about a certain major, and they feel like that's the path that they want to take. (Advisor, Ryan)

It's weird, because being here over 11 years, I would tell you that there was this period of time here when criminal justice is really popular. There's always a top 3 or 4 that stays the same, doesn't change. We went to this big thing when everyone went into labor studies. Then, there was communication. Now, I feel like we're back to criminal

justice...I don't want to say it's like herding cattle, but they herd themselves. They are upperclassmen who's their teammate who plays ahead of them was a criminal justice major, or labor studies major, and they tell them-"I really like these classes. This is what I'm going to do with it." Then, the kid, "I want to do that!" That happens a lot. I will say unless a kid knows they want to be an engineer right when they come in, we're limited on some majors just because of eligibility requirements. I had a kid who literally failed one semester of math, and now he's too far behind at this point to really do the science major he thought he might want to do. You've got to, "Let's come up with a Plan A and a Plan B of how we get back on track." Yes, we cluster, but I think that's the nature when you've got 100 kids, I think some of that is limited based on what they can and can't do based on math and some academic ability. Most of them are -- It's common. (Advisor, Julia)

There also seems to be an issue with time slots and course offerings which limit classes that students can take. Interestingly, none of the advisors mentioned this as a challenge. To compare the advisors' descriptions about how student-athletes choose their majors, I asked the student-athletes to discuss the major declaration process and how their interests were considered and incorporated. I also asked if they received any assistance in choosing their major and who provided that assistance. Most of the student-athletes indicated that they received guidance in choosing a major from their academic advisors, but did not feel that they were pressured into choosing a major that they did not have an interest in studying.

No, I wasn't guided; I always wanted to be in the business setting. If I didn't like finish football or I didn't make it or not, I was going to be in the business setting. (Ben)

Yeah, my academic advisor, she's been guiding me. She's been helping me. She's been giving me all the classes I need to just look around, because right now I'm looking

into communications and sports management, so those are the things I told her and she's been making it happen, putting me in the classes I need to see if that's really what I want to do. (Charles)

Some student-athletes even stated that they discussed options with older teammates to see what majors were feasible with their hectic schedules.

I mean I guess we were guided it's just like we hear all the dudes ... you ask them what they majored in and they may say Communications so I'm like, I guess I'm going to do communications. I feel like it sounded good. People would be like you're a good communicator. You talk good you should do communications. I was like all right, shoot. But it's the opposite, it has nothing to do with that. But the Africana minor, that was something that I decided to do and I took a few classes and I was really interested in it. (Luke)

I wanted to do broadcasting after football so they pushed me toward the communication field but it was one of those things where I was sitting in the office with my advisor for hours and talking about my major. I would not listen to a fucking thing they say. I would just stare into space. Once I got into the class I was like why am I in this class? I don't know any of this shit...Now I'm in Labor Studies just because most of the classes I've taken have been Labor Studies classes with my teammates and I can graduate in that field. Old teammates told me that it's really easy to network myself into broadcasting and stuff like that. (Ken)

A majority of the participants (10 of 12) have either officially declared their majors or have an idea of what type of major interests them. Table 2 below illustrates the participants' major or interests.

Table 2: Student-Athlete Participants' Majors or Interests

<u>Participant ID</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Major/Interest</u>
Aaron	Sophomore	Communications
Ben	Sophomore	Undecided
Charles	Sophomore	Undecided
David	Junior	TV Broadcasting and Journalism
Evan	Junior	Labor Studies
Frank	Junior	Communications
Greg	Freshman	Business
Henry	Freshman	Criminal Justice
Ivan	Freshman	Kinesiology
John	Senior	Criminal Justice and Sociology
Ken	Senior	Labor Studies Minor in Africana Studies
Luke	Senior	Communications and Africana Studies

The participants indicated that the major declaration advisement received from various sources such as parents, current teammates, ex-teammates, coaches, and academic advisors was helpful. However, at times throughout the interviews, many athletes indicated that they needed more freedom to choose their classes and majors. The participants perceived their education to be too little within their control, either because of time commitments related to their sport or pressure to remain eligible to compete. These feelings led to further discussions about the educational advantages and disadvantages of being a student-athlete, more specifically as an African American football student-athletes.

One of the stated purposes of this study is to gain a better understanding of the racial inequalities that impact the academic experiences of the participants. To capture these experiences, I asked the advisors and the student-athletes to discuss the advantages and challenges of being an African American football student-athlete. Like most top Division I

football programs, the academic services offered to the student-athletes *can* be tailored to fit their specific needs. For example, the identified academic services most commonly utilized by the student-athletes are study hall, tutoring sessions, time management sheets, academic advising meetings, and the summer math and writing bridge program. The advisors claim that services are not only specifically tailored to each football student-athlete, but each advisor also provides a unique background experience that is beneficial in guiding this particular population. One advisor discussed the advantages of having two male African American advisors who played football and graduated from the university, as well as two advisors with extensive years of experience on staff at the institution:

We have two African American advisers, so I think that helps from their own personal experiences. I think with the other two, they've been in this field for a long time. They've had a lot of contact with this population. We're speaking about African American students and different things. They come from different backgrounds, so I think that helps a great deal. Then we work together collaboratively, so I think that equips us pretty well... Based on the life experiences and work experiences with different populations or different types of African American student-athletes, I think that suits us very well.

(Advisor, Ryan)

Although most the relationships between academic advisors and student-athletes are positive, many of the participants discussed similar educational challenges as it relates to being a student-athlete in areas such as coursework overload, lack of time and time management, pressures to succeed on and off the field, and even a fear of life after college because of being placed in courses that are described as “easy A’s.”

Given the positive yet challenging relationships of the student-athletes and the academic advisors, I wanted to see if any discrepancies existed between the two groups in regards to the academic support services offered. I asked the advisors and the student-athletes to describe some of the successful services as well as any services that needed improvement. The advisors indicated that the following services were the most successful: time management sheets, study hall, and tutoring. The athletes were required to attend a “breakfast club” every day during the summer. Between 7:00am and 8:45am an academic advisor would sit at a table in the dining hall which was specifically opened for football players during the summer months and checks the athlete’s time management sheets. Each athlete was responsible for logging practice times, lift times, study hall, upcoming assignments, homework and exams on a weekly calendar in order for the advisors to verify the information. During my shadowing sessions, the upperclassmen sat at the same table as the advisor while conversing about everything other than football and assignments. The breakfast club was another way of making sure that the athletes were eating a proper meal to start the day. Contrary to the advisors’ beliefs, during a focus group session, the student-athletes felt that the time management sheets were not necessary as they matured:

I just hate checking the schedule every day. In life no one is going to have a time sheet. Freshman and sophomore year I feel that it's more necessary, but don't be hounding me down for no sheets to tell me. (Luke)

Although tedious, the time management sheets appeared to keep the athletes organized and responsible for their own academic challenges and successes. Another academic service that had conflicting views of importance and success was study hall. Some athletes indicated that study hall helped them stay on track or catch up on work when procrastination hit, however a majority of the athletes stated that study hall was a waste of time and they openly admitted to not

utilizing the time in an academically beneficial way. I confirmed the lack of productive academic time during study hall while shadowing two of the four student-athletes who were required to attend study hall sessions. During the one-hour session, both students chatted with their neighbor, watched Netflix on their laptops, played games on their phones, or slept. I also witnessed similar situations during a class that I attended with a freshman participant. Tutoring sessions were the one academic support service that both the advisors and student-athletes agreed to be important and a successful component of the program. The student-athletes indicated that tutoring sessions were assigned individually or as groups depending on the course and type of work required by the professor. All of the student-athletes attended tutoring sessions throughout the year. Ten of the 12 participants indicated that tutoring was essential to their academic success and they appreciated the tutors' efforts in wanting them to succeed.

As a result of the lengthy discussions surrounding the academic advantages and challenges of being an African American football student-athlete, I asked the student-athletes to describe their relationships with the academic support staff and what improvements could be made to the academic support program at the university. I also asked the advisors about their relationships with the athletes and whether or not the current staff truly grasps the academic, social, and personal developmental challenges that the student-athletes experience.

Several student-athletes spoke highly of their relationships with the academic support staff. They used phrases such as "tough love", "act like my parents", and "they really care about us." However, a majority of the athletes indicated that they feel the advisors are "caught up in the system" and seem to forget that the athletes are all different and the support system should be tailored for each of the athlete's needs. The athletes do not want to be "puppets" and wish the

advisors truly grasped what it's like to be them. We discussed this thoroughly during a focus group session:

I think in the end it's just support. Just wanting to feel loved by someone when you don't want to love yourself. I think that's one of the biggest things in life that anyone needs. Division one sports athletic program, I find you can never go through it alone. That's really hard to do. I couldn't imagine of someone trying to do that. (Aaron)

Positives, I'm going here for free. I'm getting a great education. I'm surrounded by great people to help guide me through this whole thing, especially being the first person going to college and actually...ready to graduate. I don't know if I would be able to do it without football. (Ben)

...Athletes should not just be a name on paper. This is your kid, learn more about the kid. Know more about his background. Before, you know, I studied him just being that name on the paper. My advisor is so dogged into the system and to the framework of the system that Mid-Atlantic University has in place that he can't see the sign in front of him. He's headed so far ... He forgot who the hell he was. You know what I'm saying? He can't be real with me. He would ruin me. (Greg)

Eh, her husband is black but she still doesn't get us. She bases her decisions on previous experience. She acts like we are all the same. She treats all of us like we're all problem kids for no reason. (Ivan)

The student-athletes concluded that the most significant improvement needed as it relates to the academic support services system is a more personal relationship with their academic advisor. They are yearning to develop a relationship that goes beyond "checking in on grades" and "how is football?" talks, but indicate that they do not have the time to do so. Instead of being "hand

held” and “told where to be when”, the athletes suggested having more one-on-one time with the advisors to develop a bond of understanding and trust. Several athletes even suggested that the advisors should host dinners at their homes similar to some of the position coaches in order to get to know them outside of school and football. The athletes also suggested that this might alleviate a lot of predispositions that the advisors have about the athletes as students. Several participants indicated that they feel prejudged (as a Black athlete) before an advisor even has a single conversation with them:

I think it's being open with the them. Understand that they have friends who aren't athletes. Not all of us are just here for football. (Greg)

What differences ... I don't know. Taking time to get to know the players better. It's a simple thing that goes a long way. (David)

At the end of the day, I feel like it's just about we got to do to win. (John)

Reactions were mixed when this topic was discussed with the academic advisors. Some of the advisors feel that their previous experiences as an athlete helped guide them toward this profession. Division I athletes are a unique population in which guidance usually comes from those who have been through the experiences before them:

We really try hard to explain to them (the athletes) like, ya know, you're not back home where you came from. You're at a university where all eyes are on you. You walk around with football gear on. You walk around, ya know with the hats, the fancy sweat suits, everything. You're on TV. They see your face. They know your name. Your professors know your name. It's how you present yourself that people are gunna remember. First impressions are, lasting impressions. And I think we do what we can to try and empower them. We say, look we tell you to sit in the first three rows in class.

Take off your hat in class. Don't be sittin' there listenin' to music in class. Pay attention. Do all the things you need to do because all eyes are always gunna be on you. Ya know, if somethin' goes wrong in class, they know who to contact already. They aren't gunna call all the other student's parents. They're gunna call coach. They're gunna call us as academic advisors, and be like, we've got some of your football players in class and they're disruptive and they're loud and inappropriate. (Bob)

The discrepancy in student-athlete responses and the academic advisor responses is troubling. Although the student-athletes feel that the advisors love them, they also feel that they prejudice and treat them all as problem children. The advisors feel that their relationships with the student-athletes are mainly positive. The student-athlete/advisor relationship is crucial to the academic success of the student-athletes and an open communication style between both parties will alleviate confusion regarding internal procedures which can seem to lump student-athletes into groups instead of shaping their individual experiences.

For many African American students, racial and cultural identity are an integral part of their college student development. The development of a positive racial identity helps create a positive attitude and confidence in one's abilities. Therefore, a positive racial identity is critical for the academic success and personal development of the African American student (Bakari, 1997). For most of the study participants, striving for a major of interest or academic excellence was less important than ensuring playing time on the field by "majoring in eligibility." Majoring in eligibility reinforces stigmas and stereotypes commonly associated with athletes and more significantly African American athletes.

Keepin' It Movin': Dismissing Stereotypes and Stigmas

More often than not, the athlete identity is the primary role for African American athletes: therefore, having a means to more effectively connect to the student identity is critical to having a well-balanced student-athlete. The athlete identity is oftentimes more salient, especially for African American athletes which also incorporates their racial identity. When asked if being African American played a role in their participation in football, 10 of the 12 participants indicated that their race did not influence their participation in football, although they understood that stereotypes existed regarding the significant percentages of African Americans playing the sport of football. It should be noted that each of the participants who responded in this manner self-identified his neighborhood of origin to be predominantly African American. The majority of participants also indicated that coming from a lower socioeconomic class motivated them to pursue dreams that would afford them the opportunities to not only support their families, but to escape poor socioeconomic predicaments. Discussions about the role of race and class challenged the participants in the way they viewed their own race and identity.

