

ABSTRACT

Exploring the Challenges of Elite African American Male Athletes at Predominately White
Universities: Three Descriptive Case Studies

by

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December 2019

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In American society, sports participation is viewed through many lenses. With both college and professional teams, sports are popular entertainment that rivets millions of people and is discussed passionately. It is a major revenue-producing enterprise for universities, professional sports teams, and the communities that benefit in many ways from sports attendance. For many elite African American male student athletes growing up in low-income urban areas and without many job possibilities at home, sports provide a potential means to climb out of their current economic circumstances, support their families, and possibly earn millions of dollars and fame. For elite collegiate athletes particularly, sports bring scholarships and a pathway to college as well as a better career. The possibility of attending college would not be open to many of these students from poor urban areas without sports scholarships. This study seeks to gain insight into the challenges experienced by elite African American male athletes attending predominately White universities.

EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF ELITE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE
ATHLETES AT PREDOMINATELY WHITE UNIVERSITIES:
THREE DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDIES

A Dissertation

Presented To

The Faculty of the Department of Addictions and Rehabilitation Studies

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Ph.D. Rehabilitation Counseling and Administration

by

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December 2019

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AT PREDOMINATELY WHITE UNIVERSITIES: THREE DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDIES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would be remiss in my duty if I did not thank the Almighty God for giving me life and allowing me to be in the circle of life in this day and age. Thank you to my committee for your dedication and support. Thank you to the Department of Addictions and Rehabilitation for giving me the opportunity to fulfill a dream of pursuing my doctoral studies. I would like to thank my parents for being the vehicles through which God chose to bring me into existence. To my family and friends, thank you for all your love and support along the way; I could not have made it without you. Finally, I just want to thank all of those individuals who have supported me in one way or another and who have been a part of my life during my tenure as a student and a professor at East Carolina University. The lessons I learned from the Pirate Community are invaluable, and I will cherish them forever.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This first chapter provides the foundation for a study concerning the experiences of African American collegiate athletes at predominately White universities with the purpose of gaining greater insight into the numerous challenges that these students face as collegiate athletes. Although the challenges are not exhausted, the major challenges (e.g. discrimination, limited education, inability to navigate in a monetary system, and depression and substance use) will be the focus. This chapter begins with a background discussion, followed by the presentation of the theoretical framework guiding the study. The problem statement, rationale, and ethical considerations are presented, followed by the research study questions, limitations, and key definitions.

Introduction to Study

Tens of thousands attend college sporting events each year. Football, basketball, baseball, track, and other sports are well-loved across the country and also well-attended. From the outside, it looks like the athletes that compete in these events “have it made” and are quite lucky. In many respects, they are. These athletes are attending college on scholarships with some becoming the first in their families to receive the opportunity of a college education. They are seen as toned, fit, healthy, ambitious, supported, loved by fans, and lucky to have their coaches and teammates as extended family. No doubt that this is true to an extent, but this is perhaps especially true for those athletes who are African American. However, there is a dark underbelly with the world of college sports. While all athletes face some challenges, the ones that African Americans face are unique.

While elite African American male athletes may appear to dominate many collegiate sports both in terms of talent and fame, their experiences at predominantly White universities

may be less than positive. These athletes often face racism, discrimination, and exclusion, which can affect their ability to experience success both on and off the field. The purpose of the following discussion is to highlight the obstacles faced by elite African American male athletes who attend predominantly White universities, which include family-related challenges, disparities in graduation rates, mental health issues, and difficulty finding self-fulfillment.

A great deal of these elite university athletes experience fame on the field or court; however, many suffer in silence due to issues related to family, inability to graduate, mental health, and discrimination. Although there are numerous resources available on university campuses, the resources that are relevant to their well-being and to the improvement of their quality of life are seldom provided. The focus of the athletic department is on winning the game and ensuring continued championships. Several of these young men are selected from high school and from impoverished communities, where they have grown up with limited resources. When thrust into the university environment where there are seemingly endless resources, they still rely heavily on only their coaches to guide them. Because the coaches' goal is to win games, they are not focused on whether the athlete has family household responsibilities or whether he has not obtained the needed academic skills in high school to be successful at the university.

Family-Related Challenges

Families can play an important role in the life of the athlete, both financially and socially. While many athletes receive scholarship money to play their sport, these funds may not always cover the full expenses of attending school (NCAA, n.d.). Racial disparities in income pose another threat. The median wealth of African Americans is one-tenth that of Whites, and they are less likely to own a home, more likely to hold high-interest debt, and more likely to live in poverty than Whites (Hanks, Solomon, & Weller, 2018). Thus, it is likely that many African

American families cannot afford to send their children to college without adequate scholarship money.

Lack of family support may also be a concern. A greater number of African American collegiate athletes are first generation college students compared to their White counterparts. As such, they may receive less support from family, who lack the experience to help these students adjust to the academic, social, and cultural facets of university life (Sadberry, & Mobley, 2012).

Crime is yet another consideration. Low-income individuals and racial minorities are disproportionately affected by crime. African Americans are also more likely to be the victims of violent crime than Whites. In fact, predominantly African American neighborhoods are five times as likely to experience violent crimes as White neighborhoods (Housing and Urban Development, 2016). African American athletes who lose their scholarships, such as due to inadequate athletic or academic performance, may risk returning to the very neighborhoods from which they hope to escape.

Graduation Rates

In addition to the challenge of maintaining scholarships, disparities exist in the graduation rates of African American versus White athletes. Among NCAA Division I schools, 55.2% of African American male athletes graduate within six years, a figure notably less than the 69.3% of White athletes who graduate within that time frame. African American male athletes also graduate at lower rates than African American male non-athletes at over half of these schools. At 40% of the universities in this division, graduation rates for these athletes have declined over the past two years (Harper, 2018). Therefore, African American male athletes graduate less often than White athletes and African American male students in general.

One factor, which may contribute to this disparity in graduation rates, is team success. Southall, et al. (2015) uncovered a statistically significant and negative relationship between the success of a collegiate football or basketball team at a predominantly White institution and the graduation rate of its African American, but not White, players. In other words, African American male athletes demonstrated lower graduation rates if they played for a winning team. This same relationship did not hold true for White athletes. One possible explanation for the reduced graduation rates is that predominantly White schools often recruit Black athletes from low-income or impoverished areas. These athletes, more motivated by the possibility of using success in sports to improve their socioeconomic status, therefore choose schools based more on athletic influences rather than academic considerations. These schools also place greater emphasis on sports, seemingly unconcerned that the Black athletes they recruit were not afforded quality educational opportunities earlier in life and may not be prepared to succeed at the college level (Southall, et al., 2015).

A number of other institutional and demographic factors may negatively impact graduation rates of African American athletes. These include negative stereotypes of African American athletes, particularly among faculty, poor interactions with and lack of encouragement from faculty, social isolation from White peers, extensive practice and athletic schedules, and the lack of academic rigor or expectations in academic programs largely populated with African American athletes (Simiyu, 2012). Demographic factors that may impact academic success and graduation rates include family structure and socioeconomic status. Reynolds, Fisher, and Cavill (2012) reported that 52% of the African American athletes in their study concerning graduation rates were raised in single parent homes. Further, 73% of athletes lived in families where the mean annual income was less than \$50,000. About one-fifth of athletes lived in homes with a

mean annual income less than \$20,000. The authors reported a linear relationship existed among family structure, socioeconomic status, and academic success among African American athletes (Reynolds, et al., 2012).

Mental Health Issues

In addition to academic struggles and lower graduation rates, African American male athletes face challenges related to substance abuse and other mental health issues. In general, college athletes tend to use substances at a higher rate than their non-athletic peers. For example, according to Ford (2007), 58.4% of collegiate male athletes reported engaging in binge drinking, as did 75.4% of hockey players and 64.6% of baseball players. Marijuana use was most prevalent among hockey and baseball players than among other collegiate athletes, at 38.5% and 27.4%, respectively. Finally, 14.6% of collegiate football players admitted to using other illicit drugs (Ford, 2007).

In spite of this data, few studies focus specifically on substance use in African American athletes (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014). The NCAA did report that fewer African American collegiate athletes use drugs and alcohol than White athletes. For example, 59% and 83% of Black and White athletes, respectively, use alcohol. Similarly, 20% and 26% of Black and White athletes use marijuana. Fewer African American athletes than White athletes also report the use of stimulants, narcotics, LSD, and ecstasy (NCAA, 2018). Reasons for alcohol use among African American athletes include to celebrate, to have fun, to join in with other teammates who were drinking, and to become intoxicated. These reasons are similar in importance to White collegiate athletes who use alcohol (Milroy et al., 2014). Furthermore, it is likely that racism and discrimination play a role in the motivation to use substances by African American male athletes (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014).

Like substance abuse, African American athletes may face other mental health issues. These athletes are 1.2-fold more likely than White collegiate athletes to commit suicide (Rao et al., 2015). While some research suggests a protective effect of collegiate athletics against depression (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009; Armstrong et al., 2015; Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010), other studies suggest an indirect link between athletics and depression. Meeusen et al. (2013) noted that 64% of athletes experience overtraining, which refers to excessive training and stress that can lead to decreased performance and physical and psychological symptoms. Overtraining is associated with burnout among athletes, a phenomenon that closely resembles the symptoms of depression (Cureton 2009). In fact, 63% of collegiate athletes in one study who reported burnout also reported a history of depression (Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010). It is important to note that these findings are not specific to African American athletes.

What is specific to African American athletes, however, are issues related to psychological adjustment to a predominantly White school. According to Sadberry and Mobley (2013), these athletes may experience a college campus that is hostile and alienating towards minority students. Racism is a significant issue at predominantly White schools, as 98% of African American students who attend such schools experience at least one incident of discrimination per year. Racism, whether institutional or individual, is associated with depressive symptoms and negatively associated with life satisfaction. Also, African American athletes often face social isolation due to rigorous training and game schedules (Sadberry & Mobley, 2013).

In a study concerning social support and perceived cohesiveness among African American collegiate athletes at predominantly White schools, Sadberry and Mobely (2012) reported that social support may play a key role in adjustment to college life. Students with low levels of social support were four-fold more likely to experience family problems, 3.4-fold more

likely to experience interpersonal problems, and 2.36-fold more likely to experience depression than students with high levels of social support. High levels of minority stress also contribute to an almost two-fold increase in depression and family problems (Sadberry & Mobely, 2012). Social support plays a prominent role in reducing the risk for mental health issues, such as depression, and increasing the chances of successful adjustment to school for African American athletes.

Self-Actualization

In addition to reducing the risk for mental health issues, social support positively relates to the state of self-actualization. Self-actualization is the final step in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. This theory explains that as an individual's needs in one area are met, he or she is able to progress to another level of needs. The lowest level of needs is physiological needs, such as the need to eat, sleep, and perform bodily functions. Once those needs are met, the individual can focus on the next set of needs in the hierarchy, the need for safety. Moving upward in the hierarchy is the need for affection and belonging, often met through interpersonal relationships with family and friends. Next is the need for self-esteem, which encompasses achievement, ability, and respect from others. At this level, individuals may seek independence, appreciation, and prestige to meet the need for self-esteem (Maslow, 1943).

The final step in the hierarchy is self-actualization, which can only be met after the needs at all preceding levels are fulfilled. At this step, the individual realizes his potential, becomes what he or she desires to be, and experiences self-fulfillment (Maslow, 1943). A person at this level can cope effectively with problems, demonstrate empathy towards others, maintain satisfying interpersonal relationships, and experience psychological adjustment. Furthermore, individuals who reach self-actualization may be better able to obtain social support. Social

support communicates to the individual that he is loved, respected, and valued, and belongs to a group able to help in times of stress, thus satisfying the needs of the lower levels of Maslow's Hierarchy. In order to obtain social support, an individual should be able to problem solve, demonstrate empathy, and be social and extroverted, qualities associated with the self-actualized person (Ford & Procidano, 1990). Self-actualization positively correlates with perceived social support and negatively correlates with depression and stress (Ford & Procidano, 1990).

To briefly summarize, high levels of minority stress and low levels of social support are associated with depression and decreased adjustment to school (Sadberry & Mobely, 2012). One possible way to stave off these mental health issues is to reach a state of self-actualization, which is positively associated with social support and negatively associated with depression (Ford & Procidano, 1990). In order to reach self-actualization, the individual must first fulfill the needs in the lower categories, including physiological needs, safety, affection and belonging, and self-esteem (Maslow, 1943). Although individuals never reach a point of self-actualization due to the constant struggle to fulfill the lower level of basic needs, the progression is the major factor in the struggle to become self-actualized.

African American collegiate athletes may face a number of roadblocks on their way to reaching self-actualization. At the most basic level, these athletes face the risk of not meeting their basic physiological needs, such as the need for food and shelter or housing. About one-half of African American athletes are raised in single parent homes, and almost three-quarters of these athletes live with families where the mean annual income is less than \$50,000 (Reynolds et al., 2012). These financial issues may impact the ability of the athlete to afford school and thus the ability to remain on an athletic team. The low socioeconomic status of many athletes may also heighten the fear of losing scholarships; if an athlete cannot maintain his scholarship, he

could lose his opportunity to attend school and pursue a future career. Poor performance on the field may also threaten scholarship funds. If scholarship money is inadequate in covering all school and living-related expenses, which may be the case given that most scholarships available to athletes only cover a portion of the total costs (NCAA, n.d.), athletes from poverty-stricken homes may be unable to meet their basic needs. This prevents progression upwards in Maslow's hierarchy.

Even if the athlete is able to secure adequate funding, racism and discrimination present significant challenges. Athletes may feel unsafe in an environment in which they are at best, socially excluded, and at worst, actively harassed and threatened. This is a significant issue given that 98% of African American students experience at least one incident of discrimination per year (Sadberry & Mobely, 2012), and many experience social isolation from peers, teammates, and faculty (Simiyu, 2012). Without a sense of safety and belonging, African American athletes cannot progress towards self-esteem and self-actualization. Elite African American male athletes who attend predominantly White universities may be idolized by the public for their talent and achievement while at the same time face serious threats to their well-being and future. These athletes are more likely than their White counterparts to come from high-crime and impoverished neighborhoods with little social support from their families. The risk of losing scholarship money due to inadequate performance on the field or in the classroom can be a burden, threatening to send the athlete back to the environment from which he is trying to escape. These athletes graduate college less often than their White peers and often struggle with substance abuse or other mental health issues. Racism, discrimination, and social exclusion plague the African American community, preventing these athletes from receiving academic and social support. Postsecondary institutions, and perhaps sports fans in general, seem to ignore the needs of

African American collegiate athletes, concerned only for their own personal financial gain or entertainment. Advocacy efforts for this vulnerable population are paramount. College is more than an opportunity for Black men to showcase their talent and pursue a possible career in professional sports. For many, it is the way out of poverty and violence. Coaches and administrators must prioritize the health and well-being of African American athletes. Greater efforts must be made to provide necessary counseling services, staffed by minority professionals, to ensure that athletes are equipped to succeed in school and adjust successfully in an environment that both desires and shuns them.

Significance of the Study

This study could be significant in helping resolve many of the difficult trends facing elite collegiate African American males who want to improve their economic and social situations. The graduation gap between that of White male college athletes and African American students remains a major area of concern, as there is a huge disparity between these two groups. The fragility of athletic scholarships for African American college athletes is another troubling situation, as many of these student-athletes could only afford college tuition by receiving this scholarship money. However, with the possibility of permanent injury looming as a detriment and underperformance in the competitive sports environment a possibility, these student-athletes could be declined a scholarship after one year on campus. A further issue is the categorization of these students as less intelligent and in need of attending easier classes that may not fit their desires and could lead to lesser careers. The undercurrent of discrimination and racial profiling also exists, as these students undergo wariness and isolation from others. This study could shed light on and assist with the negative outcomes associated with these problem areas, including the manifestation of physical symptoms and the lack of self-esteem that can accompany the difficult

transition to college. By performing a qualitative analysis of these challenges and how student-athletes react to the academic pressures to succeed, potentially, African American male student-athletes could face greater prospects for satisfaction and career opportunities that will help them long after their college tenures are over.

Problem Statement

Elite African American male athletes may experience stressors related to the competitive environment of sports that contribute to feelings of negative self-worth and low self-esteem. Such feelings may be related to depressive symptoms, which could manifest as substance use disorder abuse. African American athletes are in a particularly unique situation, as they often deal with factors, such as discrimination and stereotyping, which could impact self-image. The purpose of this descriptive case study is to explore the challenges experienced by collegiate African American male athletes. The study seeks to gain insight into the challenges that elite African American males experience and consider strategies that should be designed and implemented to assist them with overcoming those challenges and becoming academically successful.

Challenges experienced by athletes can play a role in the abuse of substances among African American college athletes, and this issue is not well understood. While researchers have investigated the prevalence of substance abuse among college athletes, this research is exploratory and descriptive in nature (Green, Uryasz, Petr, & Bray, 2001; Watson 2002). This research has also generally recognized that factors, such as status of athletes in the college community and a culture promoting substance abuse, influence substance abuse among college athletes. This research has not considered anxiety about performance in competition as playing a significant role in substance abuse among elite African American college athletes.

A general assumption adopted by researchers has been that the active lifestyle adopted by collegiate athletes tends to reduce the possibility that athletes will be subject to depression. Nonetheless, there is some evidence suggesting that pre-competition concerns about performance lead to a depressed mood (Lane & Terry, 2000). There is also evidence that other types of situational factors, such as an injury or anxiety about future performance, can lead to depressed mood among college athletes (Appanael et al., 2009). Although this research suggests that athletes with a depressed mood may abuse substances to self-medicate for depression, there has been limited research examining pre-competition anxiety and substance abuse. The lack of sufficient data concerning the relationship between pre-competition anxiety, depression, and substance abuse among elite African American athletes limits the ability to develop programs to moderate substance abuse behaviors and reduce the possibility of depression.