In the academic domain where the quest for knowledge and growth is at the center of all missions, the discourse of race is absent. The development of identity is a socialization process shaped by experiences in one's family, community, school and social affiliations. While change in the environment is sometimes welcomed or at least tolerated, a change in our identity can be difficult and challenging. The developmental process in which African Americans develop a manner of thinking and evaluating themselves as "Black" is called Negrescence (Helms, 1985; Cross, 1995). This concept provides a logical structure to support the understanding of the relationship of racial identity and sport. In African American culture, the success of African

American athletes in sports would conceivably prompt the development of self-stereotyping in the realm of sport (Harrison, 2001). Many African American youths see themselves as the next potential NFL star largely because there are many perceived obstacles placed in their paths to stardom. They learn at an early age that American society views an educated African American man as threatening while at the same time, the community embraces and encourages their athletic pursuits. The meaning and significance of being African American becomes salient to the African American adolescent and tends to be a profound factor in the development of racial identity.

Throughout the study, I challenged the participants to think about their race in ways that required deep thought and understanding of African American history, which some could not truly grasp because a lack of historical knowledge. For example, one participant discussed the significance of the 1940's Clark experiment using dolls to study children's attitudes about race:

It's called "The Doll Studies" and it's a thing that shows how they put a group of kids and they have a Latino group of kids, white kids and black kids. Did you know what it is? They put up a group of kids basically on camera and whatever and they give them like a doll. They give them a white doll and a black doll. Each kid ... Not even genetically but mentally are thought to see that white dolls are better than black dolls. They give them the dolls and like, "What do you think about this doll?" They're like, "Which doll is pretty? Which doll is ugly? Which doll is good? Which doll is bad?" It's like they're brought up to think that one race is 10 times better than another race. It's crazy also.

(Greg)

Another participant discussed the concept of white supremacy, negative images of African American men, and the advancement of the African American family:

All right, I feel as though like when ... The whole thing with slavery, all that went down. That like set put a lot of people behind ideally in people's mind... You know how primarily there are lots of black people who are in bad, bad neighborhood that go to bad places, bad schools. Then you got the stereotypes, drugs, tattoos, dark, and he's like he's a thug. Black guys are always going to jail because it is. The jail is populated with black people. You have white supremacy. They are always there ... They are all rich. They all live in the fancy house. We go to certain neighborhood, you see clean cut grass, nice street, they are white. It's like how things were. Some people are intimidated by the fact that, okay, this black parent raised their son correctly. He grew up to be educated and got a good job. Then now his son is living a good life and da da da da. Now it is the black family actually doing it sometimes. (Henry)

Most of the athletes never spent a significant amount of time thinking about their race. Ten of the 12 participants even stated that if a racial discussion ensued, they just "kept in movin'" and ignored the ignorance of others. Because of this lack of attention, I asked the athletes how they feel about being an African American male athlete. The results conflicted with their lack of focus and pride of their race.

Although most of the athletes "keep it movin'" when they experience racism and discrimination, throughout the interviews I got a sense of pride in their racial identity regardless of the participants true historical understanding. I asked questions such as, "How do you feel about being an African American male athlete?", "Do you feel that being African American is an asset? A liability?", and "How has your racial identity changed (if at all) since attending college?" These questions invoked feelings and emotions that seemed to be sacred. At first, the athletes did not want to share their feelings regarding race. After establishing an environment of

openness and trust, the hidden meanings about being African American males appeared. Despite various negative emotions about stereotypes and racism, the athletes described feelings of racial pride and love for who they are and what they represent on earth. Phrases such as “It feels good,” “It’s who I am,” and “I love it” were used to describe their personal views about being an African American male. In addition, several athletes were challenged by their feelings although they described constantly experiencing diversity prior to enrolling at Mid-Atlantic University.

When asked to describe their neighborhood racial makeup, 9 of the participants used the words diverse or very diverse. One participant stated that his neighborhood was majority White and another indicated his neighborhood was predominantly Hispanic and Haitian. Eight of the participants described their high school as diverse or very diverse. Three of the participants stated that their high school was mostly White and one participant said his high school was mostly African American. Finally, when asked to describe the diversity of their friends, 6 of the participants indicated that their friend group was semi-diverse, diverse, or very diverse. Four of the participants stated that their friends were mostly Hispanic, African or Puerto Rican and 2 of the participants said that their friends were mostly White except for their African American teammates. As seen in Table 3 below, these findings indicate that through sports, all participants had been exposed to some amount of racial and ethnic diversity from their families of origin which contribute to their views about race in the world.

Table 3: Diversity and Families of Origin

<u>Participant ID</u>	<u>High School</u>	<u>Role of Religion</u>	<u>Neighborhood Racial Makeup</u>	<u>Friend Racial Makeup</u>	<u>High School Racial Makeup</u>
Aaron	Public	Attends church every Sunday; Christian	White	Very Diverse	Caucasian with an increase in African Americans over the years
Ben	Public	Attends church frequently; Christian	Very Diverse	Diverse	Very Diverse
Charles	Public	Attends church regularly; Christian	Predominantly Hispanic and Haitian	Hispanic and Black	Very Diverse
David	Public	Attends church regularly; Catholic (even does one-on-one bible studies currently)	Very Diverse	Mostly Black	Very Diverse
Evan	Public	Did not grow up attending church and currently does not attend	Diverse and segregate by race (White, Black and Spanish)	Diverse	Diverse
Frank	Public	Attends church every Sunday; Baptist	Very Diverse	Diverse	Diverse
Greg	Private	Attends church every Sunday; Christian	Semi Diverse- mostly white	Semi Diverse- mostly white	Predominantly White
Henry	Private	Attends church every Sunday; Baptist	Very Diverse	Diverse	Very Diverse
Ivan	Public	Attends church every Sunday; Christian	Diverse	White (with black football players as friends)	Diverse
John	Public	Went to various churches growing up but doesn't consider family very religious	Diverse (socioeconomically)	Mostly Black and Puerto Rican	Diverse
Ken	Private	Non-existent; believes in being a good person	Diverse (lived in an older complex his whole life)	White (with black football players as friends)	Mostly White
Luke	Public	Frequently attends Church-Christian	Black and White	Mostly Black	Mostly Black

Fifty percent of the participants could not indicate a specific instance of experiencing discrimination or racism prior to enrolling in college. The other fifty percent of participants gave extensive examples of discrimination and racism that shaped the way that they handle micro aggressions today. One participant described his first high school relationship when asked about experiencing racism prior to college:

I met this girl when I was a freshman. She was Italian and French and uh, we were like best friends. You know in high school you have a best friend like you hit them

up all the time like some real friendship shit. Then my sophomore going on my junior year I figured out I had feelings for her and it's real fucked up because when I was her best friend I was at her house all the time and her parents loved me. I'm talking about Italian as hell, like these motherfuckers grandparents off the boat like they just got here. When I was her best friend it was like oh yeah, you can sleep over. You cool, you can kick it. They called me their son and shit and I was like word, whatever. I decided that I had feelings for her, I made that up in my mind. I told her and she had feelings for me too. It was cool. We dated for a couple of weeks and shit. I was excited and shit and I'm like when you're going to tell your parents they love me, let's just tell them. She was like oh I'm going to tell him. She kept putting it on the back burner and it was like 3 or 4 weeks in. I was like, yo did you tell your parents yet or what the fuck. She was like listen, I don't think my parents are going to take it the way you think they're going to take it. She was like I don't think my parents are like, I think they're kind of racist. I was like, well let's find out. I showed up, I was on some straight like, in love, you couldn't tell me shit. I was going to do whatever it took, showed up to the crib, her in my hand, like yo what's the deal like it is what it is. This is what it's going to be. Those motherfuckers started tweaking. I'm talking about tweaking. He's not going to ruin our blood line, this and this and that. I'm like word, you know I'm in love. I go home I'm crying and shit. I'm like fuck that, I'm going to continue to see you, if you down with it I'm down with it. We're sneaking behind their backs. They done filed a restraining order against me. I done went to jail and got charged for this shit three times...I'm talking about cuffed up for breaking restraining orders, I'm a minor they're adults, it's their word against mine. I can't say shit. I was on some other shit man. Cuffed up three times talking about my mother calling

their house. My mother from the hood, she straight from Queens talking about you calling cops on my son, I'll come over there and beat your ass. We tried to do it behind their backs for about a year. It got to the point where she would call me and they would block my number from her phone. She would have to call me from her friend's phone.

(Henry)

Another participant described an instance as a young child that caused him to get emotional. He also discussed a similar experience with a high school relationship as Ken. I asked David to discuss experiences of racism before getting to Mid-Atlantic University:

Before college? This was two times. One when I was 5 ... one was when I was in 7th/8th grade, when I first got to PA. Riding my bike, trying to keep up with older kids going up the hill. I was on the wrong side of the road. Some car almost hit me. The guy screamed out the window, "You fucking nigger." I was like ... I'm young, crying. I had to ride my bike all the way back down the hill, back to home. I go to the older kid's mom and did, I was crying. "Why are you crying?" " He called me the n word." Hysterical. I bawled my eyes out. I look back on that like, "What the fuck was wrong with me?" I don't know why, I'm just a pussy. That was one. Then another time was in high school ... I actually have three. One was recent, too. Second time was in high school. I was dating this Italian chick for a while. Her parents loved me. They found out we were dating. They weren't having it. They would get in fights every day because of me. We ended up breaking up. She didn't want to. We were broken up, but she was still ... we would still hang out, still date. We were basically still together, but she would get in fights every day. Her mom would harass her every day. "He'd be an embarrassment to the family." I remember I invited her to the conference championship game, I was getting recruited. I

was a big deal, a lot of girls wanted to go with me. "Oh my God you're not going? Are you kidding me?" "I can't, my mom." We ended up breaking up. She's not good, that family ... ignorance. Who cares?" I actually talked to my dad about it. He was like, "Why the hell does that matter to you? They want to be ignorant, then be ignorant." My dad deals with white people all the time. They try to pull some stupid shit, until he opens his mouth and they're like, "Oh shit." They realize he's smarter than all of them. He tells me stories all the time. Whatever. Especially because he's a foreigner too. He's not even black, it's another country. I don't know. It's ignorance. I don't let it bother me. (David)

When further analyzing the data, I concluded that although 50% of the participants could not indicate a time when they experienced racism or discrimination prior to enrolling in college, almost all of the participants indicated that they experienced stereotypes such as the dumb jock stereotype while enrolled at Mid-Atlantic University. The low rate of discriminatory and racial experiences prior to college is due to the fact that the majority of participants were surrounded by diverse environments in which they were constantly interacting with a variety of people who also experienced sources of diversity, and no one particular instance was made apparent. In these instances, the participants chose to ignore, instead of challenge, systemic racial inequalities. Similar experiences were described at Mid-Atlantic University. Some of the participants briefly mentioned that they have experienced discrimination with professors. One stated,

Yeah some teachers be like I don't like athletes from the rip. Especially if you black too. I had a Black teacher, she used to throw a lot of shade. She used to tell us how she doesn't like athletes. It could be race. (John)

During one focus group session, the athletes even discussed discrimination as it relates to dating girls and peer to peer interactions:

Besides being a football student, you get discriminated against plenty of times, besides that. Some girls don't need to talk to football players. They just can't see you out. (John)

For blacks, these little white kick back sports places, I don't feel comfortable in there, man. I'll be posted up against the wall. They cool I just don't feel comfortable in there because at the end of the day, they look at me as a nigger. Anytime they talk to me it's on some hip hop shit. What's up man. I'm like you don't have to talk to me like that. You don't have to talk hip hop for me to communicate with you. I got to fit with the people that act normal. Don't be going over there talking to him and be normal then come over to me trying to make me feel good and trying to act all new. (Luke)

Trying to talk to a girl. Or even asking her name. Just making conversation but, you're a football player, you're just trying to get in bed with me. I'm in a relationship. I just wanted to know what your name was. The stereotype of "footballas" or even athletes, and past experiences. They think you're after it." (Aaron)

These racial challenges shape the student-athlete experience as well as assist in the identity formation process. One of the most significant factors in a student-athlete's identity development is the dumb jock stereotype. All of the advisors mentioned how race is a challenge for the participants regardless of attending a university that is well-known for its racial diversity on campus:

I think the reality is our team is probably 75, 80% African American. I'm around it all day. I'm not really around many white people anymore. I'm not really around a lot of white people. I'll say like when the Baltimore stuff was going on, there was some heated conversations at lunch... here we are a very diverse place...you turn around and

everybody's different. That's why I love this place. When I was at Oregon, it's as white as white can be. Literally I'd be walking on campus and look up and if there's an African American kid walking, I knew it was one of my athletes. I think there you're easily identified and that's just what you're put in. That's the hole you're put in. Where here, I would tend to believe for the most part that professors, other than them identifying themselves as an athlete, you can't be identified as a black kid and you're an athlete here. I think that really helps us here. I would say in general though, throughout the country, depending what pocket you're in, I would be concerned of racial challenges. (Advisor, Steve)

Attending a diverse university can positively impact the educational experiences of African American student- athletes. Furthermore, the development and evolution of a relationship with the athletic academic support staff whose race and/or extensive history working at the university can benefit the participants' experiences as well. The participants expressed the need, want and yearning of a healthy, communicative relationship with their advisors. The student-athletes also indicated the need for their academic advisors to re-evaluate their own biases. All staff members and players involved with the football program preach F.A.M.I.L.Y (forget about me, I love you). However, at times the athletes feel far from a family environment. Several athletes indicated that the coaches and staff do not truly grasp what it means to be an African American football student-athlete although the advisors felt that they do. Because of this, I asked the athletes what they need to be successful and what advice they would give a young African American boy who is playing football and has dreams of playing football in college. To help facilitate discussion, I asked each participant to discuss the academic, athletic, emotional and social needs of being an African American football student-athlete. I wanted to understand what

they feel is lacking in their experiences in order to be successful on and off the field. The majority of participants disregarded aspects about being African American and focused on aspects that would help any and all student-athletes succeed.

All 12 participants indicated that they need a foundation of support. "Support" was described as family, friends, faith, and staff members (e.g. coaches and advisors) that are willing to take the time to personally get to know each athlete. At times, some of the athletes feel as if they are just another player coming through the system, just a number on a list. They are yearning for staff members to show that they care about who they are as an individual, not just their academic and athletic abilities. Some athletes also discussed how important obtaining a degree was for their future:

When you have people invested in you, it makes it harder ... You don't want to fail because you know that you've got people in your corner. That's the whole thing with disappointment. If you never had anybody in your corner, who are you going to disappoint? Not going to disappoint anybody but yourself and if you've never given a fuck then that's not a problem. When you have people who are invested in you, now you're not only doing it for you, you're doing it for everyone who cares about you. (Ken)

I think maybe the biggest thing is how important a degree is. You kind of take it for granted since you are going for free. They come here for other reasons. You may just pick a BS major or you're not applying yourself and I think that's one of the ... Kids in my position, I feel like no matter what you should always get your education. Another thing is I just learned from my experience here. (Luke)

I then asked each student-athlete what they need athletically to be a successful student. Most of the participants indicated that they need more opportunities and time outside of football to use as an outlet:

I think we need options. We need that openness, that ability to be able to do things ... if you want to go work out, work out. If you want to be able to go to the workshop, go to the workshop ... go see your academic advisor. Talk to your coach about something. You need that opportunity. That's not the word I'm looking for ... that outlet? I think makes more sense. (David)

One participant mentioned that he needs a role model to be a successful student. His example illustrated an NFL player as a role model:

Yes, like a role model. We see a successful person doing what we're doing or doing what they're going to be doing, it's going to kind of push us and want us to be that same person. We're seeing people from our team go to the NFL and do big things with their lives and we see that, as a black guy, oh we saw this black kid who came from nothing and now he's living lovely and is financially supported, why can't that be me, why can't I, he was just like me when I was in high school and college, why can't that be me? That's like a role model. (Frank)

When asked what they need emotionally to be a successful athlete, several participants discussed the importance of being able to practice their own religion. Having faith as a foundation in their lives, gets them through the long, grueling days. Others indicated that being able to have a circle of friends who are not directly involved with football helps them blow off steam and forces them to take some time away from their sport. One participant even stated that having a girlfriend to come home to after a long day helps him:

When you got a girl, it just makes everything better. After a long day of practice or something, just hang out with a girl. The thing I like, because they don't know I'm not, usually from my experience they don't know anything about football so they don't really ask too much. I feel like that's one of the few people in my life right now that they care about other things other than football. (John)

Similar to emotional needs, the student-athletes indicated that they need to surround themselves with the right people and most importantly the right friends to be successful:

We need people that we can talk to about anything...friends, coaches, maybe professors. We need people that we can trust. (Evan)

We need to diversify our friend groups ...we need to get different friends than your typical black teammates. (Henry)

As described in the above literature review, one of the most common forms of discrimination that athletes experience is the dumb jock stereotype. Lengthy discussion ensued during every interview (including the advisors) when this topic surfaced. Each advisor discussed his or her concerns with the dumb jock stereotype and all twelve student-athletes indicated that they had experienced the dumb jock stereotype while enrolled at Mid-Atlantic University. Each participant indicated that there was not one single population that stereotyped more than the other. The student-athletes experienced this stereotype with professors, students, coaches and their own teammates. Each of these scenarios follows different implications and consequences for the participants. For example, Bob talked about these experiences on a personal and professional level. He told a story about a time as a football student-athlete at the university in which a professor told the class that he did not like athletes, especially African American athletes. The advisor made an effort to never wear athletic clothes to class and sat attentively in

the front row. At the end of the semester, he met with the professor to extend an invitation to a home football game in which he would be playing in that week. The advisor also indicated that although that experience was over 25 years ago, the outlook on the dumb jock stereotype has not changed:

Um, I think that people automatically assume that if a big African American student walks into the classroom they'll probably be like, "oh he's on the football team" or the 6'9", ya know, with a wing span, ya know, "oh, he's on the basketball team." Ya know, so I think that the student population, they know, but I think they also get the stereotypes once that 1st incident occurs. You know you walk into class and you've got a student-athlete sitting on the floor. They're just playin' on their phones. They're sleepin' in the back of the class and they're like, these kids don't care. Typical dumb jock. Ya know, sittin' in the back, probably got a scholarship to be here and I'm bustin' my butt workin' 5 jobs to pay for school and because he can move a person outta the way, ya know, he's sittin' here doin' that. I'm sure there is. (Bob)

Several student-athletes indicated that they acknowledge the existence of these stereotypes and when they experience a situation in which the dumb jock stereotype is present, they just "keep it movin'." Depending on the person, and the situation, the participants also felt that the dumb jock stereotype is a misconception for some athletes but definitely not for all. Some athletes reinforce the stereotype by choice; they fall into the stereotype. One athlete even indicated that the stereotype doesn't affect him, and he wonders how people will feel once he makes millions of dollars while they work in cubicles:

I look like ... I mean some of those stereotypes are true. That's what makes it kind of like you can joke about it and stuff like that. But I've received that from girls too...

You know, everybody's been saying dumb jock and "he's so big" and stuff like that. So it's a regular thing that you grow up with. It's kind of like just goes in one ear comes out the other. (Ben)

Ah man, that's a hard one because I try so hard not to come off as that. Even when I talk to somebody, I try my hardest not to come off that way. I try to come off as well-spoken and educated because I know if me talking a certain way, as a regular person, that might not come off as he's an asshole and he's stupid. Just being an athlete and I talk a certain way, that comes off as okay this guys like a dumb ass. I feel like that is one thing. I'm always fighting against that one because nobody wants to be called stupid or dumb. Those are some of the things being a Black athlete, especially on a campus that's supposed to be diverse, like Rutgers, because you can tell we don't act like other students. We don't dress like other students. We stick out like sore thumbs. (John)

I don't like it. I mean, dumb jock. I don't think people, athletes are dumb jocks. I just think that they put a lot of energy, and focus, and time in something, so other things take the back burner. Some people know how to balance both, some people can't. (Luke)

One day when I'm making millions I hope you still feel the same way. When I'm making millions and you are fucking working in your little cubicle, I hope you still feel like I'm the dumb jock with double mounds of money. (Ken)

Most of the student-athletes discussed multiple instances when they experienced the dumb jock stereotype. Internalizing this stereotype and eventually identifying with it, hinders the overall identity development. Experiencing this stereotype from professors invokes a sense of subtle animosity in which several participants indicated the want and need to challenge the professor's views. Dumb jock discriminatory experiences from peers raise concerns for the student-athletes

(as if they hear and internalize the comments or actions), but again, they do not address these instances and simply keep it movin'. Although the participants frequently experienced discriminatory comments and actions, the academic advisors recognize the need to challenge the dumb jock stereotype by establishing relationships with the student-athletes surrounding academic success:

I sometimes feel that we pity a black kid because they didn't come from a good background. They didn't have structure. They're black. That frustrates me a little bit because society's not going to do that. You have to hold them, as I said, understand their accountability and work them through that process than making it another excuse because the real world isn't going to do that. I do have some concerns sometimes with just the way sometimes it's handled. I mean I think the reality is race impacts everything in the world especially athletes, and stereotypes, and whatnot are a lot harsher when you're African American. That's reality. I can't say yeah it doesn't probably impact their experience here at all. (Steve)

The academic culture at Mid-Atlantic University consists of a variety of constituents from professors, coaches, academic advisors and even friend circles. The relationships with each constituent group drastically affects the experiences of the participants, however the time allotted to focus on making these relationships the best that they can be is minimal. The peer-to-peer relationship for most college students is significant in that they have an opportunity to really pick and choose their friends. One acronym that surfaced several times throughout the study was the term NARP or Non-Athletic-Regular-Person. Non-Athletic-Regular-Person (NARP) is used to describe anyone who is not an athlete. As an ex-athlete myself, the participants were shocked that I had never heard of this term. I was fascinated with the fact that the student-athletes are

negatively stereotyped, but the participants also stereotype those individuals who are not athletes. Due to my lack of understanding, the discussions led to how the athletes tend to be isolated and rarely have an opportunity to make friends outside of this circle of people. I wanted to understand who their friends are outside of football and what the dialogue was like with the people closest to them about the concepts of diversity:

Me, ever since I was in middle school, if I've ever moved to school, if I've ever going from 8th grade to high school type shit, I never kept friends. I think as you get older it's kind of hard to find the people with same goals ...it's hard to find people with the same goals. I can't do the shit y'all can do. I know y'all like to live that normal lifestyle, I can't. I've had football friends in high school who after high school there was no more football. You can do whatever the fuck you want but I can't. I don't have that same luxury. I've got friends like who have been my friend since I was a freshman. I've got one friend from home who still plays football. Now that he's realizing that he's not going to have a career in the league he's kind of doing the whole fucking thing too and I'm just kind of like listen, I can't. We lose touch little by little, more and more. My best friend is Frank. I went to high school with him. He's fallen off into the NARP life. When I got to high school I made some friends, but I've always made friends because of my athletics. I've always been friends with people on the team and stuff like that. It's not that I don't have NARP friends, I have people like, "Hey, hey what's up? How you doing?" But I've never had a close NARP friend because we just live too different lives. (Ken)

If I'm with NARPS, they usually White. Some of my frat boy friends, they're all White. We talk about diversity all the time. Especially my roommate, he's big on that. I feel like he uses that card a little too much. When he gets denied talking to a girl, oh man

because I'm Black. I feel with some stuff I'm like you just can't blame everything on race.

(Ken)

A majority of the participants indicated that they have a few select friends outside of college football. Most of these friends are people they played high school football with at some point during their lives. As John and Ken mentioned, the lives of athletes are unique which makes keeping friends who are NARPS difficult. Friend groups can be influential in decision making which adds more pressure to be successful on and off the field.

Student-athletes are frequently absent from class due to competition, which not only affects their academics, but it also impedes their ability to interact with other students or NARPS. Their obligations to both academics and athletics leaves them with fewer opportunities to socialize with students outside of their teams, either because they are not physically on campus or because these obligations take precedence to their social lives as young adults. This absence leads to feelings of isolation and alienation which are not uncommon amongst African American football student-athletes. These feelings can also have adverse effects on their academic performance (Hyatt, 2003). Until the early 1990's, most athletic administrators kept student-athletes together, usually in specific athlete friendly dorms near the athletic facilities. In an effort to alleviate the isolation student-athletes were experiencing, the NCAA mandated that dorms could not be populated with more than 49% of athletes (Watt and Moore, 2001). Although this practice is enforced with living quarters, the consensus is not common in the classroom with student-athletes experiencing clustering in a particular course of convenience due to practice schedules.

In instances when there are opportunities to meet or mingle with the general student body, many athletes do not experience positive degrees of interactions which also reinforces the

habit of sticking together with teammates. On college campuses, there is a sense of pride and entertainment when teams are successful. African American student-athletes can be some of the most visible and popular students in which eagerness to affiliate with potential future professional athletes is commonly felt by the student-body. The student-athletes expressed concern with NARPS in that they were only seeking friendship due to their potential professional status, especially with girls.

Another significant relationship that might have racial challenges is with the coaching staff. For many, these coaches act as father figures from the time the athletes step on campus until they graduate or exhaust eligibility. The sport of football is unique in that there are a variety of coaches with specific responsibilities. For example, Mid-Atlantic University has one head coach and nine assistant coaches. There are also assistants to the assistant coaches, graduate assistant coaches, player development coaches, strength coaches, and recruiting coaches. This structure is common amongst top Division I programs. I asked the student-athletes to discuss their relationships with the head coach and with their specific position coaches to grasp their roles in the athletes' lives.

When I asked the participants whether not they have been coached by someone of color in high school, 7 of the participants indicated that they were coached by someone of African American decent. Five of the participants indicated that they were only coached by white males. These numbers are important because the 2014 NCAA Race and Gender Demographics Report found that nearly 89% of football bowl subdivision head coaches are white. The athletes expressed mixed emotions and experiences as it relates to their relationships with the head coach who is a White male. Some of the athletes stated that they did not have a relationship with the head coach. They viewed him as an authority figure who is too busy to get to know the players

on a more personal level. Several athletes even described a lack of relationship with all of the coaches while also stating that they wanted a relationship with their coaches:

I've definitely felt that way before but I would say as for football coaches, they don't know you on a personal level too well. I would want that. I know that you've got to gain a relationship over time but I feel like even when it starts off, there's not a real bond. It's all football. Of course I know that's a huge piece is football, but I feel sometimes that there's all there is. I do feel like it's mostly a relationship that's all about football. I don't find that healthy between two people at all. I feel that us players, I'm talking about for myself, me and the coach I interact with, no real relationship at all. (Aaron)

I wouldn't go to (the head coach or the assistant coaches) if I needed to talk. I'd probably go to the (strength coach) because of the way that he presents himself and carries himself, it just makes you feel comfortable that you can be able to talk to him. He'll laugh with you all the time. If you mess up, he'll yell at you and then he'll laugh at you right after, so he kind of like gets on you. He's kind of your dad. He'll get on you but take care of you afterwards. But with the head coach, I don't talk to him that often. I shake his hand and keep it moving. There's really no relationship. (Frank)

On the other hand, some of the athletes indicated that they felt a sense of family and that the coaches truly do care for them:

I think coaches understand our needs. Honestly, I think everyone here just wants us to be successful. I think it's how you take it. I think I go above and beyond on the field and I go a little below in class and I think they all care about you. I think they all care about you in their own different ways and I don't think anybody's here to fail. I think everybody genuinely cares about succeeding in this program. (Ken)

He just cares a lot. He keeps it real. That's the one reason I hated Penn State. I was getting recruited by (the head coach), my favorite coach. That was my number one school. Then he left and (a new head coach) came along and I hate (the new head coach) because he is a fake ass person. He is the guy when you go up, "Oh yeah, I came here to have you. You're like" ... You know, you say the same thing to all tender kids. Well, our head coach, I feel like I actually ... He separates you and makes you feel genuinely important ...there are some coaches out there that just put kids in the pile. You know what I mean? But I think Coach does a good job of not doing at that. (Greg)

The majority of athletes felt that their relationships with the coaches were strictly about football business only. Most of the athletes are yearning for a deeper relationship with all of the coaches, in which they can comfortably discuss family issues, academic challenges, and overall life goals. As stated earlier, the relationship between a coach and student-athlete is influential in setting the foundation for the athletes' overall college experience similar to the significance of an athletes' friend group. Building a supportive relationship with coaches that might not understand the student-athletes' racial identity and the challenges that accompany it, is significant for the student-athletes' own identity development. Throughout their interviews, most of the participants discussed the lack of racial significance that impacted their decision to play football. However, the participants did discuss the importance of playing football in college which is the stepping stone to playing professional.