African American male athletes face a number of issues unique to their group, including racism, stereotyping, and low graduation rates. Among the five power conferences, which include the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Big Ten Conference, the Big 12 Conference, the Pac-12 Conference, and the Southeastern Conference, the graduation rates of African American athletes are typically lower than the rates for White athletes and all non-athletes. For example, in the Big 12 Conference, the graduation rates of African American athletes when compared with all athletes and all students are lower in every school in the conference. Graduation rates for African American athletes dip as low as 26% at some schools, such as Kansas State University (Harper, 2016). In addition to low graduation rates, African American athletes face racism and stereotyping. These athletes may experience the stereotype that athletics are their only opportunity for success or that they are incapable of academic success. These societal and cultural attitudes can lead to a sense of hopelessness (Njororai, 2012; Cooper et al., 2017).

The literature suggests that discrepancies exist between the perceptions of Black athletes and those of the NCAA. For example, the NCAA claims to place a higher priority on academics than athletics for student athletes, requiring them to meet a number of academic eligibility requirements (NCAA, 2018). However, the literature also reports that African American athletes hold the perception that colleges are more concerned with athletics, even discouraging African American athletes from choosing certain majors that may interfere with sports and failing to provide adequate academic assistance (Harrison, 2018). This study seeks to further clarify this discrepancy by exploring the experiences of African American athletes. An understanding of these and other challenges may help educational leaders to better address the needs of this segment of the student population and ensure their success in life post-graduation.

Purpose and Justification of the Study

This study can be justified on numerous levels. As documented, elite African American male athletes are vulnerable to serious psychological problems and have a unique set of stressors that are in many cases greater than that of their Caucasian counterparts (Poucher & Tamminen, 2017; Rees & Freeman, 2007; Gouttebauge, Frings-Dresen, & Sluiter, 2015). This study has identified these pressure factors and suggests counseling and therapy that can prevent and treat the African American athlete before these physical and emotional issues become more severe. By performing qualitative research, the study also provides insight into the perception of discrimination and unfair treatment on campuses of elite African American male athletes and potentially other minority student athletes. This can help universities determine the scope of this problem and endeavor to develop structured solutions that support students and curb potential discriminatory activities. This will enhance the value of the college educational system and lead to higher graduation rates for African American student-athletes. Researchers have discovered

that elite African American male athletes experience stressors related to the competitive environment of sports that contribute to feelings of negative self-worth and low self-esteem, and that such feelings may be related to depressive symptoms, which could manifest as substance use disorder abuse (Kingston, Marel, & Mills, 2017). African American Athletes are in a particularly unique situation, as they often deal with factors such as discrimination and stereotyping that could impact self-image (Cooper, Davis, & Dougherty, 2017; Njororai, 2012). The purpose of this descriptive study is to explore the challenges experienced by collegiate African American male athletes. The study seeks to gain insight into these challenges and consider strategies that could be designed and implemented to assist them with overcoming the challenges and become academically successful.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study includes Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Adler's The Glorified Self. Both theories enable individuals to "express themselves through something beyond the self" (Leidl, 2009, p.156). Maslow's theory explains that the needs of individuals are met within a hierarchical manner, beginning with the most basic of needs and progressing to existential needs. Adler's theory explains that individuals who are the constant subject of public and media attention eventually develop a new identity aligned with the perceptions of others. Both theories will be used to interpret the results from this qualitative study to gain greater insight into how the needs of collegiate athletes are met or neglected.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's theory contends that individual needs are met according to a hierarchy, in which the most basic of needs must be fulfilled before more complex needs can be addressed. The lowest level of needs and the one that must be met first are physiological needs. These

include those needs required to maintain homeostasis, or the correct functioning of the body, such as food, water, and sleep. In infancy, the child learns to trust the caregiver who provides these basic needs. Even as the child grows older, if these needs cannot be met, difficulties are created for the child in his attempt to move on to consider higher needs. Once physiological needs are met, the individual can focus on meeting the next set of needs, those related to safety. These include the need for protection and a predictable and orderly world, both of which may be met during early childhood through a secure attachment to a caregiver. The lack of a secure attachment can be detrimental to the child, who may learn not to trust caregivers.

The next set of needs is related to love, including affection and belonging. These needs are met during adulthood through relationships with friends and family. Moving up the hierarchy, once the needs for love are fulfilled, the individual can focus on the esteem needs of the self, based on ability, achievement, and respect from others. At this step the individual desires adequacy, confidence, independence, and freedom. Individuals at this level in the hierarchy may also demonstrate a desire for reputation, prestige, appreciation, and a sense of importance, qualities with which many successful collegiate athletes may be familiar (Maslow, 1943).

This step in the hierarchy may be most relevant to Adler's description of the Glorified Self. Briefly, this theory contends that when athletes are lauded by the public and continuously praised publicly, they begin to create a new identity that aligns with this public persona. The athlete who gains recognition and praise from the public begins to seek out additional affirmation from others. This reassurance is continually needed in order to maintain the new public persona created for him by others (Adler & Adler, 1989).

At the top of the hierarchy in Maslow's original model is the need for self-actualization. Self-actualization refers to the ability to be what one desires to be. The individual is able to realize his or her potential and by applying that potential experiences self-fulfillment. Individuals may exist at different levels in the hierarchy, and some individuals may not reach the highest level, especially if early needs remain unfulfilled (Maslow, 1943).

Considering Adler's theoretical framework described in greater detail below, it is possible that this highest level of needs may be difficult to achieve for athletes who experience a dual sense of self. When a new public persona is created and is the only part of the athlete's identity available to the public, it may be difficult for the athlete to reconcile his true self with what he believes others perceive him to be. However, without recognition of the true self, one may not be able to fulfill one's purpose in life or find meaning. The athlete may struggle with desiring to be both individuals at the same time, the glorified and successful athlete who remains in the public eye and the inner person with thoughts and feelings unrelated to his role as a public figure.

Maslow's theory may be particularly applicable to elite and successful collegiate athletes, who may enjoy the limelight during their tenure at school. In particular, the world of athletics may help one to realize the need for esteem as the athlete gains respect from fans and the media and develops a reputation and a sense of importance. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory is used in the sports literature to examine topics such as gender differences in the college choices of NCAA athletes (Andrew, Martinez, & Flavell, 2016), sports consumer behaviors (Yong et al., 2017), and athlete motivation (Rabalais, 1998; Leidl, 2009).

Adler's The Glorified Self

The private identity of athletes who live in the spotlight may conflict with the public persona presented to friends and fans. Known as the "glorified self," this type of self-identity can develop when an individual becomes the center of attention in the public and in the media. The public persona that emerges may be quite different from the private persona. The public images are often stereotypical, only showing small, simplified snippets of the person's life. This inaccurate and limited representation can lead to a separation of inner self-concept from the perceptions of the self created by others, leading to a disparity in identity. The individual attempts to resolve this disparity by changing his self-image to more closely match others' perceptions of him, even though this change may occur unwillingly (Adler & Adler, 1989).

Adler's Glorified Self may be described as greedy and self-important. This overpowering, intoxicating persona minimizes the other aspects of the individual not recognized by the public spotlight. The Glorified Self requires constant reinforcement in order to grow. The problem, however, is that the attention which feeds this alternative identity violates societal values of modesty and humility, causing conflict between the need for recognition, flattery, and affirmation and the urge to fight off these feelings and needs. While the individual strives to maintain the Glorified Self, he also struggles to fight against it internally (Adler & Adler, 1989).

The experience of glory, such as that bestowed by the public on elite athletes, produces two new types of self, the reflected self and the media self. The reflected self is the product of social interactions during which the individual perceives how others feel about him and then reacts emotionally to those perceptions. For example, fans that see athletes in the media may feel as though they know the athletes on a personal basis and attempt to engage in conversations with them as if that were the case. The athlete perceives that the fan feels a sense of intimacy towards

the athlete, even though this is not reality, and reacts by opening himself up to personal interactions with individuals he does not know. The media self refers to the portion of the self which becomes the focus of the media. For example, if the media focuses on the aggressiveness of a football player, then that player may eventually feel as though he must live up to that image, even though he may not be an aggressive individual off the field. The more that the reflected self and media self are reinforced, the greater the chance that the athlete will integrate those identities into his core self (Adler & Adler, 1989).

Miron (2010) noted that as the athlete becomes more associated with this role, the athletics begin to dominate self-identity. As the individual excels and reaps greater rewards and recognition, the desire to maintain that role increases, and can ultimately lead to the “blocking of the identity market,” in when the athlete turns his back on other potential career opportunities or success in areas outside sports, such as academics (Miron, 2010, p.9; Francis, 2002). Ultimately, an identity crisis can occur if, upon reaching retirement from the sport, the athlete is unable to adapt to life post-athletics. The individual may feel misguided or lack a clear understanding of the new identity without sports (Miron, 2010).

Another aspect of the Glorified Self is self-aggrandizement, or the desire to bask in glory given by others (Adler & Adler, 1989). Self-aggrandizement is one component of a “positive illusion,” along with an illusion of control and an unrealistic sense of optimism. These positive illusions may be an effective coping mechanism for stressful or threatening life situations, such as a cancer diagnosis, allowing one to maintain normal functioning. Positive illusions may also be beneficial in competitive situations, such as athletics. They help the individual better cope with losing. Reducing the discrepancy between what was expected and what was actually achieved may mitigate the disappointment that can arise from failure. This can be accomplished

by reinterpreting original expectations and by perceiving what actually occurred in a biased, more favorable light. Thus, negative feedback is interpreted in as non-threatening a manner as possible, useful instead for sparking future improvements; ambiguous feedback expressing neither failure nor success is interpreted as being positive (Catina & Iso-Ahola, 2004).

In addition to coping, positive illusions may increase motivation. Individuals with these beliefs tend to set hard but realistic goals for themselves, increasing the likelihood of success. The belief that one can succeed at a goal increases effort and persistence in overcoming challenges and improves performance. Overall, positive illusions, of which self-aggrandizement is a significant component, can have beneficial outcomes for athletes. They directly affect athletic success by increasing the expectation of success and the motivation to compete (Catina & Iso-Ahola, 2004).

In spite of the benefits of positive illusions, self-aggrandizement and the Glorified Self can lead to negative outcomes. Athletes in this situation may become too wrapped up in the present to consider the future. This is problematic because once the athlete's collegiate career ends, he may not be prepared to succeed in a career. Caught up in the fame and spotlight, the athlete may believe that their career will advance to a professional level. This is unrealistic, as less than 2% of college athletes go on to play professional sports (NCAA, 2018). Other negative outcomes include a decreased awareness of the old self and detachment from the true self (Adler & Adler, 1989).

Ethical Implications

When conducting qualitative research, several ethical concerns exist which should be adequately addressed. Subjects must have the opportunity to provide informed consent. The researcher should fully inform the participant about the study so that he is able to make an

autonomous decision regarding participation, including but not limited to the study purpose and rationale, a description of the steps in the study, potential benefits and risks of participation, and the contact information of the researcher in case the individual has additional questions in the future. Additionally, participants should be made aware that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason and without any negative consequences. Subjects must be treated fairly and with openness and respect throughout the research process (Banister, 2007).

Given that the research involves the use of human subjects, approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) should be sought prior to beginning the study. The purpose of this group is to ensure the protection of human rights. Moreover, the IRB promotes involvement of subjects at all stages in the research process and ensures that subjects are provided the opportunity to give informed consent to participate in the study (McDaniel, Baker, & Lansink, 2002).

Another ethical concern relates to the storage of the study data. All hand-written and interview data are maintained in a notebook that is kept in a locked filing cabinet. Digital data within computer files are kept on a password-protected computer; only the researcher has access to both of these. Taped interviews are maintained on a digital recording device that is also kept in a locked filing cabinet. No personal identifiers were used during the interviews in order to protect the identity of the participants.

Two additional ethical issues were considered. First, since this researcher is passionate about collegiate athletics and the fair and just treatment of all individuals within society, steps were taken to ensure that the researcher did not introduce any bias into the interview process. The open-ended questions were created in a neutral manner, and the researcher read the questions to the subjects to ensure that no additional and potentially biased phrases were

introduced into the process. The researcher also avoided any sharing of personal experiences or viewpoints with the subjects.

A second ethical consideration was the possibility that a subject may reveal information indicating that he was harmed in some way or in danger of being harmed. Since the focus of this study is the lived experience of African American athletes and since such athletes may be subject to racism, stereotyping, and discrimination, all of which can potentially be mentally or even physically harmful, it was important to consider how to handle such information should it arise. If the researcher perceived the subject to be in danger or if the subject expressed the concern that he was in danger, the researcher would provide the subject with contact information for a counselor able to work with the situation. Further, if the subject was in danger of harm, the researcher would immediately contact the dissertation chair for assistance. The interviews were held in an on-site environment, easily accessible to a psychological counseling office, yet the area was isolated well enough to protect the identity of the interviewee.

Grand Tour Questions and Sub Questions

This qualitative case study provides a descriptive exploration of three African American college students at a major university in southern United States to further understand how African American athletes cope with the pressures of life at a predominately White university and the need to succeed over potential adversities. These adversities include institutional stereotyping, ostracism, scholarship pressures, academic challenges and the need to belong to a group that is supportive and nurturing.

Three overarching questions serve as the foundation for this study. These include:

1. In your opinion, why do elite African American male athletes experience challenges at the collegiate level?

2. How would you describe being an elite African American male athlete at a predominately White university?
3. How have you dealt with those challenges?

Delimitations and Limitations

There are limitations associated with the study design. The primary limitation is that there are only three research subjects, and therefore, the results from these individuals may not generalize to the entire population of African American elite collegiate athletes (Atieno, 2009). A second potential limitation is the possibility of researcher's bias influencing the results. Further, the presence of the researcher during the data collection process could potentially affect the subject's responses. Finally, given that the interviews were conducted in person (face-to-face), maintaining full anonymity was not possible. While other steps were taken to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the research subjects, their identities did not remain hidden from the researcher (Anderson, 2010). Another limitation is that only elite African American athletes were interviewed. The scope of the proposed research is limited to elite African American male athletes at a single university.

The scope is also limited to elite African American athletes that are currently attending classes and have played on one or more athletic teams over the past two years. Also, the study examines the patterns of use of both performance enhancing drugs and recreational substances, such as alcohol or smokeless tobacco, that are both legal and illegal. The proposed study has a limitation in the size of its sampling, which will include elite African American male collegiate athletes (n=3). Variables such as the culture concerning substance abuse at the university may also limit the ability to generalize the findings to a larger population.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided for concepts used in this study:

Collegiate: According to Merriam Webster dictionary (2018), the term “collegiate” may be defined as something which relates to a college or university. The NCAA uses this word to refer to an amateur athlete enrolled in a post-secondary institution (Buckstaff, 2013). According to the NCAA, a collegiate, or amateur athlete, must adhere to certain rules, including no contact with professional teams, no salary or prize money for sports performance, no playing with professionals, trying out for, or practicing with a professional team, and no representation or benefits from an agent (NCAA, “Amateurism,” n.d.).

Competition: The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2018) defines the term “competition” when you compete or subscribe to any type of sport.

Elite: The term “elite” may be defined as a descriptor which relates to competing at a university, regional, national or international level; possessing competitive experience; and possessing expertise (Swann, Morgan, & Piggott, 2015).

African American: The term African American originates in part from the term *Africana*, first proposed by W.E.B. DuBois as a category which includes all African individuals (DuBois, 2013). For the purposes of this study, the term African American refers to an American of Black African descent (Tracy, n.d.).

Depression: According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-5), depression is a mental health disorder characterized by the presence of at least five of the following symptoms during the same two-week period, one of which must be either a depressed mood or loss of interest in pleasurable activities (anhedonia):

- A depressed mood most of the time and on most days

- Reduced interest in pleasurable activities
- Significant and unintentional change in weight or appetite
- Reduced physical movements and thoughts
- Fatigue
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Difficulty thinking or making decisions
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide (p.179)

These symptoms must cause significant impairment in everyday functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Substance Abuse: According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-5), substance use disorder is a mental health disorder characterized by the presence of at least two of the following symptoms:

- Taking the substance in increasing amounts or for longer periods of time
- Desiring but unable to cut down use of substance
- Spending a significant amount of time securing or using the substance
- The presence of cravings for the substance
- Unable to meet responsibilities in the home or at work or school due to substance use
- Using the substance even when it causes difficulty with relationships
- Giving up social or recreational activities due to substance use
- Using the substance even when it places the person in danger
- Using the substance despite an awareness that it could cause physical harm or exacerbate an existing condition
- The presence of a tolerance for the substance

- The development of withdrawal symptoms if substance use is withheld (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p.179)

Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter provided an overview of the NCAA, the participation of African American athletes in member schools, and some of the issues which may impact this group. African Americans have a long history in this country of racism and inequitable treatment. As W. E. B. Du Bois commented, “The Harvard of which most White students conceived I knew little” (Du Boise, 2013, p. 364). Even a century later, African Americans may have different experiences than Whites in the nations’ post-secondary institutions. This is evident in the graduation rates of African American athletes, which lag considerably behind that of White students. African American athletes may face other challenges as well, such as depression, stereotyping, racism, and a lack of academic opportunities. Furthermore, one cannot neglect to consider that while these athletes may experience disparities, they are, at the same time, often held up on a pedestal by adoring fans and the media, which may lead to other challenges, as these athletes seek to resolve discrepancies that might arise between their internal selves and the new public identities being created for them.

The theoretical frameworks presented in this chapter will guide the analysis of the data collected through interviews with African American athletes. As these individuals describe their experiences living as Black men in a predominantly White world and educational system, their ability to become self-actualized will be considered. In addition to this, the possible existence of the glorified self will be explored in order to understand how these athletes reconcile their popularity in the public eye with their true inner selves.

The next chapter will delve into greater detail about some of the issues identified in this introductory chapter. The discussion will include substance abuse among college athletes and the potential contribution of different levels of competition, depression among college athletes, and challenges faced by African American athletes in particular. Consideration will also be given to discrepancies in the literature in an attempt to present a balanced view of the issues.

Statement of Personal Experience

This researcher is qualified to conduct this study as a substance abuse professional, qualified experienced counselor, and a trained qualitative researcher. The researcher has also received education and training in conducting qualitative research at East Carolina University. This researcher has relatives that were rated elite athletes while attending a predominately White university. The researcher's family association with elite athletes may have influenced the way in which she analyzed and coded data.

Organization of the Study

This chapter introduces the current study, including the need for the study and the rationale for using a descriptive case study. Chapter 2 provides a review of challenges experienced by elite African American athletes at predominately White institutions. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of the study. The study results are reported in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 provides a discussion and implications of research findings as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the challenges faced by African American student-athletes at universities. The issues discussed in this chapter include the problem of much lower graduation rates than that of their White counterparts, academic underperformance, perceived racial discrimination and isolation, and excessive drinking and substance abuse engendered by these stressors. A review of literature depicts cognitive factors such as attitudes, motivations and beliefs that affect thinking patterns and lead to many of the academic issues and pressures on African American student-athletes. Noncognitive factors, such as institutional racism and stereotyping, as well as potential exploitation of African American male athletes by university administrators, also have been addressed in studies. Research theories incorporating stereotyping, racial profiling, approach-avoidance behavior and self-worth have been incorporated into current research, borrowing from both Adler & Adler's (1989) theory of the Glorified Self and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. These variables will be examined in a study of three African American male athletes, using qualitative analysis to determine the factors contributing to lower academic performance in a public university setting. A summary concludes the chapter.

African American collegiate athletes face several unique challenges, some of which may significantly impact their future and careers. For example, in addition to the presence of multiple levels of racism in society and the stereotyping of African American athletes as unintelligent, these athletes are often pushed aside academically in favor of developing their profit-creating athletic skills at the expense of academic preparation (Beamon, 2008; Cooper et al., 2017). When adding other issues, such as substance abuse (Milroy et al., 2014), to the variety of stressors

faced by the student athlete population in general, these athletes may be at a significant disadvantage. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the issues facing collegiate athletes in general, as well as issues specific to African American athletes. This chapter opens with a discussion of the connection between substance abuse by college athletes and competition before progressing to a discussion of competition and depression. Finally, this chapter concludes by addressing challenges faced by African American athletes. This chapter provides the background for the study, which will be described in greater detail in the next chapter.

The Glorified Self

As detailed in the previous chapter, Adler's theory of Glorified Self (1989) plays a central role in understanding the lives of African American collegiate athletes. These athletes, if successful, dwell within the media spotlight. A new self-identity may form, based upon the perceptions and expectations of others and those propagated through the media. The emergence of a new persona can create an internal struggle for the athlete, as he attempts to resolve the discrepancy between his true inner self and the self that others expect him to be. Negative consequences can arise from the Glorified Self, such as self-detachment and a failure to plan for the future, which will likely not include professional play.

Substance Abuse, College Athletes, and Competition

Prevalence of Substance Abuse in Collegiate Athletes

The prevalence of substance use among college athletes appears to be similar to that of the general college population. Druckman et al. (2014) investigated the use of alcohol and performance-enhancing drugs by athletes playing in the NCAA Big Ten Conference, including schools such as Penn State University and the University of Nebraska. Results from a

comparison of an email survey of about 1,300 students to a previously published study of college drinking suggested that athletes may consume alcohol less frequently than the general student population. The percentage of athletes who reported either frequently or occasionally drinking beer was 47%, compared with 75% of the overall student body ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, 36% of athletes reported drinking wine or liquor occasionally or frequently compared with 84% of the general population ($p < 0.01$). Additionally, 38% of athletes partied for three or more hours during the week prior to completing the survey, compared with 53% of the general student population ($p < 0.01$). Using a different strategy to determine drinking prevalence, which was not based on any comparisons with prior surveys, the authors found different results. Using their method of estimating alcohol use based on the activities in which athletes participated, the authors estimated that 46% of athletes consume five or more drinks weekly. The authors used this same novel approach to estimate that 37% of student athletes have taken banned drugs (Druckman et al., 2014).

These findings should be interpreted with caution. The authors relied on self-report data from athletes, which may be biased and inaccurate. Although the survey was anonymous, athletes may be motivated to be less than truthful when admitting substance use out of fear of being caught. Further, other than alcohol, the data did not indicate the types of substances used or how often they were used.

Labrie, Grossbard, and Hummer (2009) reported similar percentages as Druckman et al. (2014) for marijuana use among college athletes. Among the 522 NCAA Division I male and female athletes surveyed, 36.8% reported using this drug at some point during their lifetime. Of those who did report using it, 62% used it six or fewer times in a year, 9.9% used it monthly, 12% used it two to three times monthly, 8.9% used it less than six times weekly, and 7.8% used it

daily. Male athletes used it more frequently than females ($p < 0.001$). As with Druckman et al. (2014), these results should be interpreted with caution due to the potential for self-report bias.

Factors that Affect Substance Abuse

Given that collegiate athletes do use drugs and alcohol, understanding the factors that may or may not contribute to this substance use is essential. Research suggests that a variety of factors may not be related to substance use. For example, non-athletes in one study reported greater difficulty in adjusting to college life than athletes. Using the College Adjustment Scale, Drum et al. (2014) found that non-athletes scored significantly higher than athletes with respect to interpersonal problems, suicide ideation, substance abuse, and family problems. While these findings do not necessarily support the idea that inadequate adjustment can lead to substance use, they do suggest that athletes may be better adjusted to school and less likely to use alcohol and drugs. Two additional factors that do not contribute to substance use are athletic identity and competitiveness, according to Jones (2015). This author reported that college students who identify as athletes but do not actually participate in sports reported similar alcohol consumption rates as student athletes with an athlete identity. Therefore, no significant differences were observed between these two groups with regards to the characteristic of competitiveness.

In spite of these potentially non-contributing factors, other issues may lead to an increased risk of substance use in athletes. Lewis et al. (2017) reported that being out-of-season for one's specific sport, having a close friend who binge drinks, and not holding negative alcohol outcome expectations increased the likelihood of misusing alcohol by student athletes. Milroy et al. (2014) compared factors that influence White and Black athletes to drink, which differed between the two groups. The reasons cited more often by Whites than Blacks for consuming alcohol included celebrating, joining teammates drinking, having fun or meeting people,

becoming intoxicated, lowering inhibitions, as well as partying because the sport was out of season. Whites were more likely to abstain from alcohol use than Blacks due to concern over negative effects on athletic performance, negative effects on academic work, being underage, coach disapproval, and intending to drive (Milroy et al., 2014).

Another reason cited by collegiate athletes for consuming alcohol is psychiatric symptoms. Miller et al. (2002) reported that athletes with severe psychiatric symptoms demonstrated a greater rate of alcohol use than those with less severe symptoms. The reverse held true as well, as athletes who consumed greater amounts of alcohol were more likely to experience severe psychiatric symptoms, including depression (Miller et al., 2002).

The Role of Competition in Substance Abuse

One additional factor for consideration with respect to substance abuse among athletes is the role of competition, including both a sense of competitiveness and the level at which the athlete competes. As mentioned previously, Jones (2015) reported that the characteristic of competitiveness, as assessed when playing drinking games, was not significantly associated with increased alcohol consumption. However, this finding may be specific to the context in which drinking occurs, given that it related to drinking games.

Other studies considered the level at which the athlete competes, such as intercollegiate, intramural, club, individual, or group sports. Martens and Martin (2010) investigated the drinking motives unique to college athletes, including the frequency of drinking during on and off-season. Results indicated that athletes were more motivated to consume alcohol during their competitive seasons. However, at the same time, their actual alcohol consumption was less during this time period. The authors suggested that this discrepancy between desire and actual behavior may be due to greater levels of bonding with teammates or greater importance

attributed to athletic identity, both of which may decrease actual drinking behaviors (Martens & Martin, 2010). Brenner and Swanik (2007) reported similar findings, noting that 80% of the athletes in their study with a history of binge drinking indicated they consumed less alcohol during the competitive season.

Differences in alcohol consumption also exist with respect to group and individual sports as well as varying levels of participation. Brenner and Swanik (2007) reported that athletes who participated in team sports were at significantly higher risk of alcohol use than those who participated in individual sports, at 84% and 57.2%, respectively. A statistically significant difference also existed between Division I, II, and III athletes, with Division I athletes reporting higher levels of drinking than athletes in the other divisions, at 78.2%, 76.0%, and 67.5%, respectively (Brenner & Swanik, 2007). Also, a secondary analysis of data from the National College Health Assessment data, collected from over 27,000 college students, indicated that intramural athletes binge drink at greater rates and experience more negative consequences from drinking than do club athletes, intercollegiate athletes, and non-athletes (Barry et al., 2015).

Interventions

Information in the literature pertaining to mental health interventions also lends insight into the substance use behavior of college athletes. Donohue et al. (2013) developed an intervention targeting substance use in athletes and utilized a family behavior therapy approach. The authors justified the importance of these types of interventions by noting the greater negative outcomes associated with substance abuse in athletes over non-athletes, including assault and injuries, alcohol poisoning, unsafe sex practices, interpersonal problems, poor relationships with teammates and coaching staff, poor grades and attendance, mental health problems, and increased risk of HIV and hepatitis. The therapeutic approach included being rewarded for goal

attainment, managing triggers that promote negative images, thoughts, and feelings, and improving family relationships and motivation (Donohue et al., 2013). In an additional study, athletes who participated in a cognitive behavioral intervention focusing on performance optimization, goal setting, rewards, and self-control demonstrated improvements in substance use when compared with a treatment-as-usual group (Donohue et al., 2018). These findings suggest that the incorporation of factors unique to athletes, such as an emphasis on goal setting and rewards, may be beneficial in reducing drinking behaviors.

Competition and Depression

Depression in Athletes versus Non-athletes

Research suggests that college athletes experience fewer depressive symptoms than their non-athlete counterparts. Proctor and Boan-Lenzo (2010) compared 66 intercollegiate team sport athletes with 51 college non-athlete students on measures of depressive symptoms. Results indicated that while 29.4% of non-athletes met the criteria for depression, only 15.6% of athletes met these same criteria. Armstrong and Oomen-Early (2009) reported similar findings, including that collegiate athletes reported greater self-esteem and greater social connectedness than non-athletes. Armstrong et al. (2015) reported in a systematic review of 30 research studies that student athletes are less likely to be depressed than non-athletes but more likely to demonstrate alcohol abuse or eating disorders.

Two additional studies related to this topic produced slightly different findings. Storch et al. (2005) reported that although, overall, student athletes did not demonstrate statistically significant levels of alcohol problems, anxiety, or depression than their non-athlete peers, female athletes did report greater levels of depressive symptoms than male athletes and all non-athletes. These female athletes also reported less social support than the other study groups, which may

contribute to the increased prevalence of depressive symptoms. Weigand, Cohen, and Merenstein (2013) compared current and former student athletes with respect to depressive symptoms and found that current college athletes demonstrated significantly greater levels of depressive symptoms than former athletes, at 16.7% and 8.03% of the sample, respectively. Factors that may lead to depression in current athletes may include overtraining and the pressure to deliver optimum performance and pain due to injury (Weigand et al., 2013).

The authors of these studies proposed several reasons why athletes may experience less depression than the non-athlete peers. For example, participation in sports may provide an outlet for the relief of stress and may increase the level of social support available to the individual, thus promoting positive mental health (Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010). Also, an increased amount of social connectedness may increase self-esteem which, when combined, reduce the likelihood of depression (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009; Armstrong et al., 2015).

Factors Contributing to Depression in Collegiate Athletes

A number of factors may contribute to depression among collegiate athletes. Davoren and Hwang (2014) analyzed data from eight National College Health Assessment Surveys conducted between 2008 and 2012. This analysis included a comparison of results from 19,733 collegiate athletes and 171,601 non-athletes pertaining to the experience of difficulty or traumatic life events, substance use, and mental health. Results indicated that significant predictors for depression included factors such as academics, relationship problems, deaths of loved ones, finances, personal health issues, and sleeping difficulty. The strongest predictor of depression was perceived level of stress over the past year. However, student athlete status was negatively associated with depression, suggesting that participation in athletics may confer a protective effect against this mental health disorder.

Depression in Relation to Level of Competition

Levels of depression may vary according to the type of sport in which one participates, group or individual. Nixdorf et al. (2013) examined the prevalence of depressive symptoms among a group of elite athletes who participated in either team or individual sports. In this sample of 162 German athletes, 15% demonstrated depressive symptoms compared with up to 17% of the general population. These symptoms correlated with chronic stress, the use of coping strategies, and levels of exhaustion. Additionally, athletes who participated in individual sports experienced greater levels of depressive symptoms ($p=0.042$) than athletes who participated in team sports (Nixdorf et al., 2013). One caveat with this study is that the athletes were not necessarily college athletes. The study sample included both professionals and amateurs ranging in age from 16-53 years. Therefore, the results from this study, while relevant to the topic of this discussion, may have limited applicability to collegiate athletes.

In another comparison of team and individual sports, Miller and Hoffman (2009) reported similar findings as Nixdorf et al. (2013). These authors examined the relationships among type of athletic involvement and depression and suicide among undergraduate students. The authors also assessed the level of sport-related identity in subjects. Results indicated that students who participated in individual sports demonstrated greater severity of depressive symptoms. This finding was mediated by the strength of athlete identity, which served as a protective factor against both depression and suicide (Miller & Hoffman, 2009).

Challenges and Experiences of African American Athletes

Inadequate Academic and Career Preparation

A significant challenge for African American athletes may be simply obtaining an education. Statistics pertaining to graduation rates suggest that these athletes may struggle

academically. According to Southall et al. (2015), African American athletes who play basketball or football for predominantly White NCAA Division I schools graduate at lower rates than full-time male students. However, this same trend did not exist at predominantly African American schools in which Black athletes demonstrated higher graduation rates than non-athlete students. The authors postulated that since the sports teams at the White institutions in this study were highly successful, there was a great deal of pressure placed upon athletes to succeed. Although African Americans comprised less than 10% of the student population at these predominantly White schools, they occupied a disproportionately high number of spots on the basketball and football teams. Thus, African American athletes may be more sensitive to the pressure to succeed, resulting in less time spent on academics and lower graduation rates (Southall et al., 2015).

Although graduation rates alone do not necessarily support the idea of academic difficulties, other studies address the latter of these two issues directly. According to Baker and Hawkins (2016), a gap exists between the academic performance of Black and non-Black athletes. This gap may be attributed to factors such as lack of high school preparedness for college, low levels of motivation, racial discrimination, social isolation, academic neglect, economic deprivation, and few leadership opportunities. Further, universities often fail to provide an appropriate cultural climate to meet the needs of Black athletes. Blacks often are underrepresented in leadership positions at post-secondary schools, are overrepresented on sports teams, lack academic support, and lack culturally relevant curricula (Baker & Hawkins, 2016).

Not only is the actual gap itself an issue, but the perceptions of Black athletes' academic abilities are problematic as well. Black male athletes are often stereotyped as being "dumb jocks" (Cooper, Davis, & Dougherty, 2017, p.62; Njororai, 2012). Those who attend

predominantly White institutions may feel stigmatized. Such athletes may be admitted to these schools solely on the basis of their athletic ability with little concern for their academic preparation. Faculty at predominantly White schools are more likely to view academic accomplishments of Black athletes as outliers, whereas those same accomplishments in White students receive praise (Cooper et al., 2017).

Beamon (2008) provided greater insight into the academic and career-related challenges that African American collegiate athletes face. Results from a qualitative study of 20 African American former male NCAA Division I football and basketball players indicated that these men perceived an inadequate emphasis on academic success by their universities. Although the NCAA claims to emphasize the role of student as more important than that of athlete, hence coining the term “student-athlete” (NCAA, “Amateurism,” n.d.), study respondents reported that this term was mere “lip-service.” In reality, universities stressed athletics over academics (Harrison, 2008).

Another issue addressed by Beamon (2008) was the sense of exploitation expressed by Black athletes. The study participants did not perceive the benefits of their sports participation to the university and the benefits offered to the athletes by the university as equitable. Division I schools earn significant amounts of money due to the performance of their athletes, particularly football and basketball. For example, the average revenue earned by the football program at an NCAA Division I school is \$29,635,946 annually (Gaines, 2016). However, collegiate athletes are not permitted to benefit financially from their participation in sports (NCAA, “Amateurism,” n.d.). Study participants indicated that although scholarship money often covers academic expenses, including tuition and room and board, the stipend provided to athletes is inadequate. Due to rigorous practice and game schedules and the need to maintain a certain grade point

average in order to participate in a sport, it is not practical for student athletes to hold jobs (Beamon, 2008).