"Black Ticket Out" of Poverty

At first the sport of football was something for the participants to do, something to keep them out of trouble. All of the participants in this study began playing football at a young age. Each participant discussed their initial encounters with football as well as all factors that

influenced their participation in sports. Eight out of the 12 participants began playing football between the ages of 4-10, while the remaining 4 participants began playing football between the ages of 14-15. When the participants were asked to identify the factors that contributed to their initial participation, 11 participants identified family members as their primary motivation to begin playing football. One participant indicated that another coach introduced him to the idea of playing football. Based on the information provided during the focus group sessions and interviews, the influence of family becomes very clear. The link between family expectations and cultural influences impacted decision making and lifestyle choices of the participants. The goal of utilizing professional football to help many of the participant's families escape poverty became a reality for most of the student-athletes once they reached high school. One of the most influential individuals who helps in a child with decision making is a role model. Role models help guide young people through life's ups and downs. Given the guidance many role models provide, I wanted to understand why the student-athletes continued to strive for professional contracts given the low statistics of playing professionally and whether or not role models impacted their decisions.

I asked the subjects to identify any role models they looked up to during their childhood. Six of the 12 participants indicated that they did not have a role model while 4 others identified an NFL player as their role models; Michael Vick, Patrick Willis, Ray Lewis, and Amani Toomer. One participant identified an NBA player as his role model; LeBron James. One participant identified his athletic academic advisor as a role model (who previously played football at the institution). The participants voluntarily provided the name of the athletes who all are African American. None of the role models were individuals of Caucasian decent. It can be inferred in this case that the athletes' racial differences impacted their choice of role models. It is

also apparent that the majority of role models for the participants were African American professional athletes which reinforces the need for the athletes to have a racial connection with those whom they look up to for support and guidance.

Given that Mid-Atlantic University is known for its' diverse campus, I wanted to understand how the student-athletes felt the institution's commitment to diversity was affecting their relationships on campus, especially because racial connections emerged as important for the participants. The participants expressed mixed views when asked how they felt about the institution's commitment to diversity. One participant stated that the university is doing a terrible job of addressing diversity:

I don't think that there's a commitment to diversity. I feel like they're trying to meet the status quo... The black people that they're comfortable with are athletes who act like them, so I just feel as though they ... Everybody is ... It's all about what you grew up around. But I definitely feel as though it helps them. Even at the same time, they're not around a lot of black people all day. They might see three. I've been on the bus so many times, I'm the only black person on there. (Luke)

Another participant mirrored this view:

It don't feel that way... It doesn't feel that way at all. I feel like when you talk about diversity, they just leave it at color. I don't think it really has too much to do with color. I feel like it has a little bit more to do with class and how you were brought up. I can feel just as comfortable around a White kid that grew up in the projects and feel least comfortable with a White kid or a Black kid that grew up in the Hamptons or something. I feel like it's just, I don't know. I don't feel like it's diverse like that. I don't see enough of

people like me. That's something Rutgers can't really do about it. They can't do anything about that. (John)

Two participants felt that the university is doing an excellent job increasing diversity and diversity awareness on campus:

As far as diversity, I've seen a lot of it. I don't know what to say. You go to campuses and you see a lot of other races. I've definitely seen a lot of different races here. I feel like diversity is not a problem with the campus in general. (Aaron)

I think they really ... It's big. This school is very diverse. That's one thing they didn't lie about. I visited other schools, I visited I remember I visited Indiana, and they were saying it was very diverse. When I went there the only black people I saw were on the football team...It wasn't a problem to me just because I was raised by white people. Then again, it's like, it's not that it was a negative but coming here and it being so diverse is cool. It's a positive. That had an edge on other schools. (Charles)

I then asked whether or not the participants have attended any diversity events while enrolled.

All of the participants indicated that they have never attended a diversity event on campus and 11 out of 12 indicated that they never would. The two reasons for not attending diversity events were due to a lack of interest and a lack of time. The student-athletes indicated that they have three main focuses throughout their collegiate enrollment: 1) maintain a "decent" grade point average 2) excel on the field and 3) do what they can to "make it to the league." Anything that diverts their energy away from these goals is considered a distraction and unwarranted.

Therefore, finding time to attend diversity events is not and will not be a priority. The student-athletes are constantly under pressure to succeed on and off the field so prioritizing time commitments is important and part of the developmental challenges that student-athletes face.

In addition to the normal developmental challenges that a college student-athlete faces, as the level of commitment grows, so does the expectation of a student-athlete's performance. Many student-athletes admit that the pressure to succeed at the college level seriously impacts their focus and overall college experiences. From the NCAA academic eligibility standards, media exposure, hollering coaches, screaming fans back home and in the stands, to the revenue generating sales, student-athletes rarely feel a lack of pressure. For most fans, the image of a student-athlete is far from the reality that the student-athlete lives. In order to tease out a clearer awareness and comprehension of said lives, I asked the student-athletes and advisors to discuss the challenges that the student-athletes encounter. All 12 athletes and four academic advisors mentioned in the interviews the overall pressure to succeed:

Um. I think there's a lot of pressure on them because of the investment in them. A lot of them are first generation students going to college. Their parents probably never went to college. Um, don't know what to expect. Their parents are putting faith in a coach and academic support program that their child is going to be taken care of while they're here. And the pressures on them to be successful and for a lot of these parents, ya know, they're thinking their child is gunna be the next best thing and goin' the next level and then it's gunna be easy street for em. But the pressures on them depending on where they come from, fitting in, ya know, knowing that I come from a predominantly all black neighborhood now that I'm in the great American melting pot of what's college. I can't talk to females like I talked to females before, because that's how it was done at home. Here, if I take that inappropriately, if I do that, it's inappropriate. And now, I'm getting charges against me for harassment, or whatever it might be. So I think that there's a lot of pressure on them as far as livin' up to the expectations, one comin' from the family but

two, some of em, they can't forget where they came from so that way they gotta be hard too, the day they die. And it's like, no ya don't. Ya know, if you want to be successful, you can't go with that attitude. (Bob)

I mean the one thing about livin' in the metro area is, our media is more of an NFL professional media so, ya know, when an 18-year-old drops a pass in Iowa and other places that I've coached, they realize that's an 18-year-old and so they don't put him on the front page showin' him droppin' it. Whereas here, it's that NFL mentality, it's that professional sports mentality. So you're critiqued and graded and ya know, you're held up as the guy who dropped the winning touchdown as opposed to the 18-year-old kid. So you develop thick skin in a hurry. Ya a know, you're gunna play on the world's biggest stage but you're gunna get booed when you do poorly. It comes with the territory and some kids can't handle the pressure. (Steve)

The thing is, I just feel like football at most schools, big schools ...is taken more seriously. There's more put into it. A higher standard because we bring money. (Ivan)

We bring money to the program, so we have to be the best in order for them to get the cash. We have to show that we're working for them. (Henry)

That's my biggest fear is being a failure. Being a failure to myself and a failure to my family. It stems from the pressure to be successful. You don't want to disappoint anybody...I'm scared to disappoint people. (Ken)

From the media exposure of professional athletes to the socioeconomic needs of some of the participants, the pressure to succeed also increases the want and desire to play football professionally. The NCAA has recognized that football student-athletes are striving for this

unlikely career option and officially launched a campaign encouraging student-athletes to “go pro in something other than sports.”

In the mid 2000’s, the NCAA launched a public service announcement targeting parents, families and most importantly student-athletes emphasizing that “[t]here are over 380,000 student athletes, and most of us go pro in something other than sports.” This number is even higher to date. Throughout this campaign, the NCAA stressed that there are many intangible qualities that student-athletes gain from their collegiate experiences which should be the focus of their time on campus. That being said, I asked the participants if they felt that they would play football at a professional level. Table 4 below summarizes their responses.

Table 4: Role Models of Color and Belief of Playing in the NFL

<u>Participant ID</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Role Models of Color</u>	<u>Belief He Will Play in NFL</u>
Aaron	Sophomore	None (did mention his mom briefly)	Decision to be made in the moment
Ben	Sophomore	None	Yes
Charles	Sophomore	Hispanic High School Coach	Yes
David	Junior	Father	Yes
Evan	Junior	None	Yes
Frank	Junior	Michael Vick	Yes
Greg	Freshman	Mother and Grandmother	Yes if God wants me to play
Henry	Freshman	None	Yes
Ivan	Freshman	Ray Lewis	Yes
John	Senior	Father and Father's best friend	Yes
Ken	Senior	Father and Amani Toomer	Yes
Luke	Senior	Lebron James	Yes

I asked the academic advisors how they handle the student-athletes' aspirations of playing professionally when the statistics indicate that less than 1% actually make it to the NFL. Bob said,

Well I think the big thing is sitting down and just talking with them. You know, everybody has those dreams of makin' it to the next level. And there are some who have the opportunity to go on and do so. I'll sit with them and tell them and say, look, there's always somebody who's knockin' on your door. What makes you that much more special that somebody's gunna select you as opposed to the person who's right behind you or somebody who is right in front of you? What are you doin' that makes you stand out? I'll never stop encouraging them from goin' for their dream, but the reality of it is, when it's all said and done, what are you gunna have to fall back on? And that's what I kinda relay to them, like look football's great and it's provided a lot of opportunity for a lot of people, but what are you gunna do when that time comes when you can't play? What's your next step? And depending on the student, some students are like you're crazy. Other students are like yeah I understand and they come from all walks of life. Some single parent families. Some have moms. Some have moms and dads. Uh you got some that have children...so there's a whole different batch. Those who have children, those are the ones who are probably more focused on bein' athletes because they know that if they get that opportunity they will be able to provide for their family. (Bob)

I think you find the niches, the kids by the nature of their teammates and the culture and whatnot. I would say it's more common in male student athletes than female. Female student athletes, by nature, we know we're never going professional. It's not true

in women's basketball, you understand from the day you walk into college you're really preparing for a career. Where, in male student-athletes, they just don't grasp that. Every kid that walks into the door is playing in the NFL. As much as I tell them the percentages, as much as I tell them that everyone in this room, the last down they're probably going to be playing is here, that concept takes years to get through their brains. (Steve)

All of the advisors display motivational sayings on the walls of their offices. They also hang statistical numbers for the athletes to reference regarding their NFL aspirations (See Appendix H). The challenge arises when a student-athlete lacks academic motivation and does not “make it to the league.” Life after college becomes a struggle, and many athletes find themselves back at home in the socioeconomic environments that they have been trying to escape. As a way of placing reality before myth regarding the manner in which student-athletes handle the academic and athletic culture, we discussed the interpersonal challenges of identity and the various roles they play within the educational experiences. The internalization of multiple identities including racial identities challenges the overall well-being of student-athletes as they mature and discover who they are as individuals.

I was also curious about what the student-athletes have learned about their race through their participation in football. Several participants stated that they had never thought about their racial identity as it relates to football. Others discussed how they saw a lot of others that “look like them” and “act like them.”

Racial identity through football. As far as what do you mean? Race has never played a big part of my life because I really don't care about things like that. I've always identified myself as an athlete. I've never looked at myself and said, "Aw, man. You're a

black athlete." Obviously that's how people look at me when I walk into a room, but that's their ignorance. (Ken)

I learned that there's a lot of me, there's a lot of athletic black athletes who are smart, who have had good people skills, who all have the same goal. Like I said, in high school, there were only so many D1 black athletes that you would think, it's just me, I'm playing, that quarterback is good but he's not going to play D1 football. That left tackle is good but he's not going to play D1 football. My whole DBs are black but they are all not going D1 football. I feel like you realize that when you go to college that you're not the only one and you kind of have to separate yourself from the others somehow or someway whether it's academically, athletically, work ethic-wise, you've just got to separate yourself somehow and that's just something that'll make you better. (Frank)

Despite the systemic racial and institutional inequalities that the student-athletes experienced (and some chose to ignore), the sense of racial pride also appeared when I asked what advice they would give to a young African American boy who dreams of playing professional football. Common themes such as "grinding" and hard work were discussed. One student-athlete stated, "Don't feel like you have to be forced to play. If you work hard, and you're nice, they'll find you" (Luke). This meant that as long as he works hard, the NFL scouts will find him some way. Another student-athlete said:

Don't listen to other people. Don't listen to society. Don't listen to other people, and all the hating. They said they were doing what you were doing. Keep your eye on the prize. Do what makes you happy but make good choices at the same time. Don't listen to other people and don't let other people get you down. (Charles).