The overemphasis placed on sports also negatively impacts career readiness. Collegiate athletes are socialized by family and friends, the community, and the media to adopt an athlete identity. Because of this, these athletes experienced limitations in choosing majors, as the courses for some majors conflicted with practice and game schedules. The study participants reported that academic counselors often pushed them toward majors in which they were not interested, leading them to graduate in fields for which they had no interest in working after graduation (Beamon, 2008). Njororai (2012) also emphasized this issue, noting that Black athletes, who perform poorly academically due in large part to a lack of preparation in high school, are enrolled in easy courses in order for them to maintain eligibility without acknowledging the concern that these classes do not contribute to graduation with a degree. With this strategy in place, recruiters are able to recruit talented athletes without regard for their academic educations.

Further support for the practice of academic exploitation of African American athletes arises from the NCAA's Study of College Outcomes and Recent Experiences (SCORE) survey. Results from this study indicated that coaches were more likely to discourage Black athletes from pursuing a major of interest than White athletes. For example, 95.3% of White students reported that their coach did not discourage enrollment in a desired major compared with 87.9% of Black athletes. Furthermore, 5.8% of Black athletes have regrets about this discouragement, compared with 1.9% of White athletes (NCAA, n.d.).

In addition to a lack of preparation for a future career, the academic exploitation of Black athletes may have other consequences, such as resentment from the Black non-athlete

community. Fine et al. (2016) examined the participation of Black non-athlete students who attend a predominantly White university in attending sports events. Some Black students refused to attend games due, in part, to a sense of disconnect between themselves and Black athletes. Black non-athlete students may perceive that Black athletes do not struggle as hard as they do academically because they “major in something really simple...they can mess it up” (Fine et al., 2016, p. 97). Unlike Black athletes, who are perceived as being able to fail tests yet still receive As in classes, Black students report being held to higher standards and needing to work harder to achieve good grades. These negative feelings towards Black athletes by Black students at a predominantly White institution create a sense of disconnect (Fine et al., 2016).

Stereotypes and Racism

In addition to the lack of academic support and the practice of academic exploitation, African American athletes face stereotypes and racism. Racism may be categorized into three types: individual, in which African Americans experience personal attacks or negative events due to their skin color; institutional, which prevents African Americans from fully participating in society; and cultural, in which the dominant culture views its practices, values, and institutions as inherently more valuable than those of African Americans (Bridges, 2010). An example of institutional racism is the school-to-prison pipeline, in which African American secondary students are punished disproportionately when compared with White students, resulting in higher rates of incarceration. An example of cultural racism is ignoring racist leaders and events throughout the course of history, such as the recent debates over Confederate statues. While some Whites see no issue with keeping statues of Confederate era leaders standing, some African Americans view these statues as a reminder of the abhorrent treatment inflicted upon African

Americans by the dominant culture throughout history. Cultural racism prevents the majority culture from understanding the issue from the African American point of view.

Racism can have serious negative consequences on the African American athlete. The stereotype that Black men are athletes and that Blacks are superior at sports to Whites convinces some young African American men that athletics is their only option for success. Cultural and institutional racism can lead to a sense of hopelessness. Furthermore, African American athletes experience lower graduation rates than their White counterparts at 58% versus 80%, respectively in basketball (Njororai, 2012).

Balanced Discussion

Substance Abuse and Collegiate Athletes

It may be difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the prevalence of substance abuse among college athletes. Druckman et al. (2014) reported that college athletes misuse alcohol less often than their non-athlete peers. However, these results were obtained through self-report measures, which are subject to bias and inaccuracies. Student athletes may be motivated to not disclose accurate information out of fear of repercussions, such as becoming ineligible to play. In addition, the recall of such information may simply be subject to inaccuracies.

In a similar situation, Labrie et al. (2009) reported on the marijuana use of college athletes, estimating that 36.8% of athletes use marijuana at some point during their lifetimes. Of these individuals, 7.8% use it daily, which works out to be just under 3% of all college athletes. These statistics, while informative, provided no basis for comparison. However, the United States Department of Justice (2018) published data on this topic, reporting that 38% of college students use marijuana annually and 4.6% use the drug daily. With these figures used as a

comparison, marijuana use appears to be used less among college athletes than among college students in general.

Depression

In general, the literature appears to support the idea that participation in college athletics exerts a protective effect on athletes against depression (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009; Proctor & Boar-Lenzo, 2010; Armstrong et al., 2015). However, when broken down by gender, this may not be the case. Storch et al. (2005) reported that female athletes experienced higher rates of depression over both male athletes and all non-athlete students. Therefore, caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about the impact of collegiate sports on mental health issues such as depression without first considering gender.

Graduation Rates

Some level of controversy may exist regarding the graduation rates of African American athletes. Southall et al. (2015) reported that African American athletes graduate at lower rates than White athletes in predominantly White institutions. These authors did not find the same trend, however, in predominantly Black schools. Further, the NCAA (“Success for minorities,” 2017) paints a brighter picture, indicating that the graduation rates for minority athletes have increased from 74% to 87% between 2002 and 2015.

There are two issues with the latter of these contentions. First, the NCAA does not clarify in its material that the graduation rate of 87% is for African American females, not males. The NCAA does discuss this information in other documentation (NCAA, “Trends in graduation,” 2017), stating that the graduation rate for African American males in 2017 was 72%. This figure diminishes the impressiveness of the initial claim that graduation rates among minority athletes have soared to 87% since, when considering gender, they have not.

Southall et al. (2015) described a second issue with the graduation rates calculated by the NCAA. According to these authors as well as the NCAA (“Trends in graduation,” 2017), the NCAA calculates graduation rates based on the number of first-time full-time students who graduate from their institution within six years of initial enrollment. Although the organization does admit that the rate ignores the large number of transfer students, it contends that this is the only way to directly compare student-athletes to the overall student body. Southall et al. (2015) adds another point to this limitation, explaining that the NCAA’s figures are made further inaccurate by failure to consider students who drop down to part time status. These students may take longer than six years to graduate since, as part-time students, they take course credits at a slower rate than full-time students. Failure to consider this subset of the student body can artificially lower the overall graduation rate for students, making the difference between minority athletes and the overall student body appear greater than it really is (Southall et al., 2015).

The Designation of “Student-Athlete”

One final point of contention in the literature is the NCAA designation of “student-athlete.” The NCAA appears to emphasize the importance of the role of student over that of athlete. In fact, on their web page pertaining to academics (NCAA, 2018), they highlight the need to meet academic eligibility standards and the commitment student athletes have to academic achievement. Ganim (2015) reported that, on this web page, the NCAA stated that “young men and women competing on the field or court are students first, athletes second.” Although the web page no longer displays that particular quote, its emphasis on the importance of academics is clear.

This proclaimed emphasis is troubling for at least two reasons. First, Ganim (2015) quoted the NCAA as saying that it “did not assume a duty to ensure the quality of the education

of student-athletes.” While this may be true, as individual institutions should maintain high academic standards, this statement appears to contradict the importance the NCAA places on education for athletes. The second issue pertains to the discrepancy between the NCAA position and the perception of actual African American student athletes. According to Harrison (2018), these athletes reported the perception that colleges focus far more on sports than academics, often discouraging athletes from studying certain majors or placing athletes in easier courses that may be of no benefit to the athlete’s future career plans. These actions are taken, according to Harrison (2018), to ensure that athletes maintain the grades needed for eligibility to play sports.

Chapter Summary and Implications of the Literature Review

Cumulatively, the findings presented in this literature review present a number of key insights into collegiate athletes, including African American male athletes. While, clearly, African American athletes face unique circumstances, an increased risk of substance use over the general student body may not be one of them. The evidence suggests that participation in collegiate athletics may have a protective effect against substance abuse due, in part, to increased social support from teammates and coaches. Interestingly, Jones (2015) reported that athletic identity is not associated with increased substance use. According to Adler’s *Glorified Self*, athletes may succumb to their popularized public persona at the expense of diminishing their private persona. Interestingly, the athlete identity is unrelated to popular activities in college such as drinking alcohol or taking drugs. Findings similar to those reported for substance use exist for depression as well. Participation in athletics may also protect against depression, perhaps due in part to an increase in self-esteem and social connectedness.

In spite of possible protection from mental health disorders, African American male athletes may find it difficult to escape racism. These individuals may be subject to individual,

institutional, and cultural racism and stereotyping, leading to feelings of hopelessness and decreased academic performance. With regard to the latter, student athletes also face discrepancies between a stated emphasis on academics by the NCAA and by schools as well as the reality of academic exploitation in which the academic careers of athletes are sacrificed for the good of the school in order for the athlete to maintain eligibility to play. These factors may have significant and long-lasting negative effects on the lives of African American collegiate athletes.

The next chapter describes the methodology used in this study. This chapter will address the study design, data collection, and analysis procedures. In addition to methodology, issues such as data credibility and dependability will be addressed. The next chapter lays the groundwork for the methodology section in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological approach used to investigate the phenomenon of elite collegiate African American male athletes while attending a predominately White university. Included in this chapter is: (a) a description of the grand tour questions; (b) a rationale for the use of a descriptive case study design; (c) a description of the role of the researcher, including bracketing and the researcher's statement of bias; (d) the population, sample, and sampling; (e) the study procedures, including participant recruitment and data collection; (f) the data analysis; (g) the verification methods, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; (h) the ethical considerations; (i) the study timeline; (j) the Committee on Human Subjects Criteria; (k) the reporting; and (l) the chapter summary.

Qualitative research comes in different forms, including observation of the phenomena by the researcher, interviews with those individuals and groups involved, and focus groups, in which groups of participants engage in social interaction of vital issues, providing the research with insight into the critical social dynamics which shape human behavior. Qualitative research provides the ability to explore emerging data concerning the topic under investigation that was not considered at the outset of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 17). The participants in the study can control the direction taken by the research by providing new information about issues faced by African American students in predominately White universities, which can produce unexpected insights about the topic (Babbie, 2008).

The qualitative research approach also provides a rich in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants in the study (Morehouse, 2012, p. 48). The understanding in the proposed research includes the perceptions of the subjects of the context

created for the students by the university environment. Qualitative research is also useful for research generating descriptive data, which must be analyzed using narrative techniques (Babbie, 2008). One particularly effective form of qualitative research is the case study, yet it does not have the same degree of validity in the minds of many researchers, largely because it does not command established protocols that demonstrate consistent structure or definition (Yin, 2013), leading many in the field to consider it a “soft” (Yin, 2013, p. 2) form of research. Yet Yin maintained that case study researchers who firmly establish (a) construct validity, (b) internal validity, (c) external validity, and (d) reliability can forge findings that are precise and robust. A qualitative approach to the research is recommended for the study because of the subjective nature of the experiences of African American athletes attending predominately White universities. Qualitative research is appropriate when the variables affecting the topic under investigation are difficult to fully identify, measure, or quantify (Babbie, 2008). Qualitative research is also appropriate when the topic under investigation is subject to the interaction of many variables beyond the ability of the researcher to control (Carey, 2012, p. 37). The qualitative approach to research is also suitable when the purpose of the research, as defined by the research question, is to gain an understanding of the perspectives of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2014, p. 20).

Likewise, qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher is not aware of the variables under investigation a priori. Therefore, this qualitative approach is appropriate for the study of African American athletes in predominately White universities because the topic is best understood from the perspective of the individuals experiencing the phenomenon. Because of the varied nature of the experiences of the athletes, identifying the full range of variables influencing the experience is difficult to ascertain. Some of the variables are not easily measured or

quantified. Based on these considerations, the qualitative approach to this research is the most appropriate method for examining the research questions in this research.

Case Study

The case study is one of the possible qualitative research designs. The case study examines the phenomenon under investigation in its natural context using a variety of different sources of data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Because the research investigates the phenomenon from several perspectives from the variety of sources, multiple facets are explored and understood. In this research, the phenomenon of the experiences of African American athletes in a predominately White university will be investigated in the natural context of the university. Additionally, a variety of sources of information were used such as data provided by the athletes and the reports of non-African American observers.

Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies

Qualitative research provides the ability to explore emerging data concerning the topic under investigation that was not considered at the outset of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 17). The participants in the study can control the direction taken by the research by providing new information about issues faced by African American students in predominately White universities, which can produce unexpected insights about the topic. The qualitative research approach also provides a rich in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants in the study (Morehouse, 2012, p. 48). The understanding in the proposed research includes the perceptions of the subjects of the context created for the students by the university environment. Qualitative research is also useful for research generating descriptive data, which must be analyzed using narrative techniques. A weakness of the qualitative approach is the inability to generalize the findings beyond the experiences of the participants (Morehouse, 2012,

p. 35). The subjective experiences are bounded by the context, which in this case is the environment in the individual university attended by the participants. Another university could produce different circumstances or a different environment where the findings of the study may not apply.

The quantitative research approach was rejected for the study because the approach involves using numerical data to test a hypothetical proposition established before the beginning of the research. The quantitative approach can test only a limited number of variables and may overlook important variables related to the experience of African American athletes in predominately White universities such as their perceptions. With quantitative studies, the researcher stands apart from the subjects and observes the effect on the subjects resulting from the manipulation of a variable (Creswell, 2014, p. 176). With a study examining the perspectives of African American athletes in a predominately White university, it is not feasible to manipulate key variables.

Descriptive Case Study

Yin (2014, p. 16) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a real-world phenomenon referred to as a case in an in-depth manner in its real-world context. In a case, the boundaries between the phenomenon under investigation and the context may not be clear, which requires providing considerable information about the context. The case study is an analysis of a single case intended to capture the complexity of the topic under investigation (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014).

A descriptive case study focuses on providing a description of events as understood by the subjects of the study without attempting to develop an explanation of the events (Yin, 2012, p. 49). The questions and propositions about the topic under investigation are stated at the outset

of the case and serve as the guidelines for decisions such as the type of data that should be included in the descriptive case study. The questions and propositions also help to establish the boundaries of the case, which are important for ensuring that only relevant information is included in the case study. In the proposed study, the research question establishes the need to gather data about the perceptions of African American athletes and establishes the boundaries of the case as athletes attending a predominately White university.

The critical element when developing a descriptive case is the selection of the range of topics that will be covered and the level of detail for each topic necessary to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2012, p. 50). A balance is necessary between excessive and insufficient content in the case information. There must also be sufficient information to support an analysis of the data to answer the research question without providing so much data that the analysis becomes overly complex.

The sample can include the perceptions and understandings of individuals (Taylor & Sondergaard, 2017, p. 105). In addition, the descriptive case study can be used to develop a descriptive theory applicable to the specific context of the case. In the proposed research, an in-depth assessment will be made of the perceptions and understandings of the African American athletes attending a predominately White university. The resulting descriptive theory could lead to a better understanding of the experiences of the participants.

Sources of Evidence

Yin (2013) described six potential sources for discovery of evidence when using the case study approach. These include documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. With a consistent rigor in the research and analysis of these multiple diverse sources, the case study can actually provide a considerable

degree of information in support of very diverse, very nuanced phenomena. Yin describes this as the case study's "unique strength" (p. 11) in comparison to other qualitative forms of research. Moreover, Yin maintained that rigor in research can be established by seeking multiple forms of evidence in the process of inquiry, creating a consistent case study database of the composition of the findings, and providing a diligent documentation of the chain of evidence.

Application

While the theoretical principles and operational practices of the case study (Yin, 2013) and the foundation of qualitative research in support of the case study (Stake, 2010) may present promise in understanding complex human processes, the true value of the case study is in its application. For example, when striving to understand a complex sociocultural phenomenon such as the increased incidence of depression and associated substance abuse problems of elite African American athletes who attend predominantly White institutions, a case study methodology can reveal what otherwise would remain simply statistical measures.

In contrast, Yin's (2013) six sources of discovery could, if effectively collected, shed light on the hidden dimensions of the human interaction that fosters this form of behavior. For example, the researcher could collect documentation of police records, as well as existing documentation of substance abuse and depression of the athletes, as well as archival records that would foster potential longitudinal support. With this foundation of the manifestation of the phenomenon, the researcher can engage in a range of interviews with many different individuals and groups who experience, or who may be the cause of the behaviors. Moreover, the researcher can extend understanding by observing those involved in the issue in their natural environment. The composite of these discoveries can lead to considerable understanding of the issue as well as create new avenues of deeper consideration of various aspects of the discoveries.

This study was undertaken due to interest in the large number of African American collegiate athletes who are experiencing success on the playing field but are not successfully graduating from college or if able to graduate, not experiencing success in the community after their collegiate days of glory. A number of other questions regarding this particular population are raised. For example, what are some factors that may impede the success rate of these brilliant young athletes? How can an individual bring in billions of dollars to an institution and yet not experience the benefits of those billions of dollars? The quest for answers led to this research; however, answers must be sought through the lens of these young men.

The previous two chapters provided an introduction to the topic of this study, including a comparison of the academic lives of African Americans at the turn of the 20th century as described by W. E. B. Du Bois (Du Bois, 2012; Du Bois, 2013) to today's African American athletes. The theoretical framework was presented, which included Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Adler's Glorified Self, both of which will serve as the lens through which the study results may be interpreted. The second chapter provided an overview of relevant literature pertaining to collegiate athletes in general, as well as African American athletes in particular. These issues include substance abuse, depression, competition, and challenges that African American athletes experience, including an overemphasis on athletics by institutions and the NCAA at the expense of academics.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used in this study. After defining a case study and discussing the characteristics of a qualitative study, the chapter will present the three grand tour questions which guide the study and describe the researcher's role in the study. The population and sample will be detailed, as well as the procedures for sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Key aspects of study quality will be addressed, including

credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Finally, strategies for reporting the results will be presented. The case study is a common type of qualitative research inquiry that has the potential to better understand deeper meanings of personal experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 443). The case study examines the phenomenon under investigation in its existing or socially constructed context using a variety of different data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Because the research investigates the phenomenon from several perspectives from a variety of sources, multiple facets are explored and understood in a meaningful way. In the proposed research, the phenomenon of the experiences of African American athletes in a predominately White university will be investigated in the existing (natural) context.

Advantages of the Case Study

An advantage of the case study over other qualitative research techniques is that the approach permits the broad use of data collection methods (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). The researcher can use interviews and focus groups to collect data directly from the participants. These techniques are often associated with phenomenological and grounded theory research. It is also possible to use observation, which is commonly used with ethnographic research. The selection of the technique is based on the case conditions and objectives of the study.

Another advantage of the case study is its holistic approach, which reveals some of the complex interactions influencing the perceptions and decisions of people in the case study context (Andrade, 2009). Consequently, the case study is suitable for investigating events influenced by intricate social phenomena involving the influence of many variables on the individual. Complex social phenomena that cannot be easily measured routinely influence the

nature of the experiences of African American athletes at predominately White universities as well as the athletes' understanding of the meaning of the experiences.

The case study also has an advantage for investigation because manipulating any of the elements or features of the natural setting where the study takes place is not possible. The case study is concerned with examining phenomena as they naturally occur, which can reveal nuances of meaning that may not be possible in a controlled environment (Hunter, Lusardi, Zucker, Jacelon, & Chandler, 2002). Using the case study to investigate the perceptions of African American athletes in predominately White universities can reveal information about subtle understandings that may not be found using other qualitative methods.

The case study approach enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of a case relevant to one or more individuals (Creswell, 2014). Typically, this approach involves the collection and subsequent analysis of multiple forms of data in order to enrich the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon. Case studies can involve single or multiple cases, as well as an explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive design. Explanatory case studies explore cause-effect relationships in an attempt to understand why a particular phenomenon occurred. Exploratory case studies evaluate a particular phenomenon within a specific context for the purpose of generating additional future research. Descriptive case studies, such as that utilized in this particular study, present a description of a phenomenon directly within the context in which it exists (Gangeness & Yurkovich, 2006).

Justification for a Case Study Design

The case study is appropriate for use as a research design when the focus of the research question is on how the participants experience a specific phenomenon (Yin, 2014, p. 2).

Additionally, it is not possible to manipulate the behavior of the participants in the study, and the

contextual conditions are relevant to the study. The focus of the proposed study is on how African American athletes experience attending and playing sports in a predominately White university. It is not possible to manipulate their behaviors and the context of the university environment is critical for understanding the experiences of the participants.

The case study approach was selected for the research because it provides greater flexibility in design when compared to other qualitative research designs such as a phenomenological design or ethnography. The case study can focus on providing the detail necessary to support a full and clear understanding of the experiences of the African American athletes at the predominately White universities. In addition, the development of the case study and relative emphasis of information can be based on the data provided by the subjects rather than planned at the outset of the study (Yin, 2014, p. 2).

A qualitative methodology was selected for research investigating African American athletes at predominately white universities because the methodology supports the examination of the subjective perceptions of the participants. The identification and manipulation of variables would be difficult, which precludes the use of a quantitative methodology. The case study research design was selected because it permits examining the perceptions of the African American participants in the natural context of the predominately White university.

Grand Tour and Sub Questions

1. In your opinion, why do elite African American male athletes experience challenges at the collegiate level?
2. How would you describe being an elite African American male athlete at a predominately White university?
3. How have you dealt with those challenges?

Researcher's Role in Qualitative Research

The researcher's role in a qualitative study can range from being an outsider to being an insider. As an outsider in the process, the researcher acts merely as an observer and does not intervene in the situation. For example, a researcher may quietly sit on a park bench and observe the behavior of adults walking their dogs without interacting with them. On the other end of the spectrum, the research becomes closely involved with the research subjects, interacting with them in their own context. For example, an anthropologist may conduct research by living among a particular culture in order to add his own insight and experiences to the data (Raheim et al., 2016). The role of the researcher in this study is to gain access to the thoughts and feelings of the research subjects (Sutton & Austin, 2015). As such, this researcher is neither fully removed from the study nor intimately involved in it. This researcher will ask the study subjects open-ended questions and record answers, using additional probing questions when necessary to clarify answers or seek elaboration.

Bracketing

Bracketing refers to the identification of any interests, experiences, assumptions, or cultural factors which may influence how the researcher views the study data (Fischer, 2009). This action prevents researcher biases or presuppositions from interfering with the authenticity and credibility of the research findings (Rolls & Relf, 2006). Bias refers to any thought or emotion that prevents a researcher from considering a question or data in an unprejudiced manner (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2011). In order to successfully set aside any biases, this researcher first identified biases and existing knowledge about the research topic through critical self-reflection and conversations with peers. After creating a list of biases and experiences, this researcher created a journal for use during interviews and took note of any additional biases that

arose during the interview process. Finally, these notes are summarized in the following section to make the reader aware of any biases that could impact the interpretation of study results.

Researcher's Statement of Bias

Several biases held by this researcher could have impacted the collection and interpretation of study results. The most significant bias is this researcher's lifelong interest in sports. Sports have played an important role in the life of this researcher since childhood, in the capacity of both an athlete and a spectator. As such, this researcher has admired a number of professional and collegiate athletes and was fortunate enough to meet several favorite athletes.

A second bias is previous knowledge and a strong opinion concerning the lack of compensation for collegiate athletes. This researcher has followed this topic closely over the past few years, supporting the idea that collegiate athletes should be compensated in some manner for the use of their likeness in the media and for product endorsements. It is the belief of this researcher that academic scholarships are inadequate to fully cover the needs of collegiate athletes, and the excessive amount of revenue earned by NCAA Division I schools should be returned in some way to the athletes who are responsible for that revenue, rather than padding the pockets of the coaching staff.

Also, this researcher is aware of racism and discrimination against African American students and athletes on college campuses. This awareness conjures empathy and frustration. These feelings, along with prior knowledge and opinions regarding collegiate athlete compensation, and a love of sports were identified, reflected upon, and bracketed prior to conducting the interviews with the study subjects. The researcher also has had family members that were rated elite athletes while playing their perspective sports at predominately White universities. The researcher has strong sentiments about the importance of ensuring the health

and well-being of African American male collegiate student athletes while attending predominately White universities.

Population, Sample, and Sampling

The population relevant to this study is that of African American collegiate athletes. While African American students comprise only 14% of the college student population in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018), they represent a disproportionate number of players in some collegiate sports. For example, they are the majority race represented in college basketball, as 45% of collegiate basketball players are African American, and a close second in prevalence to Whites in football, comprising 39% of all collegiate football players (NCAA, "Sport Sponsorship," n.d.).

This qualitative case study design is based on a sample size of three individuals ($n=3$). Each study subject plays a different sport, including baseball, basketball, and football. These three individuals are elite African American collegiate athletes between the ages of 18 and 24 years enrolled in a predominantly White institution. A sample size of three was selected in order to maintain the manageability of the data.

Sampling Procedures

The sampling strategy used in this study was purposive sampling. In this type of sampling the researcher intentionally chooses the subjects based on their perceived ability to answer the research questions (Setia, 2017). In order to obtain a sample, this researcher contacted the head coaches of each of the three teams at a mid-sized university and explained the purpose of the study. Each coach relayed the study information both verbally and through email to the athletes, providing them with this researcher's contact information. Several athletes from each team expressed interest in participating, and this researcher recruited the first athlete from each

team who made contact and met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria are: baseball, basketball, or football player; African American; at least one prior season of playing experience; between the ages of 18-24 years; and rated elite status.

Data Collection

The source of data for this study is an interview conducted with each of the three study subjects. Data collection occurred after the purposive sampling of the three athletes. Once selected, the duration of time over which the athlete was required to participate lasted less than a week until the interview could be completed. During the course of the interview, participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions, allowing for a greater number of themes to emerge over the course of the study and providing subjects with the opportunity to elaborate on their thoughts. Likewise, open-ended questions are useful in understanding processes and identifying possible explanations for observed correlations (Weller et al., 2018).

Before conducting the interview, the subject was presented with an informed consent form and asked to review and sign it. This form provided the purpose of the study, an outline of the steps used to conduct the research, a description of potential benefits and risks associated with participation in the study, the contact information of the researcher, and an explanation on how the interview notes would be kept safe and confidential for at least five years. The researcher informed each participant on his right to withdraw consent to participate at any time without providing a reason and without experiencing any consequences. After the subject was given the opportunity to ask questions and sign the form, the interview began.

During the course of the interview, the researcher transcribed the subject responses into a notebook. Also, the interviews were recorded using a digital audio device. In addition to this, the researcher maintained a bracketing journal and made notes in it during the course of the

interview when appropriate. Although the researcher asked permission to contact the subject for later clarification if necessary, this was not needed prior to data analysis (Thomas, 2017).

Data Analysis

Yin explains (construct, internal and external) validity and reliability in a traditional sense at the outset of his text prior to describing the procedures of case study design and deems them as the criteria to judge the quality of the research. He repeatedly reminds the readers of the paramount importance of these criteria which “are common to all social science methods” (Yin, 2002, p. 34) in the remainder of his text. He suggests that case study researchers should make sure that they take these criteria into consideration while designing and implementing the entire inquiry. Because research quality and rigor mean the achievement of these criteria, “An important innovation of this book is the identification of several tactics for dealing with these four tests when doing case studies” (Yin, 2002, p. 34). According to Yin, case study researchers need to guarantee construct validity (through the triangulation of multiple sources of evidence, chains of evidence, and member checking), internal validity (through the use of established analytic techniques such as pattern matching), external validity (through analytic generalization), and reliability (through case study protocols and databases). Coming from an epistemological tradition, which places considerable emphasis on these tests, Yin presents tactics for all these four tests not only in the designing stage but also data collection, analysis and compositional stages.

According to Yin (2013), the theoretical principles and operational practices of the case study are the foundations of qualitative research, and they are essential factors in the support of case study research (Stake, 2010). These entities present promise in understanding complex human processes; therefore, the true value of the case study is in its application. For example, in

striving to understand a complex sociocultural phenomenon, such as the increased incidence of depression and associated substance abuse problems of African American athletes who attend predominantly White universities, a case study methodology can reveal what otherwise would remain simply statistical measures. Epidemiological quantitative research, no matter how rigorous, is extremely limited in revealing why this phenomenon exists, or why it continues to exist. In contrast, Yin's (2013) six sources of discovery could, if effectively collected, shed light on the hidden dimensions of the human interaction that fosters this form of behavior (the existence and why it continues to exist). To illustrate, this researcher collected documentation of elite African American athletes at predominately White universities of higher learning and discussed, via intense interviews, their perceptions on a number of issues. With this foundation of the manifestation of the phenomenon, the researcher engaged in a range of interviews with different individuals who experience, or who may have been the cause of the behaviors. Moreover, the researcher extended understanding by observing those involved in the issue in their natural academic environment. Further, the researcher participated in some of the activities of the subjects, granting insight into hidden dimensions of the problem. Finally, the researcher was able to gain insight into the subject's perceptions by examining the multiple physical artifacts, the cultural products produced by participants by those who influence the participants.

Once the data were collected, the written notes were compared with the transcripts from the audio recording to ensure accuracy of notes, and then a transcriber typed the notes. Inductive content analysis was performed on this data in order to identify themes. First, each set of data was read three times in order to become more familiar with it. Next, the data were organized through open coding and the creation of categories. Open coding involved the writing of notes and headings on a handwritten copy of the data while reading it. The data were read and coded

multiple times in order to ensure that all aspects of the data were adequately described. At times, the data were color coded with highlighter markers so that comments and the text from which they came could be linked and more easily identified (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Once the coding was completed, the list of identified categories was grouped under appropriate headings to reduce the overall number of categories and ensure that similar categories were grouped together. These categories also enabled the researcher to describe the phenomenon, increase understanding, and create new knowledge (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Abstraction was then used to name and create a general description of the categories. Subcategories were created where necessary and grouped together. A chart was created to provide an organized and simplified overview of the data prior to describing the emerging themes and relationships (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Verification Methods

To ensure rigor for this study, the four requisites of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were applied. These provisions were credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the truth or accuracy of the data and the interpretations made by the researcher. Ways to increase credibility include describing one's experience as a researcher and verifying the findings with the subject. If the descriptions created by the researcher can be easily recognized by individuals who share the same experience as the subject, then the data possesses credibility (Cope, 2014; Connelly, 2016). In order to enhance credibility, this researcher asked a colleague who in the past participated in collegiate athletics to

read over the organized categories. This individual was able to recognize several of the categories based on past experiences.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to apply the findings to other groups of individuals or settings. This characteristic is similar to generalizability or external validity in quantitative studies (Andrade, 2018). A study has transferability if the results can be understood or have meaning to individuals in situations different from that of the study subjects (Cope, 2014). The study results may apply to individuals in other types of collegiate sports. Since the African American experience is unique to African Americans, the results are not transferable to individuals of other races and cultures. Also, it is possible that the results may not be generalizable to some types of sports, such as individual sports or sports at Division III schools which do not give scholarships to athletes (NCAA, “What Does Division III Have to Offer,” n.d.).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the constancy of the data over time or across similar conditions. One way to enhance dependability is to allow another researcher to read the data and coding each time a new decision is made. If the other individual agrees with the decision, then the data are likely to be dependable. This quality is similar to reliability in a quantitative study (Davenport et al., 2015; Munn et al., 2014).

In order to help ensure dependability, this researcher asked the dissertation chair to review the coding and categorizing schemes several times throughout the process. If disagreement occurred between the researcher and the outside individual and an agreement could not be reached, the process was repeated, and a new category or code created. These actions

helped to ensure that the same results would be reached even if another individual had coded the data.

Conformability

Another important step in ensuring data quality and consistency is conformability. This characteristic refers to the ability to demonstrate that the data represent the views of the research subject rather than that of the researcher (Cope, 2014). Confirmability can be established by describing how interpretations were made and conclusions were drawn. Likewise, the researcher can demonstrate that this information came directly from the data by including quotations from the subjects in the Results section of the report as a source of support for the researcher's contentions (Cope, 2014).

Another way to ensure that the data are not biased by the views of the researcher is to perform bracketing, as previously described. Critical reflection on any preconceived notions that may influence the data analysis is an important step to ensure that the results truly reflect the experiences of the research subjects.

Validity and Reliability

All research inquiries must be able to respond to questions such as "How truthful are the findings of the study? What criteria will be used to evaluate the finding? Are the findings applicable in a different setting?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1981). Lincoln and Guba (1981) pose several constructs related to qualitative inquiry that are useful in addressing questions about the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These constructs relate to the credibility (i.e., the accuracy of portrayal of participants' words), transferability (i.e., whether the study would be applicable in another situation), dependability (i.e., the researcher responds to changes in the situation being studied), and confirmability (i.e., the data and findings can be substantiated by an

external examiner) of the research findings (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Strategies the researcher utilized to meet criteria for trustworthiness are discussed below.

Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

Qualitative research involves a method of inquiry that is utilized within a variety of disciplines, especially the social sciences and overall market research. The method investigates the *how* and *why* of decision-making through exploratory research and trends regarding opinions and thought (Pathak, 2013). Furthermore, to evaluate qualitative research, Guba's Model of Trustworthiness is often used to explore the truthfulness and preciseness of qualitative data.

Guba's Model of Trustworthiness is based on the identification of four specific factors that pertain to qualitative research. The first factor is known as truth value, and it determines whether the researcher has established confidence towards the truth of the findings for the informants or the subjects (Shenton, 2003). Essentially, this portion of the model allows for internal validity that is obtained from human experiences. Truth value is known to be subject oriented, and it is typically not defined by the researcher. The second aspect of the model is known as applicability. This concept refers to the degree in which findings can be applied to other potential settings or contexts. When looking at applicability in qualitative research, it helps to determine how well threats are related to the external validity. This can then be defined as the ability to generalize information from the study towards other populations, taking into consideration the sampling technique (Shenton, 2003). The third portion of the model is known as consistency. When qualitative data are consistent regarding the inquiry and the findings, beneficial and effective results can develop. This also allows for stability of the study in its entirety as well as results that are deemed equivalent (Shenton, 2003). Finally, the last portion of Guba's Model is a concept known as neutrality. This term is defined as a lack of bias that exists

within the research procedures and results. Once bias is found within a study, it takes away from the overall validity (Shenton, 2003).

When researching a topic such as African American elite male athletes with depression and substance abuse issues, it is essential to take Guba's Model of Trustworthiness into consideration since this is a protected population. When individuals have certain clinical conditions, researchers must be aware of the ethical implications involved. Many times, the credibility of a study may be threatened simply because there are errors made towards the data that has been gathered. If this type of population is utilized to study, prolonged engagement is necessary so that response sets can be detected accordingly. This will emphasize the importance of the data that is collected as well as the overall truth value of the qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

The primary researcher obtained approval from East Carolina University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research study. The participants' confidentiality was protected in the collection, management, and use of all data. Pseudonyms were used linking personal information of each participant to his or her specific demographic information, recorded interview, and interview transcript. Furthermore, information such as name, address, and telephone number were not used in this study and were not maintained as part of participants' record. The use of pseudonyms minimized the risk of confidentiality violations. As risks were minimal and did not exceed those that could be expected in typical daily interactions, participants potentially benefited from the opportunity to verbalize their experiences with alcohol exposure. Participants were provided with a list of area counseling providers in the event that the interview triggered any substance use or mental health concerns. Findings from this research study would be beneficial to other research studies because it provides a look into the adverse

consequences that appear to exist for African American student-athletes on the college level. Both the Glorified Self as well as Maslow's Hierarchy are viewed as valuable assets in this cause. The employment of qualitative, open-ended questioning also provides research with the flexibility to explore relevant issues while capturing defining themes specific to this issue. Future research could also combine a mixed-methods approach that both qualifies internalities while quantifying associated behaviors. In this vein, counseling methods may be augmented towards meeting the needs of a very narrow population.