Although this advice is beneficial, most of the athletes did not mention the struggles and challenges of being a student-athlete such as the sense of isolation which all of the advisors and student-athletes briefly brought up during their interviews.

One advisor expressed concerns about the influence of third parties on a student-athletes' experiences:

They are making a business decision when they come to play college football. How do they make those ...Once you've made that decision, you think you're signing up for one thing, usually you're signing up for something different. There's people who influence these kids around them all the time who don't have their best interests. I just get worried about those types of kids. I'm trying to figure out the best way to say. I guess it's like you made a business decision, so when you invest yourself in a business, take advantage of every piece of it and kind of approaching it that way of there's a football piece, there's a school piece, like what else can you be doing for yourself while you're there because reality is, whether they understand it or not, everyone ... Like the coaches are out for themselves. It is a business. It is not fun, hey let's come play some high school football anymore. There's decisions being made about their lives that they don't even understand or know about. Because everyone just thinks going to be football player and it's going to all go okay because they made it out of home or the ghetto or wherever they came from. I think one thing here we're training kids to think about that type of stuff would be beneficial. How do you become a business man in this environment? I think just understanding you have all this at your fingertips. Specifically this population because it's not education in some other area, you know in just having self-awareness of

what's going on and whatnot. Which is more life skill stuff too I guess. Once again branches to all those specific areas and to be careful who you get close to. (Julia)

The third party handlers that influence young, immature and inexperienced athletes can detrimentally impact a student-athletes' collegiate experiences and overall identity development. An individual's identity is molded by experiences and environments. The challenge for student-athletes is figuring out who they can trust. Whether a student-athlete "makes it to the league" or not, NARPS, handlers, groupies etc. are all trying to grab a piece of their successes which in turn reinforces the sense of isolation felt on campus. These factors along with institutional practices, policies, and procedures, support the cyclical reproduction of inequality which shape the experiences, opportunities, and career aspirations of African American football student-athletes.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this study of the relationship between race and the academic experiences of African American football student-athletes, I found that several institutional practices at Mid-Atlantic University contribute to the reproduction of inequality: 1) the significant time demands of football; 2) the major declaration process; (3) the institutional course offerings and time slots; 4) the guidance (or lack thereof) of the academic advisors; 5) the relationships (or lack thereof) with the academic advisors and coaches; and 6) the awareness of significant stereotypes and stigmas from various constituents that are never addressed. These inequities shaped the experiences, opportunities, and career aspirations of the participants. The athletic academic support structure and practices encouraged the student-athletes to focus heavily on their athletic role while dismissing stereotypes and feelings of isolation. More often than not, the athletes found refuge from many harsh effects of multiple stigmas and stereotypes by brushing off discrimination and "kept it movin'" when challenged with racial micro aggressions. The athletes' responses and experiences reinforced the idea of securing a professional contract to escape dismal socioeconomic conditions, and forgoing an optimal education by maintaining eligibility versus striving for academic excellence.

Systemic racial inequalities found in American culture frequently challenge African American college football student-athletes. Not only is deciding to pursue an athletic career at any level a stressful and demanding undertaking, but facing racial inequalities also intensify these experiences. After surviving the grueling and rigorous recruiting process, student-athletes find themselves in a highly competitive environment both academically and athletically, and of course socially and psychologically. At times, they feel overwhelmed with their "new" lives.

They are a special, diverse population because of their unique roles on campus and their atypical lifestyles and needs. "They face huge time commitments, physically grueling workouts, a high-profile existence, and demanding expectations" (Carodine et al., 2001, p. 19). In their novel environment, "[t]his culture makes demands on the athletes that other students do not endure and has both positive and negative effects on the athletes' personal, social, career, and personal development" (Despres et al., 2008, p. 209). Although these pressures and demands may overwhelm student-athletes, their participation in college sports should be, contrary to the perceived reality, enriching and supportive of the educational mission. Only within the last decade has the NCAA recognized the significance of the overall well-being of student-athletes in relation to their collegiate careers as well as life after college. This study illuminates the importance of examining race, academics, institutional practices, and the overall well-being of African American football student-athletes. The stated purpose of this dissertation is to understand how systemic racial inequalities impact the academic experiences of African American college football student-athletes at a top Division I football program. I also further investigated what the racialized experiences of African American football student-athletes are and how these overall experiences influence their career aspirations. My interpretations of these results equate to two themes: 1) the athletic academic support structure and practices encouraged these student-athletes to focus heavily on their athletic role while dismissing stereotypes and feelings of isolation, and 2) the athletes found refuge from many harsh effects of multiple stigmas and stereotypes by brushing off discrimination and "keepin it movin'" when challenged with racial microaggressions. The athletes' responses and experiences reinforced the idea of securing a professional contract to escape dismal socioeconomic conditions, and forgoing an optimal education by maintaining eligibility versus striving for academic excellence.

Athletic Academic Support Structure and Practices

The previous educational experiences of African American male collegiate student-athletes before they even step foot on campus directly impacts their overall well-being. Because intercollegiate athletics is a small part of the university, student-athletes must remain committed to academic achievement and the pursuit of a degree to remain eligible for competition. Accomplishing these tasks can be a daunting undertaking if a student-athlete has received minimal academic preparedness prior to collegiate enrollment. Also throughout their careers, student-athletes must meet academic standards specific to their division's goals. For example, in Division I athletics, student-athletes must complete forty percent of their required degree coursework by the end of their second semester. They must complete sixty percent of their required degree coursework by the end of their third year and eighty percent by the end of their fourth year. Student-athletes are allowed up to five years to graduate while receiving athletically related financial aid and must earn at least six credit hours each term to be eligible for the following term while first year football student-athletes must earn nine credits to complete their eligibility. They also must meet minimum grade-point average requirements that are set by the NCAA and individual institutions. As one of the main goals of the NCAA is to integrate athletics with academics, the members have approved eligibility standards intended to maximize graduation rates while minimizing disparate effects on economically disadvantaged groups (Ncaa.org).

Because of systemic inequalities and marginalization of people and groups based on race and ethnicity in society as well as within social institutions like intercollegiate athletics, differential treatment from their academic recruitment to their academic engagement is common

for African American student-athletes. Ladson-Billings (2009) even suggests that people of color have a distinct cultural makeup that has yet to be fully acknowledged in educational institutions and should constantly be challenges. Acknowledging the complex and time consuming role of playing a division 1 sport for student-athletes of color may prove beneficial in their academic engagement and overall educational experiences. Their past marginal academic performance has created a need for academic support staff to adopt a culturally relevant framework to spark a culturally sensitive environment and holistic education (Bimper et al., 2012). This type of environment will situate the education of African American football student-athletes as purposeful and meaningful within the relevant social and cultural contexts of their experiences while also simply treating them as “student-athletes” and not “athlete-students.” Therefore, it is imperative to reform policies, procedures, pedagogical frames and most importantly perspectives to foster academic, personal and career success of African American football student-athletes.

More often than not, African American athletes are challenged by threatening stereotypes from various groups such as professors, peers, coaches academic advisors etc. which all lead to different ramifications and consequences. These challenges impact their racial reputations as they built on their personal, academic, and athletic successes. In order to bridge the gap between athletics and academics and focus on the “student-athlete” versus the “athlete-student” stereotypes, colleges and universities must provide a sound student-athlete services program that includes academic support, mental health and personal counseling, and career and life skills components. Administrators must also keep in mind that educational backgrounds vary from student to student, and some educational foundations may be in need of an intervention. Those interventions must address racial issues on campus, the everyday lives of African American student-athletes are shaped by their racial experiences.

Being an African American student-athlete can sometimes presuppose countless connotations in the minds of African Americans and non-African Americans alike. Whenever engaging in psychological exercises with others, the terms athlete and sport often surface (Harrison, et al., 2002). The implication is that, in most cases, being African American symbolizes a specific identification that consequently impacts the development of African American racial identity. Although the social construction of groups changes over time, the identity development socialization process is shaped by experiences with one's family, community, school, group, and social affiliations. One component of the racial identity development process is conceptualizing complex identities and negotiating the significance of identities to understand the intricacies of what being an African American male and an athlete means to them in relation the broader context of college sport culture and the world.

Despite expressing elevated athletic identities due to extensive time commitments to their sport and the isolation caused by these time demands, both the focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews yielded conflicting participant results surrounding their identity battles. When asked directly about their feelings regarding being an African American and an African American athlete, all of the participants indicated a positive message. However, all of the participants stated that they experience some type of discrimination or negative racial experiences as it relates to their African American identity and their athletic identity. These results indicate that the racial identity and the athletic identity are two salient identities that African American student-athletes negotiate during their intercollegiate student-athlete experience. The participants realize that their best interest as an African American student-athlete is to "keep it movin'" focus on maintaining eligibility to compete, and "shrug off" the

perceptions and stereotypes of others. This mindset creates a continued desire to strive for a professional contract.

Although most of the participants truly value their education, they do not view their educational experiences as tools for liberation. The varying relationship between the participants' educational experiences call for a more holistic approach in developing their academic expertise, identity awareness and understanding, and social skills needed to not only succeed as an African American Division I football player, but also as an African American male in American society.

This study in particular illustrates the combined impact of the discussed challenges facing African American football student-athletes as it relates to their overall academic experiences and more specifically their developmental experiences in regards to their professional athlete status. Further investigations regarding these components will not only identify issues faced by African American male intercollegiate football student-athletes, but they will also illustrate the continued need for education regarding the true lives of student-athletes by society as a whole instead of relying so heavily on media reports. This knowledge has the potential to encourage sport practitioners to consider how their beliefs, practices and the current structure of sport culture may positively or detrimentally influence the identity construction and perceptions of African American student-athletes (Bimper and Harrison, 2011). "Like legal colleagues, critical race scholars in education are committed to promoting social justice in the form of equitable access to quality educational opportunities for *all* students of color" (Donnor, 2005, p. 53). Currently there is a scarcity of educational research that employs a critical race theoretical perspective on the educational experiences of students, student-athletes and most importantly African American student-athletes. This perspective contends that "modern racism and racial inequity is systematic because it privileges and normalizes cultural messages and institutional policies and practices

that function to advantage whites-both directly and indirectly” (Donnor, 2005, p. 52). Applying this theoretical perspective on future educational research will provide a better understanding of the complex role of race in education as well as bring racial inequalities to the forefront of institutional policies and procedures. This study in its entirety has called for practitioners to re-evaluate their student-athlete development and life skills programs similar to Wisconsin’s Beyond the Game™. The study also helped shape the following guidelines for University personnel that work directly with African American football student-athletes. These guidelines should encourage the Academic Support Staff as well as the Athletic Department to constantly examine held policies and procedures in order to best suit their enrolled student-athletes. The review process of policies and procedures enables improvement of work for effective and efficient services. Due to constantly changing NCAA bylaws and the concern for overall student-athlete well-being, it is recommended that universities review and amend their policies and procedures yearly.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS

Beyond the Game TM

At the conclusion of the 2015 football season, Mid-Atlantic University personnel hired a new head football coach. Within months, an entire new football staff arrived on the east coast ready to tackle the challenges that lead to the previous coach's firing. Because multiple studies over the past decade and a half have depicted an oppositional relationship between athletics, academics, and life after sport, I suggest implementing some, if not all, aspects of the Beyond the Game TM program. "Research suggests that media imagery, stereotyping, and other non-academic influences on African American males who participate in intercollegiate athletics tend to result in over-identification with professional athletes, sports, and perceptions of great value associated with physical performance activities and a simultaneous under-identification with academic performance, scholarly identity, and student development" (Charleston, et al., 2015). These pressures limit the career options outside of athletics. In order to combat these issues, Wisconsin's Equity and Inclusion Lab developed Beyond the Game TM (BTG) to confront the challenges student-athletes face when they exhaust their eligibility and must identify viable career alternatives to professional sports.

According to Charleston et al., 2015, the BTG program consists of six objectives: 1) provide an environment that will allow the student-athletes to connect their educational goals to viable career options; 2) equip the student-athletes with important life skills; 3) facilitate meetings with mentors, faculty, peers, and other on campus units; 4) provide participants with networking and professional development opportunities; 5) offer academically oriented service-learning opportunities; 6) increase the awareness of and cultivate the development of students'

non-athletic academic identities. The program also seeks to develop a longitudinal data set to constantly improve the services over time. With the culmination of these services, the program promotes two primary goals: 1) student-athletes are expected to obtain employment within 90 days of graduation (in their field of study) or accept graduate school admissions; and 2) earning the program's leadership certificate while also successfully completing a 10-year career plan.