Timeline

Data were collected from November 2018 to January 2019. Data were transcribed and coded from January to February 2019. Data were analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized into a written report from February to March 2019.

Committee on Human Subjects Criteria

This researcher received approval from the East Carolina University's Medical Center Institutional Review Board. The following elements of informed consent were outlined on the consent to research form for this study:

1. A statement that the participant is engaging in a research project,
2. An explanation of the purpose of the study,
3. The expected duration of the study,
4. A description of possible risks,
5. A statement that participation is voluntary and may be stopped at any time,
6. A statement describing how to file a grievance.

Reporting

Reporting is the final step in the research process. The purpose of this step is to provide to the reader evidence of the results and conclusions. It is important for the researcher to provide a detailed description of strategies used throughout the research process, as well as ample, appropriate, and detailed quotes from the research subjects as a source of support. By doing so, the reader is able to determine for herself the credibility of the data and the interpretations made from it (Cope, 2014). The results section will follow these guidelines, offering quotes from the research subjects and providing a description of how the data were coded and organized into themes.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the data collection and analysis methods. A distinction was made between qualitative and quantitative studies, and the case study approach was described. In order to help ensure that researcher bias was minimized, the role of the researcher in the study was clarified, the researcher engaged in bracketing, and the researcher presented a statement of bias. The population of this study, African American collegiate athletes, was described, as was the purposive sampling strategy employed to locate three study subjects. Then, the data collection and analysis methods were described. Data were collected using written and digital audio methods. After transcribing the data by typing it using a laptop, the researcher coded the data and identified emerging themes similar to all three transcripts. The iterative process of coding continued until the point of data saturation, in which no new themes or categories were identified.

In addition to ensuring accurate and consistent coding, the elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, and reporting were discussed. Since one cannot

calculate Cronbach's alphas to determine reliability using narrative data, it is important for the researcher to address each of these elements. Consideration of these characteristics helps to ensure that the data are truthful, consistent, applicable over other situations, and non-biased, thus increasing the level of confidence in the results. Furthermore, the use of quotes from study subjects, as will be presented in Chapter Four, helps to provide support for researcher conclusions and increase the credibility of the findings.

Chapters Four and Five present these results and a discussion of their significance. In Chapter Four, a description of the themes which emerged from the data is presented along with supporting quotes and examples. In Chapter Five, these results are further analyzed and applied to answer the three questions driving this research study. Chapter Five will also include a discussion of study limitations, implications for future research, and consideration of how the knowledge generated from this study may be used to further social justice within post-secondary institutions with athletic programs. Finally, the emergent themes will be considered in light of the types of interventions that may be most beneficial to empower African American collegiate athletes in experiencing greater academic freedom and success.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the challenges faced by elite African American male athletes who attend predominantly White post-secondary institutions. The students interviewed described some of the same issues. Of course, each had their own versions, their own reactions, and their own levels of coping. They all agreed that their respective sport was “their life” but not always in a good way. In all, they felt a duty to their sport. They felt that they would be letting many people down, especially, perhaps, their families back home, were they to quit. They even felt like they would not know what to do if they were to quit; they had invested so much, and they would have time on their hands to replace their rigorous training schedules. These are all things that most spectators never stop to think of; however, they are very real to the athletes. Yet, Adam, one of the interviewees, mentioned “athletic prowess” in relation to Black student athletes. He said that that is why they have them on campus.

While these students said that they, as African American athletes, faced distinct challenges, their overall message was that their identity was inextricably tied to being an athlete, to playing their sport. Adam even said that his life would be over if he stopped playing basketball. It is almost that these athletes’ lives are one-dimensional. Everything they do is tied to the sport, to being an athlete. That is their identity. They are not associated with academics or excelling in class. They are expected to “deliver a championship” and make the school proud, among numerous others.

This leads to another aspect of this identity. These athletes are seen as heroes, as those who can either win or lose a competition. Anyone who has attended college sporting events knows the fierceness of these games sometimes and how eager fans are for their team to win. All of the athletes interviewed felt great pressure from this, and reasonably so. This almost single-

handed responsibility and expectation to win goes hand-in-hand with the hero status. When elite African American college athletes are portrayed by the media, they are often seen with a virile appearance, very attractive to women (Dancy, 2009), and every bit the knight in shining armor. One study claimed that elite African American male athletes are not understood outside of their sport because of their ability to put forth a substantial image of masculinity on the field (Molloseau, 2006). This is definitely not always the image these athletes want to be troubled with. As they all said, being good at their sport is something of a burden and a curse.

When attending a primarily White institution, Black athletes can stand out even more in comparison to their White teammates. As established, elite African Americans male athletes are often perceived as exceptionally gifted in sports. While White athletes can often prove to also be gifted, this is not the standard perception as is with African Americans. As a result, elite African American athletes are often expected to shoulder the win, to carry the team to victory, and to take up the slack for White athletes who might not be as talented. This is, of course, largely a stereotype but one that these athletes count among their challenges. As Adam said, that's why they have them there; they are seen as athletes and not students. Their academics take a back seat to their sport. Too many times, they are expected to win, not necessarily to study. White athletes, especially those coming from more privileged backgrounds, are not as often held to this expectation. They are given opportunity for both athletics and academics.

The athletes interviewed all said that they had little time to do everything they needed and wanted to do. This included studying, spending time with friends, and going home to see their families. Indeed, this reflects their collective assertion that the sport is their life. It is very clear, then, that they are left with little time for anything else. For anyone, socialization is an important aspect of life. In fact, one of Maslow's five levels of his hierarchy of needs is

belongingness and love. While Maslow defines this as love, affection, and intimate relationships, he also identifies social interaction under this line of needs (Maslow's, 2016). Coming from Maslow or not, socialization and being around an array of different people is crucial to a healthy mindset and a well-rounded life. Being around friends is not only fun for these athletes, it is imperative for their well-being. Too many times, coaches and trainers are focused on winning the next game and put their players' health and healthy mindset too far down the list of priorities.

The media and Hollywood often shape the portrayals of African American men as athletes. This is also sometimes the case in Hollywood portrayals. Many times, these athletes are shown to use sports to rise above their situation. Many are seen growing up in poverty, on streets where gangs roam, with parents who are not able to make ends meet. Alternately, these men are shown to be exceptional athletes, better in sports because of their race. While it is true that this is the case sometimes, this is not a fact across the board. The research literature suggests that African American male athletes face issues such as racism, stereotyping, and challenges related to academic success (Harper, 2016; Njororai, 2012; Cooper et al., 2017). However, discrepancies may exist between the perceptions of these athletes and the NCAA, as the latter purports to prioritize academics while African American athletes report a lack of support in this area (NCAA, 2018; Harrison, 2018). The aim of this study is to clarify this discrepancy and gain greater insight into the experiences of elite African American male athletes who play sports at the collegiate level. The interviews of three such athletes were conducted face-to-face. All interviews were transcribed and compared with audio recordings of the interviews to ensure accuracy, and inductive content analysis was performed to identify themes in the data. In addition, a bracketing journal was maintained to reduce the impact of researcher bias on the collection of data or interpretation of results.

This chapter will present a detailed analysis of three in-depth interviews of elite African American male athletes who attend a predominantly White university. The data are described in the format of themes that emerged from its analysis, which related to mental health issues, racism, and academic fears. The research methodology used to select study participants and collect and analyze data was described in Chapter 3. This chapter presents a profile of the participants, data collection procedures, data analysis, and a summary of the findings. The following research questions served to guide this study:

Q1. In your opinion, why do elite African American male athletes experience challenges at the collegiate level?

Q2. How would you describe being an elite African American male athlete at a predominately White university?

Q3. How has the student-athlete dealt with these challenges?

Results

Study participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) Male, (b) African American, (c) participation in intercollegiate baseball, basketball, or football, (d) between the ages of 18-24 years, and (e) at least one prior season of playing experience. The first athlete from each team sport who met the inclusion criteria and contacted the researcher was selected for study inclusion.

Profile of Participants

In order to protect participant anonymity, the study participants were identified using the pseudonyms of Adam, Bob, and Carl. This section presents a brief profile of each participant. Carl is a 19-year-old African American who plays baseball at a Division I university. He has two seasons of playing experience. Bob is a 21-year-old African American who plays football at a

Division I university. Bob has three seasons of playing experience. Like Carl and Bob, Adam also plays for a Division I university. Adam is a 19-year-old African American male who plays basketball and has two seasons of playing experience. An overview of participant profiles is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>NCAA Division</u>	<u>Sport</u>	<u>Number of Playing Seasons</u>
Carl	19	African American	I	Baseball	2
Bob	21	African American	I	Football	3
Adam	19	African American	I	Basketball	2

Data Collection

In this study, the participants are identified as “Carl,” “Bob,” and “Adam.” These pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants. In order to recruit a purposive sample, the researcher contacted head coaches of each of the three teams at a Division I school and explained the purpose of the study. These coaches relayed the study information to the athletes and provided them with this researcher’s contact information. The first athlete from each

team who made contact with the researcher and met the inclusion criteria was selected for participation. Each participant was interviewed, and the interviews were transcribed, compared with field notes, and analyzed to uncover themes related to the research questions. This section presents a discussion of the major themes which emerged from the data. These themes were substance abuse, increased effort to succeed, depression and burnout, overtraining, racism, fear of losing scholarship opportunities, fans turning against the athletes, and failure to meet or fear of not meeting competition goals. These themes will be discussed within the context of the research questions and supported by both statements from study participants and findings in the research literature.

Findings and Themes from Research Questions

For this study, two specific interview questions were created to explore the three research questions. These interview questions were “What challenges do African American athletes experience at the collegiate level?” and “What is it like to be an African American college athlete?” In addition to these questions, the researcher asked a number of other probing questions directed in part by participants’ responses in order to gain insight into the research questions. These questions addressed issues such as educational background, sports background, athletic abilities, and substance use history. In this section, each research question will be discussed in conjunction with the specific themes that emerged relevant to the question.

Research Question One

The first research question was “In your opinion, why do elite African American male athletes experience challenges at the collegiate level?” This specific question was asked directly to participants, who in conjunction with other background information provided by participants, elicited six themes. Those themes were: (a) overtraining, (b) fear of losing scholarship

opportunities, (c) fans turning against the athletes, and (d) failure to meet or fear of not meeting competition goals.

Theme 1: Overtraining. One factor that may contribute to athlete burnout is overtraining, which can occur due to increased intensity and frequency of training. The result of excessive training is a decrease in athletic performance and maladaptive physiological and psychological responses. The symptoms of overtraining are similar to those of burnout and can include decreased performance, fatigue, sleep difficulties, irritability, anxiousness, lack of motivation, and feelings of depression (Cureton, 2009, p. 32).

Adam, Bob, and Carl addressed the issue of overtraining and its emotional and physical effects. Bob remarked:

To be honest, I am a little exhausted. My work ethic is stellar, and I am used to pushing myself beyond even my own limits. But, I think I may have done some damage this time. I actually think I over trained and Coach mentioned I may not be able to play. I am still dealing with that as a reality. It makes me depressed to think about it actually.

Adam addressed the extensive amount of time that collegiate athletes devote to training and competition. According to this basketball player, it is typical to work 80 hours per week at his sport. Carl stated that he practiced so much he was beginning to hate playing his sport. He stated:

I hate when it turns 3 p.m. I just hate it.

Theme 2: Fear of Losing Scholarship Opportunities. For some African American athletes, scholarships based on athletic ability are the key to receiving an education. Two of the athletes expressed financial challenges, underscoring the need for scholarship money in order to complete their education. Adam grew up in the “projects” in a single-parent home and notes that even now he sometimes does not have enough money to eat. His mother is poor, working two

jobs to support his siblings and depending on him to help out the family. Adam expressed the perception that advancement to the NBA would help his family financially. However, if he failed in college and at basketball, he knows:

what is waiting for me back home.

Hence, there is a significant amount of pressure to succeed.

Bob expressed similar concerns. He described his family as poor and how one of his siblings is incarcerated. When asked about the challenges that African American athletes face in college, Bob said:

Money will probably be the first thing. Many of us are broke and don't have money to send home to our families. I can only speak for me, I don't. A lot of my teammates don't.

That's very frustrating to me, because my mom and little brothers need things.

Scholarship money provides these athletes with the opportunity to obtain an education and a future career, whether it is in sports or another field. Given that poverty is a concern among these athletes, the loss of scholarship money could have a significant and negative impact on, not only the athletes, but their families as well, as the families may be counting on the athlete to provide financial support in the future. Adam commented:

If I quit basketball, I don't have my scholarship. If I quit basketball, what else am I going to do?

Carl's comment reinforced this sentiment, noting that:

If I don't perform well, I could lose my scholarship. I cannot afford to go back to my old neighborhood in New York.

Another monetary remark came from Adam who said, interestingly, that he often does not have money to eat, and yet his jersey number sells in the bookstore for \$75. The perverse irony of this

is easy to see. Like Bob, Adam's father is not around and his mother works two jobs to try and support the family. He tries to send money when he can, but mostly, he keeps playing as, he says, his Mom is depending on him. Adam pointedly states that it is a lot of pressure because of his family situation. It is one reason, perhaps the main reason, that he keeps pushing forward and does not quit even though the temptation is overwhelming sometimes. Additionally, he says that he knows what is waiting for him back home if he quits. That is what he wants to avoid at all costs.

Sports allow these students to avoid going back to the dire situations that they came from and allow them to be seen as heroes by many. While this heroic image is one that many people would welcome and long for, it is not always an easy image to shoulder. Often, the pressure to win a game is too intense. The expectations that one player will lead a team to victory is unrealistic and unfair. Adam said that classmates actually get upset at him in class if the team has a bad game. Alternately, they will, as a class, give a standing ovation to him if the team does well. This backs up the assertion by all three of these athletes that they are seen as athletes alone. Even in this way, their lives are one-dimensional. Their fellow students expect a win out of them and are not happy when they do not deliver. The athlete's socialization can be limited by this expectation and often causes them to stick even closer to their teammates and train even more. The detriment of this has already been established.

Athletes associate their identity with their role on the field instead of their role in the classroom. This is brought on by family expectation and fan demands. However, they are not the only ones that identify them as athletes and little more. Teachers, faculty and staff often have a negative perception of student athletes because of exceptional circumstance admissions, press exposure, special privileges like tutoring, and the low priority that is placed on academics. These

perceptions are even worse where revenue sports are concerned. It is no secret that highly scouted college athletes are offered incentives. This is, of course, not the way it is supposed to be but schools, in cooperation with deep-pocketed donors, often find ways around this. An athlete with poor academic scores who is, nonetheless, driving an expensive sports car is likely to garner an ill perception by many on campus (Hawley, 2014). No doubt there are some who take advantage of these perks, whether illegal or not. They carry the image of hero to the extreme and get all that they can from it. Despite this, the perception unfairly applies to many student athletes, especially those who are Black. Sports car or not, they are often seen to get privileges based on their athletic abilities and value, privileges that do not help to prioritize their education.

Theme 3: Fans Turning Against the Athletes. The study participants perceived a fickle nature among collegiate sports fans towards African American athletes. In particular, Carl reported that fans called him racial slurs when he did not perform up to their expectations. The dual nature of fans may be particularly harsh for athletes who attend schools with a winning tradition, as in the case of Adam:

You know, when I arrived on campus people came up to me saying, “deliver us a championship, son”, or “I already know you can play,” or when you have a bad game, you have fans in class getting upset about a loss. It’s really, really tough. However though, when you win, you the man. I remember, when we beat out arch nemesis, the campus loved us hard. We got standing ovations in class.

Theme 4: Failure to Meet or Fear of Not Meeting Competition Goals. The final emerging theme related to the first research question is the fear of not meeting or being unable to meet competition goals. These athletes emphasized the high degree of pressure they felt to succeed in their sport and the fierce competition they faced from other athletes. Adam described

feeling a great deal of pressure, including that conveyed by his friends, to perform well and the general pressure of playing for an elite basketball program. He noted that:

The competition is fierce, and it is hard man... We have to be better than our counterparts.

Adam commented on the difficulty he has juggling academic responsibilities with practice and training. Bob reported similar struggles, commenting:

There is so much pressure, pressure from my teammates, the Coach, my family, the fans... myself.

When asked about the challenges facing African American athletes, Bob responded how he is:

Trying to stay up on the competition. Every week you in jeopardy of losing your spot.

That's why I was so sad man. I don't want to lose my spot.

Research Question Two

The second research question was "How would you describe being an elite African American male athlete at a predominately White university?" This question was asked directly to participants, which in combination with other background information provided by participants, elicited two themes: (a) Racism, and (b) depression and burnout.

Theme 1: Racism. As members of a minority culture, each of the three athletes described incidents of racism as problematic. Of the three, Carl reported the highest incidence of racism. As the only African American athlete on his baseball team, he often felt excluded and isolated from his teammates. He reported several incidents of being called a racial slur by fans when he did not play well. Both the racial slurs and the exclusion are indicators of institutional racism. Racism at predominantly White colleges and universities includes open acts of racism which create a hostile climate, such as the response by students to Carl's performance, and excluding

African Americans from full participation in the institution, such as the sense of exclusion he experiences relative to his White teammates (Njororai, 2012, p.45). Factors which contribute to this exclusion or isolation include stereotypes against the academic success of African Americans, excessive amounts of time training and participating in athletics at the expense of becoming involved in others activities or aspects of campus life, White students unable to relate to African American students due to lack of experience with diversity, and the negative perception by White students that Black students are privileged (Njororai, 2012, p.47).

In addition to the previously discussed issue of overtraining, which could hamper the ability to become involved in other aspects of campus life thus preventing isolation or exclusion, the athletes described other examples of racism. Adam said:

For example, if someone sees me off-campus, they are afraid, but if they see me on campus with the other players, I am still the same guy, but you feared me when you didn't know I was an athlete.

This culture of fear has become engrained in American society due to factors such as depictions of Black men harming White women dating back to the early 1900s as well as modern disparities in incarceration, leading to the perception that Black men are violent and menacing (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016, p.355).

A related issue involved the fear for one's safety. Carl reported that he felt concerned for his safety due to racism. For example, on several different occasions, students or other fans called him the "N" word after a game to express their opinion that he did not play well. This experience is both threatening and intimidating, especially given the lack of support from his White teammates.

Theme 2: Depression and burnout. This theme relates to feelings of depression and burnout related to training and competition as well as a psychiatric diagnosis of a depressive disorder. When referring to “demons” that he faces every day, Bob noted that he previously struggled with a depression diagnosis. He experiences feelings of exhaustion and admitted to feeling depressed due to injuries related to overtraining and pushing himself to succeed. He remarked:

When you have worked so hard to overcome things in the past and feel like you still can't get ahead, it would make anyone feel like a failure.

Bob also described feeling frustrated, weak at times, and disappointed in himself.

Adam and Carl addressed the theme of depression as well. Adam commented:

And I know maybe it sounds stupid, but some people eat when they're depressed; I play basketball.

He also described life without basketball as “emptiness.” Carl noted that he often felt isolated from his teammates, particularly because he was the only African American player on his team. This sense of isolation, at times, led to feeling depressed. Like Bob, Adam was diagnosed with a depressive disorder earlier in life. However, a striking difference between the athletes with respect to the theme of depression is that while Bob and Carl seem to experience depressive feelings as a result of playing sports, Adam uses basketball to relieve depressive feelings.

Feelings of depression may be associated with burnout. Depression is characterized, in part, by a depressed mood and anhedonia, or the loss of interest in pleasurable activities. Burnout is associated with “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment” (Bianchi, Schonfeld, & Laurent, 2014, p.308). The literature suggests that burnout and depression are correlated, particularly with respect to emotional exhaustion (Bianchi

et al., 2014, p.318). It is not surprising then that the athletes expressed feeling burned out. For example, in high school, Adam said:

I liked to train, but I just didn't want to do it anymore. And at the time, I wasn't sad about it; I was just sad that I would go to practice, and I would have feelings that I didn't want to be there...I just want to sleep. I don't want to do this. I want to go out to hang out with my friends.

After an injury during high school basketball, he recounted that:

I just felt like I had tapped out my mental bank. I'd be like, 'I'm quitting; I'm not doing this anymore.'

Research Question Three

The third research question is "How has the student athlete dealt with these challenges?" The themes that emerged related to this question were uncovered through the analysis of the entire interview transcripts, rather than relying on any one individual question. Two themes emerged related to this question: (a) increased effort to succeed and (b) substance abuse.

Theme 1: Increased Effort to Succeed. The responses by the three athletes interviewed for this study regarding how they cope with the challenges identified through the two previous research questions revealed both adaptive and maladaptive strategies. One strategy common to all three athletes was the desire to push forward and succeed in the face of adversity or challenge. Adam noted:

Because it [basketball] was such a big part of my life, I didn't want to lose all of it, so I train for my sport so hard.

When faced with a potentially career-ending injury, he gave his full efforts at rehabilitation.

Adam also commented:

I wanna play in the NBA, so I gotta practice harder and harder.

Bob also reflected on his efforts to overcome personal challenges related to playing collegiate sports, which in his case centered on the temptation to use drugs and alcohol.

I worked hard to achieve elite status. I sacrificed a lot, and to see all that hard work fall to the wayside can be even more depressing. I am working hard to keep my head up and stay focused. I want to break this cycle once and for all... I may not be able to play this year, but I want to come back stronger next year.

Theme 2: Substance Abuse. A final, yet significant, emerging theme from the interviews of the three athletes was drug and alcohol use. Although this is a challenge for at least two of the athletes, this theme is categorized under the third research question because it was identified as a means to cope with the pressures of being an African American collegiate athlete. While not all of the athletes have abused substances, each of them discussed this topic in relation to a means to deal with challenges. In general, male collegiate athletes report a greater frequency of drinking episodes and binge drinking as well as increased likelihood to use performance enhancing drugs and smokeless tobacco than their non-athlete peers (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014, p.557). African American athletes may be at particular risk for substance abuse issues due to their unique stressors and pressures (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014, p.559), such as the stressors of racism and the fear of losing scholarship money identified in the data of this study.

Two of the athletes interviewed referenced the issue of substance abuse as a coping strategy. Although Adam did not admit to using drugs or alcohol, he did note that his friends encouraged him to do so as a means to cope with the pressure of being a collegiate athlete. He commented:

That's a lot of pressure to make it. My friends tell me to drink the pressure off or smoke weed to relax. I can't do that. We have piss test and if I fail my test, I lose it all...

In contrast to Adam, Bob discussed at length his history of substance abuse. He referred to this problem as his "demon" and something that was difficult to keep from affecting his performance on the field. According to this athlete:

When you have worked so hard to overcome things in the past and feel like you still can't get ahead, it would make anyone feel like a failure. I know the answer is not to go back to what I was doing, but sometimes I am not sure how else I am going to deal with everything. There is so much pressure...

Bob also explained that his temptation to use alcohol and drugs makes him feel weak and disappointed in himself.

Drugs have a way of convincing you to do things that your sober mind knows is wrong, but you somehow justify the behavior. You don't think about consequences. That's not where your mind is; you just want to feel better and you will do anything you can to feel better.

He said that sometimes it comes down to wanting to do anything to feel better. He associated this with the pressure from so many different directions and the feeling of working so hard and never getting ahead. This can surely also be attributed to the struggle of the one-dimensional life and being allowed little or no time for anything else. For anyone, it is no way to live. It is especially no way to live for a young person.

Substance abuse is, of course, an extreme way of dealing with such pressures. Only one athlete interviewed admitted to actual abuse, but all admitted to using either marijuana or alcohol as a means of coping. The opposite extreme, however, can also be detrimental. Interviewee Bob

said that he trained so hard that he injured himself and did not yet know if he would be able to play in the next season or not. In fact, all the athletes interviewed mentioned injuries that they had sustained from overtraining that had threatened their playing sports. Although they both had come through rehab, there were still uncertainties. The dangers associated with overtraining were clear to these athletes.

An overview of the themes described in the preceding sections is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Research Questions and Emerging Themes

<u>Research Questions</u>	<u>Emerging Themes</u>
In your opinion, why do elite African American male athletes experience challenges at the collegiate level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overtraining • Fear of losing scholarship opportunities • Fans turning against the athletes • Failure to meet or fear of not meeting competition goals
How would you describe being an elite African American male athlete at a predominately White university?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism • Depression and burnout
How has the student athlete dealt with these challenges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased effort to succeed • Substance abuse

Evaluation of Findings

The research questions in this study were created to gain greater insight into the experiences of African American male athletes attending predominantly White institutions. The

literature indicates that these athletes are at increased risk for unique stressors and challenges as compared to White athletes, such as lower graduation rates, (Southall et al., 2015, p.407), substance abuse (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014, p.557), and stereotyping and racism (Bridges, 2010, p.15). An understanding of these issues from the viewpoint of the African American male athlete may help educational leaders develop strategies to more effectively address the needs of this population and promote success both within school and after graduation. This section presents an evaluation of the themes uncovered with respect to each research question.

Research Question One. The purpose of this research question was to identify the unique challenges that African American male athletes face at predominantly White universities. The study participants identified several prominent challenges, including overtraining, the fear of losing scholarship opportunities, fans turning against them, and the fear of not meeting competition goals. The issue of overtraining, as a challenge, is supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. The athletes in this study noted feelings of depression and physical exhaustion related to the high number of hours they devote weekly to training and play. Maslow (1943) explained that physiological needs, such as hunger and thirst, must first be satisfied in order for the individual to experience self-esteem and motivation (p. 373). Overtraining may deprive the athlete of these basic needs, leaving little time for sleep or adequate nutrition thus serving as a roadblock to success.

The fear of losing scholarship opportunities may also be supported in the literature. The NCAA maintains strict academic standards for athletes, tracking their success through grades, credit hours per year, and progress towards their degree (NCAA, 2018). If athletes do not meet these standards, they are in danger of losing their academic scholarships that enable them to play sports. African American athletes face a number of challenges that can negatively impact their

academic success and potentially threaten their ability to maintain scholarships and eligibility to play, including reduced motivation, discrimination, social isolation, and poverty (Baker & Hawkins, 2016, p. 73). None of the athletes interviewed gave much indication of their academic standing. Although they did say that they did not have much time to study, they all identified studying as one of the things they had to do and one of the things that caused them to have little time otherwise. A common perception among college faculty and fellow students is the dumb jock stereotype. Many students, especially those who are Black, are seen as primarily attending college for sports. As Adam said:

They have us here because of our athletic prowess.

In fact, all too often, these student-athletes are seen as not being able to excel at both sports and academics. In one study, African American students reported feeling more pressure than their White counterparts to prove that they also belong on the academic side of campus (Stone, 2012). Simply, they are not expected to thrive academically. The strong expectation in the area of sports contrasted with the nonexistent expectation in the area of learning is also certainly a challenge for these students. They are made to believe that they are one thing and cannot be another.

In identifying those they felt pressure and expectation from, all of the athletes interviewed included their coaches among this number. With the rate of incarceration among African American males in the United States, it is reasonable to assume that many of these student athletes have fathers who are in jail or have been in jail. Each of the interviewed students said that their fathers were not in the picture. Therefore, too often, coaches take on the role of father figure. They are the closest person some of these athletes, those who are African American especially, have to a father. The desire to meet these expectations is great. Paired with the responsibility they feel to them as coaches, this pressure builds up to a major stressor.

And yet, this close-knit team atmosphere is a place where these athletes can feel that they belong. They may not have felt this before. In communities where crime runs rampant or even in the projects, as Bob stated he grew up, they may have fit in when a game was being played but not in the criminal activities that occurred. College sports teams become like family, a family that believes in them, knows they can do a great job, looks to them for support and, ultimately, success. The safety they feel in this non-biological family becomes something of a cocoon that they retreat to and often drives them away from socialization among non-athlete students. This is not to say that having such a team family is not a good thing, but there is always the need for diversity in order to be well-rounded. Also, the expectation that comes from this sort of team family can be overwhelming and lead to negative compensation.

It takes speaking with these athletes and listening to their stories, their tone, and their angst to truly come close to understanding how they feel and the struggles they face. Those moments on the field or court directly following a touchdown, a home run, or a free throw, those moments when thousands of fans are exuberant and cheering, are only the tip of the iceberg for these student-athletes. Certainly, those moments are exhilarating, but many hours of hardship are behind them. It was clear in listening to these three athletes that they are quite conflicted about the sports that they play and the very close relationship they have with them and have had most of their lives. The truth is that they do love the sport, but many of the factors that accompany it, especially at the college level, are very difficult to bear. The expectations, the pressure, and the relentless training too often suck the fun out of the sport they once used as a means of escape. Perhaps, this is the root of every other challenge they feel as African American college athletes.

Diversity is almost always accompanied by stereotype. This is seen clearly where African American men are concerned in any setting. Such stereotypes have existed for centuries and,

though formal segregation in schools is over, it is still seen clearly in educational settings.

Opportunities are not the same for African American males, even when they do overcome their upbringing and find their way to a better life. The precedent is long-standing and will not be remedied overnight. The problem is that remedy lies in people's perceptions, the way individuals see things. Prejudice runs deep and is too often passed from one generation to the next. This thwarts the chance for students such as Adam, Bob, and Carl to have a place both on the field and in the classroom. There are, however, things that can and should be done toward changing this trend and offering well-deserved equality, reasonable expectations, less pressure, and real opportunities.

On a very large scale, the societal differences between African Americans, particularly men, and other races need to change. Income segregation stems from a lack of opportunity that stems from the perception that African American men are thugs. This is the same as saying that all White men are car salesmen or that all Muslims know how to make bombs. Generalizations simply do not work. In fact, they work against people in ways that gravely affect their families and lives. These perceptions in society must change in order for changes to take place for African American student athletes and others. The hard fact is that such societal prejudices create a vicious cycle for those that are targeted. If these perceptions persist, they will not be able to rise above what they are thought to be, losing hope, as a result; they will continue in the path that their fathers, brothers and neighbors have taken before them, repeating the cycle. The education system should encourage many forms of learning and motivation. Not only should student-athletes, especially those of color, be given an expectation of success on the field, they should be given the expectation of success in the classroom. Clearly, these students feel the conflicting pull of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and expectations (Gobin, 2012). They know what they want

on the inside but feel the external expectations placed on them. It is unreasonable to ever expect sports to resort to something just fun to do at the college level. However, the atmosphere surrounding college sports and the student body as well as societal expectations must change in order for students such as Adam and Bob to feel any relief. Black college athletes, just like Black males in society at large, feel pressures and experience challenges that are unique to them. Such challenges push some of these people down and lead them to feel that there is no way out other than a life of crime. Some, however, rise above that. Those who do should be given every opportunity and motivation to stay on that upward path.

A third challenge identified by study participants was coping with fans that turn against the athletes. The data suggested that, for these athletes, the fans were congenial and supportive when the athlete performed well but confrontational and even racist when they did not. For some athletes, this stark contrast may create a rift between the private persona or inner self and the public persona, leading to disparities in self-identity (Adler & Adler, 1989, p. 299).

Finally, the athletes expressed concern over not being able to meet competition goals. The athletes experienced significant pressure to perform well at the risk of losing their position on the team if they did not. These fears are supported by research, which suggests African American athletes are admitted solely based on their athletic ability with little regard to academic performance (Cooper et al., 2017, p. 62). Given that some of the athletes in this study view collegiate sports as an opportunity to overcome poverty, the threat of losing one's position with little academic standing or skills upon which to fall back may induce fear. Additionally, failure to meet competition goals may lead to an "unwelcoming collegiate environment" (Cooper et al., 2017, p. 62), as experienced by at least two of the athletes who faced scrutiny and racism after underperforming in a game.

Research Question Two. This research question was created to provide additional insight into the challenges faced by African American athletes as well as their personal experiences. Two central themes emerged, including racism and depression and burnout. Racism is alive and well in the United States, including on college campuses, and the experiences of these athletes are supported by the literature. Du Bois (2013) described racism in the postsecondary environment at the turn of the 20th century, noting that one of the consequences of speaking out against an Alabama senator who had recently published racist writings attacking African Americans was a failing mark on his master's thesis in retaliation for speaking his mind (p. 373). While such a scenario may not occur so blatantly today, 52% of Whites and 81% of African Americans consider racism to be a significant issue in modern society (Bailik, 2018). The effects of racism, such as a sense of hopelessness and reduced graduation rates among African American athletes, can be devastating (Njororai, 2012, p. 41). Personal backgrounds and home lives of African American players should also be considered in this equation. In the 2014 Census, the latest data available, African Americans had a 26.2% poverty rate equating to about 10.8 million people of this ethnicity living in poverty (DeNavas-Walt, 2015). Unfortunately, many turn to crime, gangs, or drugs as a means of rising above these circumstances. Going to college is not the typical way out. In such situations, many people end up in jail, usually on drug charges. However, if the drug charge involves a weapon, which is often does, the sentence is even harsher. This leaves poverty stricken families behind with few or no opportunities to escape.

Even in cases that are not gang or drug related, African American men are targeted and deprived of opportunity. Cases like the ones of Trayvon Martin or Michael Brown illustrate this prejudice and stereotyping. African American men going to college, whether on sports

scholarships or not, are generally not common. It is proven that African American men make up a far larger percentage of the prison population than any other single race. The Federal Bureau of Prisons says that Black men make up 37.6% of the prison population (BOP, 2016). This is not far below half and astonishing to say the least. Such mass incarceration devastates the lives of African American men (Smith, 2010) and is widely studied by psychologists and criminologists.

Many people see African American men as stereotypes. Because of media perception, they see criminals, people who hurt others, commit crime, or do other such dark deeds. There are few portrayals of educated, enlightened young Black men. However, portrayals of Black men as uneducated drug dealers, pimps and thugs abound and are even celebrated in many cases (Evans, 2009). In fact, Adam, one of the athletes, identifies this very thing as one of his struggles. At six feet, two inches tall and 180 pounds, Adam says that he is constantly discriminated against:

For example, if someone sees me off-campus, they are afraid, but if they see me on campus with the other players I am...

His words trail off. He is still the same guy, he says, but feared by some when they do not know he is an athlete. He goes on to half-joke that the uniform changes people's opinion of him as an African American male. Out of the uniform, African American men like Adam have to carefully consider how to handle everyday situations that most White men would not think twice about. This is because of the stereotypes that surround them. If they do not consider such situations, they run a risk of ending up out of a job, in jail, or dead (Singer, 2002). In some ways, then, the uniform is a means of protection. However, as these stereotypes are often misguided, the protection should not be necessary in the first place. This adds extra challenges to Black college athletes.