To accomplish the above goals, the BTG program offers six core components: 1) curriculum courses designed to focus on identity development and leadership theories while also incorporating dinner speaking engagements, panel meetings and various academic-based workshops (this component would help the study participants increase their critical consciousness and sense of self as it relates to the world); 2) passport to success that is a rewards system that supports matriculation, campus-wide connections, and career development by stamping a physical or virtual passport for participation in various activities (this component would combat the sense of isolation our current student-athletes feel by encouraging them to get involved with on-campus activities); 3) career role model provides student-athletes with the opportunity to connect with well-established individuals from an array of professional backgrounds (this component is currently taking place in Mid-Atlantic University's Leadership Academy program that is described below); 4) real talk series that presents student-athletes with forums for topically driven, open, honest, and frank conversations guided by the student-athletes (this component would allow our student-athletes to discuss cultural issues such as inequality, difference and race in an environment built from trust, support, and open communication); 5) dinner series is designed to allow current student-athletes the opportunity to gather as a group and interact with their career role models in a semi-formal, semi-structured environment that provides networking, community building, motivation, inspiration, role modeling and overall

learning; and 6) the leadership certificate enables student-athletes to develop the skills that will allow them to positively impact others on their team and effect change on campus, in the community and in society through the completion of 100 hours of education and experiences focused on leadership development. The BTG program provides university personnel with an exemplary model for not only strengthening the post-graduation trajectories for student-athletes but also for improving the quality of their colleges experiences (Charleston et al., 2015, p. 300). Although the implementation of the BTG program cannot be generalized, Mid-Atlantic University student-athletes would benefit from many aspects of the program that would complement the life skills program already in place.

In 2010, the implementation of the Guidance Academy (pseudonym) took place at Mid-Atlantic University to enhance the overall success of the university's student-athletes through academic, career and personal development. "The mission of the Guidance Academy is to equip student-athletes with skills necessary to achieve success during and after their collegiate careers by providing them with opportunities for career, academic and personal development" (S. Tucker, personal communication, July 3, 2013). The general overview of the program explains its purpose,

During the academic year student-athletes are provided with opportunities to participate in distinctive workshops that are tailored to their specific needs of development in accordance to their graduation status, sport and professional interest. Through an ample network of specialized personnel, alums and supporters of the program, each workshop is facilitated by individuals with direct knowledge of the specific field. This allows for the student-athlete to gain substantial insight in all areas of

development throughout their collegiate career (S. Tucker, personal communication, July 3, 2013).

Within the academic development component of the program, student-athletes can experience graduate school guidance, time management activities, goal setting, study hall, new student orientation, tutors, ability to access grades first, student-athlete of the month awards, and identification of majors. The academic development component provides student-athletes with the opportunity to expand their knowledge in all educational settings. The personal development component of the Guidance Academy offers personal branding, behavioral assessments, core values training, health & wellness awareness, bystander intervention workshops, financial management courses, SCREAM athletes, and opportunities for community service. The personal development feature allows student-athletes to understand their own behaviors and apply their strengths to academic and career interests. The career development component of the Guidance Academy provides opportunities on resume building, career interest tests, career panels, video mock interviews, networking functions, dress for success workshops, company spotlights and career fairs. This segment of the program provides student-athletes with various skills and tools to apply during their lives after college.

Both the BTG program and the Guidance Academy are designed to harness curricular, co-curricular and on-the-field leadership training to develop and support post-graduation for student-athletes. As stated in the literature review, African American male athletes are easily attracted to the allure of the professional athletic lifestyle from an early age while also witnessing increased exposure to negative stereotypical depictions of African American males in popular media. By blending components of both programs into one unique structure, Mid-Atlantic University can combat non-academic influences such as media imagery and stereotyping that

tend to perpetuate the over-identification of athletic prowess and sports while also providing opportunities for educational growth and future occupational success.

Guidelines for Working with African American Student-Athletes

The following guidelines were created for university personnel as a resource in their work with African American student-athletes. These guidelines are based on the available research in the domains of sport psychology, sport sociology, and education regarding this particular population. Combined with relevant academic literature and the data collected from the current study on systemic racial inequalities associated with academic experiences, these guidelines are also formulated by the expressed concerns and viewpoints of the participants. The guidelines represent a response to the shortage of research regarding the impact of systemic racial inequalities on academic experiences of African American student-athletes and are intended to increase awareness of their experiences in the Division I athletic context. Areas identified as being the most salient were role models/mentorship, relationship building (with coaches and academic advisors), academic advising/career development, structure within the athletic program, and identity development. These guidelines also include necessary information to understand when working with African American athletes.

In terms of needs, 66% of the student-athletes believed that university personnel meet their needs or generally understood their needs whereas all 4 athletic academic advisors felt that the academic support staff members understand their student-athletes' needs. The position coaches, academic advisors and teammates were most frequently identified as being aware of the needs and ensuring that their needs were met. Although the head coach was identified as only somewhat understanding their needs, the respondents believed he expressed a slight vested interest in meeting the needs regardless of whether he showed this regularly.

Role Model/Mentoring Program. Five of the 12 student-athletes indicated that they did not have a role model during their childhood; however, the subjects expressed an interest and a need in someone such as a mentor to provide guidance and support. Without thoroughly investigating the student-athlete development department, there appeared to be a lack of a mentoring program within the team and athletic department. Below are guidelines regarding the implementation of a mentoring program for African American student-athletes:

1. Establishing and maintaining a mentoring program is ultimately the responsibility of three parties: the coaches, the academic advisors and the student-athletes. These three parties communicate most frequently as a group. Ideally, the athletic director should also understand and support the benefits of investing time and energy into a mentor program.
2. Involving the student-athlete development team and possibly the Varsity MAU Program (program for ex-student-athletes to remain connected to the athletics department and their specific sport) could potentially increase the pool of mentors to choose from for participation. The most important aspect of the mentoring program is the ability for participants to relate their experiences as an African American student-athlete in order to balance their identities as a student, as men, as an African American man, as student-athletes, and all of these identities after their careers in sport. Recruiting former African American athletes will help maximize the effectiveness of the program.
3. To create the best relatability, former student-athletes from the same university should participate in the program. These former student-athletes understand the sport

history and culture which creates a precise understanding of the current student-athletes' experiences.

4. Although the experiences of every African American male athlete are different, providing a mentoring program that partners athletes from the same sport together is ideal. There may be a lack of availability in African American athletes willing to participate, in these instances, consulting with the student-athletes may provide opportunities for someone outside of the sport or university to offer support. That being said, care and thoughtfulness should be taken into consideration when matching student-athletes with mentors. Characteristics such as ethnic background, age, region of origin (i.e. North, East), family origin (i.e. socioeconomic status), and career paths or goals should be deliberated.
5. The mentors' commitment and highest regard for their mentee's best interest must be a priority. Ideally, commitment should be at a minimum for the duration of the student-athletes' career at the university with the intention of creating a lifelong relationship. The importance of dedication and honesty will make a significant impact of the student-athlete's goals and aspirations while also fostering a line of open communication.

Relationship Building (Coaches and Academic Advisors). The overall relationships with coaches and academic advisors was seen as an area of concern for most of the participants. The following guidelines are designed to improve the communication between athletes, coaches and administrators as to assist in the growth of African American male student-athletes.

1. An effort should be made by all staff involved working with African American student-athletes to find ways to relate to them. Relating or "understanding where they

come from and what they gotta do” was seen as a theme throughout the interviews.

“Understanding them” consists of sharing similar backgrounds with the capability to empathize with their previous experiences and circumstances.

2. Avoid judgmental, prejudice, and stereotypical attitudes. All of the participants stated experiencing these attitudes even though they “keep it movin’.” Most of the participants felt that although the administration and coaches try to “understand” them, they failed to truly grasp who they are as individuals. When asked if race was a factor, most indicated that if someone was willing to try to understand, they can earn their trust, but race is a factor in understanding and connecting.
3. Establish a sense of priority with the needs of African American student-athletes. Most of the student-athletes feel that their needs are being met, but several mentioned that this is a business and they are being used in exchange for a free education. When attempting to address these needs, avoid dismissive attitudes and express a genuine interest in the development and betterment of the individual.
4. Simply make a genuine attempt at getting to know each player on an individual level. Although the team motto is “FAMILY” (forget about me, I love you), there is a lack of “family” as it relates to the head coach. The student-athletes suggested a simple family dinner outside of the football environment, possibly at his home would increase the trust and personable connection with the head coach.
5. Work with the student-athlete development department to create workshops that increase trust and support of all parties.

Academic Advising/Career Development. The overall academic advising and career development was seen as an area of concern for some of the participants in the current study. The

following guidelines are designed to improve the quality of academic advising and career development services of African American student-athletes.

1. Maintain the best professional judgment between expert advising and pushing for certain academic majors based upon convenience, scheduling or maintaining eligibility. Similarly, course selection should also be made with the student-athletes best interests in mind. This allows the student-athletes to feel a sense of ownership and autonomy over their future careers.
2. To enhance relationship building as well as academic discussions, engaging in open and honest communication regarding academic strengths is essential for trust and rapport. Because of the participants' feelings of administration's lack of understanding, establishing open communication about academic concerns creates a quality advising relationship.
3. Continue to utilize specialized tutoring for those courses that are more demanding or in which the student-athlete needs additional assistance. This individualized attention allows for student-athletes to feel that they can still pursue degrees that fit their career interests even though on paper they may not appear to exude strength in a specific topic.
4. Continue to work directly with the student-athlete development department to implement tailored career workshops for the student-athletes. Some of the participants mentioned attending required workshops in which they could not relate to the topic area. Establishing personalized career paths (other than directly to the NFL) will greatly benefit the student-athletes in hopes that they become the best citizens possible.

Structure within the Athletic Department.

1. Establish an open communication strategy contingent plan that addresses an effective grievance system for all parties. Student-athletes must feel comfortable in order to communicate. By establishing this system, student-athletes will understand that they have support from 3rd parties. This open line of communication ensures that all student-athletes are in positions to speak directly to leaders when issues arise.
2. Utilize the FAR (Faculty Athletics Representative) and the SAAC Board (Student-Athlete Advisory Committee) as an avenue for advocating the needs of student-athletes for policy changes. These parties act on behalf of the student-athletes in areas such as academic support, athletic support and overall well-being concerns.
3. Strike a balance between freedom and autonomy. The participants expressed disdain for the amount of “hand holding” or structure in their athletic program. Although the structure is necessary in an environment of athletic and academic stress, not to mention many outside distractions, the student-athletes would like the ability to define their own experiences.
4. Establish “check-in” meetings not only with the academic advisors but also with the coaches. It is important to gain trust during these meetings while also encouraging an open line of communication that not only discusses athletic or academic concerns but also anything that the student-athlete would like to discuss (i.e. familial issues, significant other issues etc.)

Identity Development. Identity development or in many of the participant’s cases, the continued development, can enhance the overall health and well-being of an African American student-athletes’ intercollegiate athletic experiences. Children are soaking up society’s messages

about race. Unless parents, teachers, and coaches intentionally challenge these messages and viewpoints, children will not critique them either. The following guidelines are designed to improve the understanding of multicultural differences while also allowing the student-athletes to develop their own racial identity.

1. Administrators, coaches and academic advisors are encouraged to recognize that, as cultural beings, they hold attitudes and beliefs that may be detrimentally influencing their perceptions and interactions with student-athletes.
2. Recognize the importance of multicultural sensitivity, knowledge and understanding about racially different individuals by developing multicultural workshops for administrators and student-athletes. Combining the multicultural workshops with those in academic and career realms will also employ the constructs of multiculturalism and diversity in education
3. Encourage the use of organizational change processes to support culturally informed organization policy development and practices. Although the inclusion of race-related content generates many emotional responses, the discomfort associated with these emotions can lead to an overall learning process of oneself and current policies and procedures.
4. Encourage student-athletes to truly “find themselves” throughout their collegiate experiences. Allow them to explore academic and career options of their interest even if they need to fail on their own to see their natural talents and strengths.

Policies, procedures and guidelines provide the framework in which an organization operates. They support effective and efficient decision making while also increasing transparency and consistency. Program reviews of policies, procedures and guidelines should

happen regularly to ensure attention to the enhancement of services quality and to assure mission centrality of the academic support services. By utilizing these guidelines when assisting student-athletes, university personnel can enhance academic preparedness, critical consciousness and overall student-athlete well-being.

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Appendix A

Principal Investigator: Carissa Conroy

Project Title: Outside the Lines and Beyond the Classroom: African American Football

Student-Athletes' Experiences with Race in Academia

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: ADVISORS

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Carissa Conroy, who is a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. The purpose of this research is to examine the role race plays in the academic and career development of African American Division I football student-athletes.

Approximately 16 subjects (4 Athletic Academic Advisors and 12 African American football student-athletes) will participate in the interview component of this study. Twelve African American football student-athletes will participate in one small focus group session. Four African American football student-athletes will participate in one full day of shadowing that will include observations such as attending football practice and/or strength training sessions, class, academic meetings, study hall, team meals etc.

You will partake in one one-on-one interview session with the principal investigator. Your participation will last approximately one to three hours. You will state your first and last name before speaking during the interview. Topics discussed will include (but are not limited to) your role within the University, the academic support of student-athletes, academic motivation of athletes etc.

Pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality during the data analysis process.

The only risk is possible breach of confidentiality. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes elements such as your educational background, personal and athletics roles, thoughts about race and college athletics in general. Please note that I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. The observation and interview recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to subjects' identity. The recordings will be retained for three years after the completion of the study and then destroyed.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years and then destroyed by shredding and burning.

The benefits of taking part in this study may be: the opportunity to reflect upon and gain insights on the current academic experiences of African American football student-athletes. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact me at 10 Seminary Place New Brunswick, NJ 08901, Carissa.conroy@gse.rutgers.edu or 732-354-6962. You can also contact my advisor Tanja Sargent at 10 Seminary Place New Brunswick, NJ 08901, Tanja.sargent@gse.rutgers.edu or 848-932-0732.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board

Rutgers, University, the State University of New Jersey

Liberty Plaza/Suite 3200

335 George Street, 3rd floor

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Please initial next to all statements that apply to you and sign below:

_____ I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from this study at any time.

_____ I agree to participate in a one-on-one interview with the principal investigator

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B

Principal Investigator: Carissa Conroy

Project Title: Outside the Lines and Beyond the Classroom: African American Football Student-Athletes' Experiences with Race in Academia

Audio/Visual Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: **Outside the Lines and Beyond the Classroom: African American Football Student-Athletes' Experiences with Race in Academia** conducted by **Carissa Conroy**. I am asking for your permission to allow to **audiotape your interview or focus group** as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team as well as a learning tool. The recordings will help the investigator recall the interview in an objective manner. The recordings may also assist the investigator in identifying problems or issues that may be overlooked without such recordings.

The participants will state their first and last names before speaking during the interview and focus group sessions. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality during the data analysis process.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to subjects' identity. The recordings will be retained for three years after the completion of the study and then destroyed.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will

not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

ATHLETIC ACADEMIC ADVISORS-INTERVIEW PROPOSAL/OUTLINE**Interview Purpose**

I am interviewing you as one of four Rutgers University Athletic Academic Advisors (three male, one female) in order to learn your preferences, recommendations, and insights related to our current academic support services/events that may help to provide our African American football student-athletes the best support possible. By listening to your feedback, I expect to provide a clearer understanding of how to best accommodate their academic needs and determine how to incorporate your suggestions. As my goal, I plan to develop strategies to enhance our Academic Support Services for Student-Athletes' services for not only our current African American football student-athletes, but also those involved in other University-sponsored intercollegiate sports.

The interviews, which I will audiotape and transcribe, will last approximately one hour. I will use any confidential data collected during our session that identifies individuals for my research only and will not publicize or share this information within the Department unless you otherwise specify in writing.

Interview Questions:

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place: Rutgers University

Interviewee:

Interviewer: Carissa Conroy

Where did you go to college?

-Grad School?

-Job Employment?

What is your current role at the University?

What are your main responsibilities?

Tell me what you did today or even yesterday from start to finish?

-Probe: Is this a typical day?

-Probe: How does it differ from your typical day?

Tell me about the different academic programs and support services that we offer our student-athletes

Do you feel that our athletes would utilize the academic support services if they were not required to do so? Please explain.

Football student-athletes are a unique population. What made you want to work with them directly?

Tell me about a “typical day” for a football student-athlete during their in-season segment.

-Probe: How does that differ from their out-of-season segment?

Do you feel that our athletes are athletes before they are students? Please explain either way.

Tell me about a time in which you experienced a student-athlete struggle academically.

-Probe: How did you share in the student-athlete’s success?

-Probe: Did the experience change anything about the way you do your job?

Describe how football student-athletes choose their majors and provide explanations as to why they choose certain majors.

-Probe: Are student-athletes clustered into certain majors?

-Probe: Why are they clustered? (Offerings, schedules, what else?)

Is academic clustering common within large FBS football programs? Please explain.

Tell me about a time when your leadership experiences were challenged by a specific student-athlete's educational deficiencies.

How do you see your role related to promoting a diverse learning environment or diversity more generally?

Do you feel that our academic advisors who work with our African American football student-athletes truly grasp their academic, social, and personal developmental challenges? Please explain either way.

-Probe: Example (s)?

In what ways does race impact the academic experiences of our football student-athletes?

-Probe: Example (s)?

Describe the academic preparation, strengths and weaknesses of a few of your African American football student-athletes.

Do you think African American football student-athletes face any particular challenges in comparison to any other student-athletes? If so, please explain and provide any examples.

Based on your experience, do you think that African American football student-athletes struggle academically as it relates to their peers? If so, please describe how you come to this conclusion.

Probe: Peers as in other student-athletes

Probe: Peers as in the average student

Tell me about some of the different techniques or ways in which you motivate your African American football student-athletes to show interest in the in their academic studies.

What image do you think that most faculty members have of African American football student-athletes?

Probe: Example (s)?

Probe: What image do you think the student body has of African American football student-athletes?

Probe: Example(s)?

Have you ever attended a multicultural development workshop?

-Probe: What did the workshop cover?

-Probe: What did you learn from the experience?

-Probe: Did it change anything about the way you do your job?

Tell me about a time in which you were challenged by race within your workplace.

-Probe: Did it change anything about the way you do your job?

-Probe: Time involving a student-athlete?

Tell me about a time when you experienced race in a positive way within your workplace.

-Probe: Did it change anything about the way you do your job?

-Probe: Was there a time involving a student-athlete?

Are there any other specific needs of African American football student-athletes that we did not discuss?

-Probe: Do you feel those needs are being addressed by the ASSSA?

If you were the director of ASSSA for football, what would you change?

Appendix D

Principal Investigator: Carissa Conroy

Project Title: Outside the Lines and Beyond the Classroom: African American Football Student-Athletes' Experiences with Race in Academia

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: ATHLETES

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Carissa Conroy, who is a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. The purpose of this research is to examine the role race plays in the academic and career development of African American Division I football student-athletes.

Approximately 16 subjects (4 Athletic Academic Advisors and 12 African American football student-athletes) will participate in the interview component of this study. Twelve African American football student-athletes will participate in one small focus group session. Four African American football student-athletes will participate in one full day of shadowing that will include observations such as attending football practice and/or strength training sessions, class, academic meetings, study hall, team meals etc.

You will partake in one small focus group session that will last approximately two to three hours. You will also partake in one one-on-one interview session with the principal investigator. Your participation will last approximately one to three hours. You will state your first and last name before speaking during the interview and focus group sessions.

Four of the student-athletes will participate in one full day of observation. The observations will be used for analysis by the research team as well as a learning tool. The recordings will help the investigator recall your experiences in an objective manner. The

recordings may also assist the investigator in identifying problems or issues that may be overlooked without such observations.

Your academic information will also be assessed. Documents and or information to be assessed include (but are not limited to) transcripts, GPA, pending and completed coursework, degree programs, academic accolades etc.

Pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality during the data analysis process.

The only risk is possible breach of confidentiality. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes elements such as your educational background, personal and athletics roles, thoughts about race and college athletics in general. Please note that I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. The observation and interview recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to subjects' identity. The recordings will be retained for three years after the completion of the study and then destroyed.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years and then destroyed by shredding and burning.

The benefits of taking part in this study may be: the opportunity to reflect upon and gain insights on the current academic experiences of African American football student-athletes. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact me at 10 Seminary Place New Brunswick, NJ 08901, Carissa.conroy@gse.rutgers.edu or 732-354-6962. You can also contact my advisor Tanja Sargent at 10 Seminary Place New Brunswick, NJ 08901, Tanja.sargent@gse.rutgers.edu or 848-932-0732.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board

Rutgers, University, the State University of New Jersey

Liberty Plaza/Suite 3200

335 George Street, 3rd floor

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Please initial next to all statements that apply to you and sign below:

_____ I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from this study at any time.

_____ I agree to participate in a one-on-one interview with the principal investigator

_____ I agree to participate in a small focus group interview with the principal investigator.

_____ If chosen, I agree to participate in one day of observation with the principal investigator with the understanding that a pseudonym will be used, and data will be protected as well as destroyed after three years following the completion of this study.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix E

FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES - FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW**QUESTIONS****Focus Group Purpose**

From this focus group, I expect to learn your preferences, recommendations, and insights related to our current academic support services/events provided to you, and how the Athletic Department can plan for future improvements. By listening to your feedback, I plan to provide a clearer understanding of how to best accommodate your academic needs and determine how to incorporate your suggestions. As my goal, I will develop strategies to enhance Academic Support Services for not only football student-athletes, but also those involved in other University-sponsored intercollegiate sports.

The focus group, which I will audiotape and transcribe, will last approximately 90-120 minutes. I will use any confidential data collected during our session that identifies individuals only for use in my research and will not publicize or share your comments to anyone without your written permission.

Questions**Opening question:**

Tell me about high school. Did it prepare you for college?

-Socially?

-Mentally?

-Academically?

Academics

Before enrolling at Rutgers, what were your expectations going into your academic support services program?

- Were they met?
- What types of programs or services were you looking forward to utilizing?
- Before entering the program, what academic and career aspirations did you have?
- Have those aspirations changed in any way?
- Why do you think these have changed?

Tell me about majors of interest or declared majors.

- What were the key factors in selecting your major?
- Describe the declaration process.
- Who assisted you with the declaration process?
- Were you pushed into a major that did not spark your interest?
- Have you ever felt you did not belong in a certain class or major? Explain.

Talk to me about a professor who you have developed a close relationship with.

- How and why did it develop?
- Did he or she challenge you intellectually? If so, in what ways?

Now talk to me about a professor who you felt distant from.

- How and why did these feelings occur?
- Probe: Do you feel their expectations of you were different from other athletes? Other students?

Tell me a time where you felt a professor challenged you because of your race.

- How did it make you feel?
- What was the outcome of the incident?
- Did you tell anyone about the incident? Why or why not?
- Who did you tell? Why did you tell him or her?

Tell me about a time when your athletic academic advisor challenged you intellectually.

- How would you describe your relationship with your advisor in terms of your academic successes and struggles?
- Tell me about a time when you felt that you and your advisor had an argument.
- What stemmed the argument?
- How did you feel?
- What was the outcome?

Tell me about a time when you felt that your advisor truly cared about you and/or your work.

Talk to me about the educational challenges you face because you are a football student-athlete.

- Probe: How do feel your experiences differ from the average student?
- Probe: What types of educational advantages do you receive because of being an athlete?

Tell me about a time where you felt discriminated against because you are a football student-athlete.

Talk to me about the educational challenges you face because you are an African American football student-athlete.

-Probe: How do you feel your experiences differ from other teammates of a different race?

-Probe: Do you feel you experience different treatment because of your race? If so, explain.

Tell me about your close friends here on campus.

-Probe: Are they mostly your teammates and/or other athletes?

-Probe: How and where did you meet them?

-Probe: What types of activities do you like to do together?

-Probe: Where do you hang out the most of campus?

What, if anything, have you felt that has been missing from your college academic support services experiences? Or what areas of academic support would you like to see the college improve on?

Race

Tell me a story about race and your experiences at Rutgers.

-Probe: When did it take place?

-Probe: Where did it take place?

-Probe: Who was present?

-Probe: What was your reaction??

How have your ideas about race and your racial identity changed since your first year on campus?

Probe: Who/what has been influential in shifting the way you think about things?

Probe: Are there any moments that particularly stand out?

What has provided the greatest sources of support for you (academically, socially, etc.) within the college environment? (Specific people, programs, etc.)

Would you recommend your college to another student-athlete of color? Explain.

Tell me about your family and friend relationships back home.

-Probe: How do they relate to you in terms of race and educational experiences?

-Probe: Have these relationships changed since you started college?

-Probe: If so, in what ways?

-Probe: Do you still have the same friends at home that you had when you started college?

-Probe: Do you think changes in these relationships are related to class issues?

How do you feel about your race?

-Probe: Do you feel it is an asset? If so, in what ways?

-Probe: Do you feel it is a liability? If so, in what ways?

Think about your racial identity. Do you think that your racial identity affects who you are, your experiences, and how you see the world? Please explain.

Tell me about your relationships with your Athletic Academic Advisor as they relate to your racial identity.

-Probe: Do you feel your race is taken into consideration in decisions?

-Probe: Do you feel you are judged solely based on your race?

-Are there aspects associated with your race that you wished the advisors understood better?

Career

Tell me about your career aspirations.

-Probe: Who has assisted you most in your decisions?

-Probe: What are the most important aspects of your career decision?

-Probe: Have you ever been pressured to avoid certain careers? If so, how did that make you feel? Who pressured you? Why do you think he or she steered you towards a different career path?

Do you feel you will play professionally?

-Probe: Have you always wanted to play professionally? When did you first think you might want to play professionally?

-Probe: Do you feel pressured to play professionally? Who is pressuring you (parents/family, coaches, teammates, peers etc.)?

Do you have a career plan other than to play professionally? (Also known as a plan B)

-Probe: Where do you receive the most support when thinking about a plan B?

-Probe: Who has been supportive of your plan B?

-Probe: Tell me about a conversation you recently had about your plan B.

Is there anything else you would like to address in this session that wasn't already discussed?

Appendix F

FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES – ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW**QUESTIONS**

Name:

Date:

Time:

Research Questions:

1. How do systemic racial inequalities impact the academic experiences of African American college football student athletes at a top division 1 football program?
- d. SUB1 How have racialized inequalities in American society impacted the education of these students?
- e. SUB2 What are the racialized experiences of African American football student-athletes?
- f. SUB3 What are the aspirations of these students after college? Do they only aspire to be professional athletes or do they have a viable alternative plan? How are they preparing themselves for their future?

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

1. What city and state are you from?
2. What is the highest level of education your father completed?

3. What is the highest level of education your mother completed?
4. What is your father's occupation?
5. What is your mother's occupation?
6. How many siblings do you have? (Names and ages)
7. Describe your family structure. (head of household/siblings/extended family)
8. Describe your sources of financial support.
9. What role does religion play within your family?
10. What type of high school did you attend? (public/private)
11. Describe your high school academic experiences. (GPA/Test Scores/Access to Resources/Who Helped with Homework?)
12. What was the racial or cultural makeup of your childhood neighborhood? Friends? Place of Worship? High School?
13. What factors have contributed to your involvement in football?
14. When did your participation in football begin? Did you play more than one sport?
15. Who was involved in your initial participation in football?
16. What role did your parents play in your involvement with football?
17. What has kept you playing football?
18. Were your coaches of color? Did you have any role models of color?

19. Tell me about a time you experienced racism prior to enrolling in college.

Expectations for College

20. What do you think Black male athletes in your position need as a student at a Division 1 university?

21. Academically?

22. Athletically?

23. Socially?

24. Emotionally?

25. What do you think Black male athletes in your position need as an athlete at a Division 1 university?

26. What have your experiences been like with these needs? Were there things in particular that have been especially fulfilling/lacking?

27. Who do you think should meet these needs? Do you feel as though coaches, administration, your academic advisors understand these needs?

28. What differences could be made to ensure that these staff members are more educated/sensitive to these needs?

29. What suggestions do you have for those working with athletes in your position as it relates to race?

30. What have you learned about your racial or ethnic identity through participation in football?

31. Do you believe you will play professionally?

32. How has being a student-athlete prepared you for those goals?

33. Overall Experience with Diversity

34. What was the racial diversity of people on the teams you've been a part of throughout your career?
35. Did you ever have coaches who were the same ethnic/racial background? How was this experience?
36. Did you ever have coaches who were different ethnic/racial backgrounds? Were there any differences in your relationship with these coaches? Do you think your connection with these coaches differed at all do to their ethnic/racial backgrounds?
37. Tell me about a role model that you looked up to related to your sport.
38. Does being Black play any role in your participation in football?
39. How do you feel about being a Black football player? (past and present)

40. Student Experiences with Identity and Diversity on Campus

41. How do you feel about our Institution's commitment to diversity?
42. What are your perceptions of the racial climate of our institution?
43. Describe the amount and types of interaction with students from other racial/ethnic groups.
44. What types of diversity issues or topics do you experience in the classroom, residence halls and informal interactions?
45. Describe your involvement with campus activities oriented around diversity.
46. Describe a time you felt discrimination on or off campus.
47. Student-athletes often strongly identify with either their academic role or their athletic role. Which role do you most strongly identify with and why?

48. How do you perceive your athletic role?
49. Describe some positive and negative aspects of your athletic role.
50. What challenges have you encountered related to your athletic role?
51. Tell me about some accolades, rewards or praises you have received related to your athletic role.
52. How do you perceive your academic role?
53. Describe some positive and negative aspects of your athletic role.
54. What challenges have you encountered related to your athletic role?
55. Tell me about some accolades, rewards or praises you have received related to your academic role.
56. Tell me how you handle to manage your athletic and academic roles.
57. If conflicts arises between these two roles, what strategies do you use to resolve the conflicts?
58. How has being a student-athlete influenced your career-decision making process?
59. In what ways have the demands of your athletic role influenced your career-decision making?
60. Tell me about a time when you sought career decision advice.
61. Some literature suggests athletes only earn the minimum grades needed to remain eligible to compete. Tell me how that makes you feel. Are you an athlete before a student?

62. If you were not required to utilize the academic support services, would you seek assistance?
63. What service would you utilize the most?
64. The least?
65. Some athletes feel that professors treat them differently because they are athletes. Have you ever experienced a professor that has treated you differently because you are a football player? Do you feel that your race played a role in the experience?
66. How do you feel about the dumb jock stereotype?
67. What other stereotypes do you feel that you face because of your status as an athlete?
68. What about because you are a football athlete?
69. Black football athlete?
70. In the past 6 months, what has been an experience of which you have been proud as a Black collegiate student-athlete?
71. During the last 6 months, what has been an experience that you wish could have changed as a Black college student-athlete?
72. What advice would you provide young Black elementary, middle and high school athletes who want to be successful in football?
73. What else should I be asking as it relates to your racial experiences on campus?

So you think you can play on Sundays?



1,023,756



High school
Football
Players

65,000



Advance to
college
football

6,000



Are scouted
by NFL

750



Sign an
NFL
contract

300



Make an
NFL
roster

140



Remain in
NFL four or
more years

OF

100,000

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL SENIORS EVERY YEAR

9,000

WILL PLAY AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

6,240

WILL BE POTENTIAL NFL ROOKIES

875

WILL SIGN NFL CONTRACTS

310

WILL BE INVITED TO NFL COMBINE

215

**WILL MAKE ACTIVE NFL ROSTER,
AND ONLY**

105

WILL PLAY FOUR OR MORE NFL SEASONS

Appendix I

Codebook

ACADEMIC CODESLACK OF ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Student-athletes discussed the lack of college preparatory skills academically and socially that they experienced prior to enrolling in college. Some participants even described their high school experiences as a joke (as if they breezed through courses).

EXPECTATIONS OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

During their recruiting visits, the student-athletes developed expectations about the academic support services that they would receive once they enrolled at the university. The expectations and actual services received varied throughout the classes of athletes.

CHOICE OF MAJOR

The student-athletes described the major declaration process as it relates to their interests. Many of the athletes discussed declaring majors that were of interest but also majors in which they knew their strengths would prevail.

ASSISTANCE IN CHOOSING A MAJOR

The advisors and student-athletes discussed whether or not assistance was provided during the major declaration process. All of the participants (advisors included) described different levels of guidance during this process. Some athletes indicated that their majors were forced upon them, where others indicated that they had full autonomy over their choice of major.

ACADEMIC CLUSTERING

The advisors discussed the natural tendency for student-athletes to cluster themselves when choosing classes and majors. Their rationale is that older student-athletes inform the younger

student-athletes of “easy” majors. The student-athletes stated that they are placed into classes that have a lot of student-athletes and it is seemingly out of their control.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

The student-athletes discuss the challenges of being a student-athlete that impact their academic performance. Topics such as lack of time for extracurricular activities, time management, academic workload, structured work environment and pressure to succeed surfaced.

EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGES

There was an overall acknowledgement that there are some negatives associated with being an athlete (more so from the athletic role), but the feeling that the positives outweigh the negatives because being a student-athlete provides opportunities. The student-athletes did indicate that there are various educational advantages of being a student-athletes. Advantages such as a free education, personal branding, and providing for their families were discussed.

NCAA-POSITIVE VIBES

The National Collegiate Athletics Association utilizes its association members to set legislation. Some of the legislation favors the well-being of student-athletes and their overall academic experiences.

NCAA-NEGATIVE VIBES

Some of the NCAA legislation negatively impacts the academic experiences of student-athletes, especially student-athletes of color.

TYPES OF SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

The advisors and student-athletes indicated several support services that they felt were “successful” in terms of their academic performance. Services such as tutoring, academic meetings, and study hall were discussed.

IMPROVEMENT TO ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

The student-athletes provided insight on several support services that could utilize improvement such as eliminating time management sheets and study hall. Some of the student-athletes even indicated that if they were not required to utilize any of the services, they would not.

RELATIONSHIP CODES

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE AT HOME

The student-athletes were asked to talk about their relationships with family, friends and mentors with people from their home towns. The established precedence for those individuals who might have influence on the student-athletes' decisions.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Where are the student-athletes getting their financial and emotional support? Many indicated family, friends, teachers and coaches provided guidance and support throughout their athletic careers.

FRIEND GROUPS

The student-athletes were asked to describe the makeup of their friend groups as it relates to race and ethnicity.

RELATIONSHIP WITH ACADEMIC ADVISOR

The advisors and student-athletes were asked to describe their relationships with one another.

The advisors gave overall positive relationships with their student-athletes whereas several student-athletes indicated that the relationship with their advisor was quite rocky.

Communication and academic expectations were the cause of friction.

ADVISOR-OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE BACK

The advisors discussed the importance of giving back in their profession. All of the advisors described the joy and satisfaction when a student-athlete succeeds.

RELATIONSHIP WITH COACHES

Most of the student-athletes indicated that their best relationships were with their position coaches. They also expressed a concern about the lack of relationship with the head football coach and yearned for a personal relationship with him.

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH PROFESSORS

The participants described a few positive relationships with professors however most of the athletes indicated that they do not have any relationships with their professors.

LACK OF RELATIONSHIP WITH PROFESSORS

Most of the student-athletes indicated that they do not have a relationship with any of their professors despite the urge from their advisors to develop them.

DISCRIMINATION AND STEREOTYPE CODES

DIVERSITY EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO COLLEGE

The student-athletes were asked to discuss their diversity experiences prior to enrolling at the university so that we could come to terms with their racial experiences. Family background, racial makeup of their neighborhoods, high schools and friend groups were discussed.

FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

All of the participants were asked to talk about any acts of discrimination that they have experienced during their time at the University.

LACK OF DISCRIMINATION

Some of the student-athletes expressed experiencing a lack of discrimination when asked directly to think about discrimination; however, throughout the interview process these same student-athletes thought of specific experiences of discrimination that had impacted them.

RACISM PRIOR TO COLLEGE

The student-athletes talked about experiencing direct racism prior to enrolling in the university. They discussed individuals such as friends, family, teachers and coaches acting in ways that were racist.

STEREOTYPES-GENERIC

All of the participants talked about generic stereotypes that they have experienced throughout their time at the university. Characteristics discussed were automatically assuming they are athletic, aggressive, dopey or dumb, criminal, lazy and out to get women in bed.

DUMB JOCK STEREOTYPE

The student-athletes were asked to discuss the dumb jock stereotype (how it made them feel, if they experience it and what they can do to combat the stereotype).

PROFESSOR DISCRIMINATION

The advisors and student-athletes were asked to talk about their experiences with forms of discrimination made by professors (if they experienced it, what happened during the encounter, what was the resolution, how did the encounter affect their academic experiences). Several student-athletes discussed scenarios in which assumptions about them were made.

IDENTITY CODES

REASONS THAT HAVE KEPT THEM PLAYING FOOTBALL

Student-athletes described reasons that have kept them playing football since childhood. Many talked about family members, passion for the game and a free education as reasons for continuing to play college football.

ATHLETE-STUDENT VS. STUDENT-ATHLETE

The student-athletes were asked if they identify as a student-athlete or an athlete-student. Most of the participants expressed that being an athlete/part of a team was very important and is how they identify with various things in life. Athletics is a full time job and a way of life.

ATHLETIC ROLE VS. ACADEMIC ROLE

The student-athletes were asked to talk about the challenges of having to identify their athletic role at times and their academic role at other times. Most of the participants discussed that their academic role is slightly important, but their athletic role took precedent in almost any situation.

ATHLETIC NEEDS

The student-athletes were asked to identify things that they need athletically to succeed. Topics such as access to the best facilities and coaches possible, supportive fans, and access to the weight room whenever they want were discussed.

ACADEMIC NEEDS

The student-athletes were asked to identify things that they need academically to succeed. Topics such as a supportive academic support staff and coaching staff, access to the best resources, and good tutors were discussed.

SOCIAL NEEDS

The student-athletes were asked to identify things that they need to succeed socially. Topics such as an understanding friend group (non-narps), time away from football ("me time") and family meals with the coaches were discussed.

EMOTIONAL NEEDS

The student-athletes were asked to identify things that they need to succeed emotionally. Topics such as a comfortable space to go and talk about sensitive topics, developing a relationship with an administrator to talk about sensitive topics, ability and time to worship and time for girlfriends were discussed.

SENSE OF RACIAL IDENTITY

The student-athletes were challenged by the questions regarding race at first, but as they became more comfortable, many even admitted never thinking about their racial identity and appreciated the enlightening conversations.

PRIDE IN RACIAL IDENTITY

The student-athletes were asked how they felt about being an African American student-athlete. Most of the participants exuded great pride in identifying themselves this way. Only one student-athlete stated that his race does not define him.

SENSE OF ISOLATION

The advisors and student-athletes talked about a sense of isolation racially and athletically as it relates to the academic experiences of the student-athletes. Although the university is known for its diversity, the advisors and student-athletes felt that the athletes will always sense isolation due to being such a small, unique population.

PRESSURE TO BE SUCCESSFUL

The student-athletes indicated that the biggest challenge was the pressure to be successful. They are the center of attention and bring in the most revenue for the university and the pressure to succeed in and out of the classroom as well as on the field can be overwhelming.

CAREER CODESCAREER ASPIRATIONS

Ways in which the participants sought or received information regarding careers. Participants provided instances that lead them to choose a major and career path.

NFL ASPIRATIONS

While athletics is important, most of the student-athletes viewed their collegiate education and earning a degree as a backup plan in the event that they do not play professionally. Most of the student-athletes indicated that they felt confident about playing professionally after college.

MISCELLANEOUSADVISORS-MULTICULTURALISM

The advisors were asked to discuss their multicultural awareness as well as any multicultural workshops that they have attended to ameliorate their professional growth.

INSTITUTION'S COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

The participants were asked how well the institution addressed diversity in general as it is known world-wide as a leader in diversity initiatives.

NARP (NON-ATHLETIC REGULAR PERSON)

The term NARP (non-athletic regular person) was brought up regularly in many of the interviews. Although the student-athletes feel isolated, they have coined a phrase that continues to isolate themselves.

ADVICE TO THOSE WORKING WITH ATHLETES AS IT RELATES TO RACE

The student-athletes were asked to provide advice to those that work directly with African American student-athletes. Phrases such as avoid assumptions, get to know them individually and show a sense of compassion and support for their overall well-being.

ADVICE TO BLACK KIDS

The student-athletes were asked to provide advice to young African American athletes as it relates to their race. Phrases such as work hard, ignore the ignorant and never fall to stereotypes were used.