Considering the statistics of crime rates, prison percentages, and general stereotypes around African American men, it is easy to see why going to college is a great accomplishment for someone from such a situation as well as a great source of pride for the family. While this is definitely a positive life event, it creates expectations that are often unattainable and very stress inducing. Each of the students interviewed included pressures from family to stick with it and perform in their sport. Bob said that his older brother had been in and out of jail and, as a result, he knew early on that he did not want to go down that road. Not only does he want to avoid that, he wants to be a source of pride for his mother and a role model for his little brothers as well as for other young Black children. Whether or not their parents put pressure on them to perform, they feel a pressure to make them proud and to be one of the ones who makes it out of the stereotypical situation. They want to be different and make something of their lives. They put pressure and expectation on themselves as much, if not more, as their families do.

Financial issues are at the very heart of many of their challenges as African American athletes and students. All participants identified money as being a major obstacle. Indeed, income segregation between White people and Black people has increased in the past 40 years (Mode, 2016). These athletes can attest to that fact. When asked what challenges African American athletes experience at the collegiate level, Bob said that money would be the first thing. For him, it was a pressure that he was broke and did not have money to send home to his family. He said that his mother and little brothers need things and his father is not around. Though he said he was glad that his father was not around, as he was an alcoholic and abuser, he was regretful that he could not provide the things his family needed. He said, simply, that there are not enough hours in the day to do all that he wants to do.

According to the data, African American male athletes may also experience depression and burnout. In general, depression among collegiate athletes is not supported by the research literature, as participation in sports may have a protective effect (Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010, p. 214). However, racism against African Americans is associated with increased depressive symptoms (Mouzon & McLean, 2017, p. 45). Therefore, it is possible that these male athletes experience depression due to the racism they experience both on and off campus.

Research Question Three. The purpose of the third research question was to gain insight into how African American male athletes cope with the stressors they reported throughout the interviews. Two central themes emerged in relation to this question, including an increased effort to succeed and substance abuse. The latter of these is particularly salient, as up to 93% of collegiate athletes report using alcohol in the past year, 28% report using marijuana, 50% report using smokeless tobacco, and 3% admit to the use of stimulants (Reardon & Creado, 2014, p. 96). African American athletes may be at particular risk for substance use as they often face social isolation, unrealistic pressure to succeed, racism, and racism-associated depression (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014, p. 559).

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with an overview of the research purpose, a brief description of the data collection and analysis procedures, and the description of the three research questions. Question one sought to uncover the unique challenges faced by African American male collegiate athletes, while question two sought to gain insight into the lived experience of the athlete. The third research question asked how these athletes coped with the challenges identified by the prior two questions. The study results were presented, including an overview of the three study participants, further details pertaining to the study methodology, and the findings

associated with each research question. After presenting the emerging themes in the data, an evaluation of the findings from each research question was presented in light of extant literature.

Research question one, which addressed the challenges that African American athletes may experience at the collegiate level, revealed four emergent themes. These themes included overtraining, fear of losing scholarship opportunities, fans turning against the athletes, and failure to meet or fear of not meeting competition goals. Athletes devote a significant amount of hours to their sport each week, potentially detracting from their ability to obtain adequate sleep or nutrition or participate in other campus activities. Further, as discussed by Bob, overtraining can lead to physical injury and a compromised ability to play the sport. Athletes also feared losing scholarships if their performance, either academically or physically, was inadequate. Given that these athletes hailed from low-income households, scholarships provided their only opportunity to attend college. A third theme addressed contradictory fans that supported the athletes in times of success but spoke out harshly against them in times of underperformance. Fans were particularly problematic for Carl, the only African American on his baseball team, who endured racial slurs at the hands of White fans. Finally, the athletes feared the inability to meet competition goals, reporting a significant pressure to perform and keep pace with other athletes.

Research question two delved more deeply into the experiences of African American collegiate athletes. Two themes emerged based on this question: racism and depression/burnout. Each of the athletes described incidents of racism, ranging from blatant racial expletives to fear expressed by White students towards an African American athlete. One athlete expressed fear for his safety due to the racism he experienced. Depression and the related construct of burnout were additional significant concerns. All three athletes reported depressive symptoms. However, a

notable difference among these athletes was that two of them associated the depression with playing their sport, while the third athlete used his sport to alleviate his depression. The athletes also reported emotional exhaustion due to their rigorous training schedules, a symptom of burnout.

The final research question sought to uncover how these student-athletes cope with the challenges they experience. Two themes were evident, the positive coping strategy of increased effort to succeed and the maladaptive coping strategy of substance use or abuse. All three of the athletes noted the importance of pushing forward and exerting effort in order to succeed, even in the face of adversity. Two athletes described the pressure to use alcohol or drugs, although only one of the athletes interviewed admitted to doing so. This particular athlete admitted the struggle to remain clean and how his temptation and struggles negatively impacted his self-perceptions.

The next and final chapter, chapter five, will present a discussion of these findings. This discussion will include further comparison of the results to the research literature, study limitations, implications for future research, implications and recommendations for counselor education, supervision, and clinical practice, and a personal statement regarding the research study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Elite African American male athletes face a number of challenges unique to their population. Although they are a minority in the country, they are often overrepresented in collegiate athletics (NCAA, n.d.). This overrepresentation may be attributed to a number of factors, not the least of which may be the stereotype that African Americans excel at sports rather than academics. Racism such as this, in conjunction with other factors identified in the previous chapter such as burnout, substance abuse, and pressure to excel, can have a significant impact on the experience of African American athletes at predominantly White institutions.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the challenges faced by elite African American male athletes who attend predominantly White universities. In order to accomplish this purpose, a qualitative case study approach was adopted. This design was the most appropriate strategy for obtaining detailed, in-depth information about the unique experiences of individuals. In addition to interviews that utilized open-ended and probing questions, the researcher maintained a journal of notes. Bracketing, the process of identifying researcher assumptions and biases, was performed through critical self-reflection and conversations with peers in order to minimize bias in the study results and interpretation.

Three participants were selected for inclusion in this study. Each of the three subjects, designated as Adam, Bob, and Carl, were undergraduate African American student athletes with two or more playing seasons. These athletes participated in baseball, basketball, and football, respectively. The athletes were interviewed, and the notes transcribed for analysis.

Since human subjects were used in this study, consideration was given to ethical principles. The identity of the subjects was concealed through the use of a pseudonym, and any specific personally identifying information, such as the individual's hometown or specific

university, was not included in the findings. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason.

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide a discussion and analysis of the findings presented in chapter four. These findings are first considered in light of existing literature, and the first section is organized by the specific research question. Next, the study limitations and implications are presented, the latter of which addresses areas for future research, athlete identity formation, counseling students and supervisors, and the counseling profession. The chapter concludes with a personal statement from the research and a summary of the chapter.

Comparison to Literature

Challenges Faced by Elite African American Athletes at Predominantly White Universities

One of the themes identified by the study participants was overtraining, in which collegiate athletes may push themselves to the point of physical and emotional exhaustion. Adam noted that he often devotes 80 hours per week to practice and training. The training of elite athletes should include some degree of overload, as this promotes improved performance. However, overtraining, which refers to excessive training and stress that results in decreased performance, can be harmful (Meeusen et al., 2013, p. 2). In addition to performance decline, athletes who over train may experience fatigue and mood disturbances which may take months to recover. Approximately 64% of athletes experience overtraining at some point in their careers (Meeusen et al., 2013, p. 4).

In addition to overtraining, elite African American athletes at predominantly White schools face the challenge of maintaining scholarship money. The athletes in this study described poor economic conditions in their home lives. Without the scholarships associated with the

sports they play, they may be unable to obtain a college education. Fears regarding the loss of scholarship are not unfounded. According to Reynolds, Fisher, and Cavil (2012), many minority students are recruited to play collegiate sports from urban areas. These areas are often a lower socioeconomic status than suburban areas, and schools may possess fewer resources. Students who attend inner-city public schools may receive lower quality education and thus be less prepared to succeed academically in college (p. 97). Without some degree of academic achievement, athletes may be at risk of losing their scholarships. Compounding the issue is the income disparity between African Americans and Whites. In 2016, African American men and women earned 70% and 82%, respectively, of their White counterparts (United States Department of Labor, 2017). African American athletes who lose their scholarships due to academic reasons may be unable to afford to continue attending school due to inadequate family financial resources.

The pressure to perform academically in order to maintain a scholarship may be compounded by the pressure to succeed athletically. The athletes in this study expressed that significant pressure existed to succeed in their sport and that competition was fierce. This pressure arose from a variety of sources, including coaches, teammates, family members, and the athletes themselves. Bob expressed his constant concern over losing his position on the team.

This pressure to succeed may be grounded in racist ideology. According to Njororai (2012), the dominant culture in the United States has socialized African Americans into believing that the only way they can succeed in life is through athletics (p. 43). African American families may push their children into sports at the expense of other career paths for a variety of reasons. African American males are often stereotyped as athletically superior yet intellectually inferior to Whites. Further, the media portrays sports as a means for African

Americans to gain social and economic mobility (Njororai, 2012, p. 49). Athletes such as LeBron James and Antonio Brown are glorified in the media. Thus, pressure is placed upon African American males to succeed in sports due in part to the stereotypical belief that it is the only area in which they are capable of succeeding and the only career path that will bring them economic freedom and success.

The Lived Experiences of Elite African American Athletes at Predominantly White Institutions

When questioned about their experience as an elite African American male at a predominantly White university, the three athletes highlighted racism, depression, and burnout as the most significant issues. Racism has persisted in the United States for well over a century, leading to the stereotyping of African American men as violent and aggressive (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016, p. 5), qualities that perhaps align with success in athletics. These stereotypes, as well as individual-level microaggressions and the inequities which exist within postsecondary institutions, housing, and labor markets, can have negative effects on African Americans (Mouzon & McLean, 2017, p. 37). These effects include depression and serious psychological distress (Mouzon & McLean, 2017, p. 43). Carl expressed psychological distress over the racism he experienced when disgruntled fans yelled at him, using the “N-word,” and fearing for his own safety. Like the other two African American athletes, Carl experienced depressive symptoms in relation to playing his sport.

Depression, as well as burnout, can negatively affect the well-being of African American athletes. The research pertaining to depression among athletes presents mixed findings. Proctor and Boan-Lenzo (2010) reported that, in general, collegiate athletics conferred a protective effect against depression when athletes were compared with non-athletes (p. 214). Other studies

reported similar findings (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009; Armstrong et al., 2015). However, Proctor contended that burnout is closely related to depression, as 63% of study participants with burnout also reported a history of depression (p. 314). Given that overtraining is associated with burnout in athletes, and the symptoms of burnout and depression demonstrate overlap (Cureton, 2009, p. 31-32), it is possible that elite athletes are at increased risk for depression.

Coping Strategies of Elite African American Athletes at Predominantly White Institutions

The African American athletes in this study identified two coping strategies, increased effort to succeed and substance abuse. The latter of these two strategies, though maladaptive, may be prevalent among these athletes. Male student athletes report higher numbers of drinking and binge drinking episodes than non-athletes (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014, p. 558). However, these findings are not specific to the African American male athlete population. The NCAA reported that 59% of African American athletes and 83% of White athletes consume alcohol, and 20% of African American athletes and 26% of White athletes use marijuana. Fewer African American athletes than White athletes use stimulants, ecstasy, LSD, and narcotic pain medications. These findings suggest that, while substance abuse does exist in the African American athlete population, it may be more prevalent among White athletes (NCAA, 2018).

Study Limitations

This study is associated with several limitations. The most significant limitation is the use of only three research subjects, which could impact external validity. Due to this small number, the results from this study and the experiences described by the study subjects may not generalize to the entire population of African American collegiate athletes (Atieno, 2009). Researcher bias represents another possible limitation. Although bracketing was performed in order to reduce bias, it is possible that the interpretation of the interview transcripts is subject to

the prior values and beliefs of the researcher. The presence of the researcher during the data collection process could affect the subjects' responses, as they may feel compelled to state what they believe the researcher desires to hear. Finally, since the interviews were conducted in person, it was not possible to maintain full anonymity. Steps were taken to ensure that the identity of the study subjects remained concealed, such as the use of a pseudonym and omitting any personally identifying information from the report; however, their identity did not remain hidden from the researcher (Anderson, 2010).

Study Implications

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study suggest that a significant area for future research is the risk for and interventions associated with drug and alcohol abuse among collegiate African American athletes. While a handful of studies suggest that these athletes may be at increased risk due to factors such as increased pressure for success in sports, burnout, and depression, a dearth of research exists in this area (Outlaw & Toriello, 2014, p. 558). Reardon and Creado (2014) also noted that little research exists pertaining to the counseling of collegiate athletes who abuse substances (p. 102). A specific area for further exploration is the efficacy of motivational interviewing approach with athletes who use or are contemplating the use of drugs or alcohol. This treatment approach incorporates empathy, using discrepancies to clarify goals and interests, and encouraging self-efficacy (Reardon & Creado, 2014, p. 102). However, it is also important to remember that "one size does not fit all," which implies that although motivational interviewing is a useful tool for intervening with this population, there are other approaches that can also be as effective. The key factor is to not limit the approaches based on popularity of the approach but to utilize an approach that is the most effective for each individual athlete.

Elite African American Male Identity at a Predominantly White University

Athletics may play a major role in the identity of African American males. Within the African American community, there is the expectation or belief that hard work, talent, and determination will enable one to experience some measure of success, and prosperity in spite of the racism endured. However, inadequate employment opportunities for minorities and the wage gap between Blacks and Whites (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017) may change the path that some African Americans follow to achieve the American Dream. Sports may become the means to achieve success when other pathways are blocked (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009, p. 102) due to the fact that sports will incur monetary rewards for the university and economy.

The athlete can be a symbol of success within the African American community, and this identity may be adopted at an early age for males (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009, p. 102). The athletic identity consists of four distinct components, including access and introduction to the sport at a young age. In the case of Bob and Adam, both men began playing at a young age in excess of a decade. The second component of the athlete identity is identification with professional athletes, which may include the purchase of team paraphernalia (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009, p. 103). For example, Bob desired to play professional football from a young age, thus perhaps identifying with those athletes. The third and fourth aspects of the athletic identity are social recognition of and full immersion into the identity. Others in the community, such as teachers and peers, recognize the individual for his athletics, and this identity may overtake other aspects of self, limiting development in other directions (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009, p. 102). This component of identity was evident in Adam's description of his participation in sports prior to college. He stressed that:

I sleep, I eat, and I play basketball. Basketball was such a big part of me.

Further identity development may occur as the athlete, now immersed in his sport as an adolescent, adopts the role of collegiate athlete. Highly successful collegiate athletes often become celebrities, perhaps not only within the confines of their own school but also within the public at large. Adler and Adler (1989) described a new type of identity, which can emerge in this case, called the Glorified Self. As previously discussed in chapter one, the Glorified Self is characterized by the development of a public persona, often created by the media, which differs from the athlete's internal self. The public persona may be based on stereotypes and is less complex than the athlete's true identity. However, through repeated exposure to public glorification, athletes may begin to adopt this public identity, leading to inner conflict. Although the athlete may desire to become this heroic figure projected onto him by others, he simultaneously feels guilt and hesitancy about doing so. Eventually, the athlete must resolve the conflict between the desire for recognition and flattery and the desire to maintain a true sense of self (Adler & Adler, 1989).

The failure to resolve this conflict may have negative consequences for the athlete. The consequences of self-aggrandizement, or adopting the public persona as one's identity, may include an intense focus on the present at the expense of considering the future. The inability to plan for the future may negatively impact the athlete's desire to succeed academically in preparation for a career outside of sports. Another consequence may be a diminished sense of self, in which the athlete loses interest in activities, goal, or people that were once important to him. A sense of self-detachment may follow as a gap forms between the two selves. The athlete may find it difficult to integrate two divergent identities (Adler & Adler, 1989).

The athletes who participated in this study did not appear to demonstrate a glorified self, although the possibility does exist for its development. Adam explained that students at his

school love their basketball team. Although the fans may have been be derogatory when he or his teammates did not perform according to expectations, their success was met with adulation, such as the standing ovation he received in class after a win. The potential for identity conflict between the glorified self and the true inner self has important implications for counselors, as discussed in the next section.

Implications for Counselor Education, Supervision, and Clinical Practice

The findings from this study hold important implications for counselor education programs, supervision, and clinical practice. Racism is an issue that must be adequately addressed in counselor education programs. Harper (2016) contended that, “Racism and routine encounters with racial stereotypes are among many factors that undermine Black students’ persistence rates and sense of belonging on predominantly White campuses” (p. 17). Counselor trainees must adequately explore their own racial biases and prejudices through self-reflection and should intentionally seek opportunities to work with individuals of different ethnicities and races. In order to best serve the needs of African American athletes at White universities, counseling students must develop multicultural competencies. Supervisors, in turn, must be knowledgeable about the unique issues that African American athletes face and possess strong multicultural competency, as well. In order to guide counseling trainees or other counselors, supervisors must also have experience working with minority individuals. Too often supervisors are individuals who graduated with counseling degrees, but who may lack, or have limited actual experience of working with individuals who are different. This lack of direct interaction can pose challenges for the supervisor who will then become less effective when providing supervision to counselors working with diverse populations.

Clinical counseling practice must strive to provide high quality resources and assistance to vulnerable populations. African American male athletes are at increased risk for depression, burnout, and substance abuse. These athletes also graduate from college at rates lower than their White counterparts. For example, 53.6% of Black athletes graduate in six years, a figure lower than the 68.5% of athletes overall. In addition, two-thirds of major universities demonstrate lower graduation rates for African American male athletes than American African male non-athletes (Harper, 2016, p. 1). Thus, counselors who work with African American collegiate athletes should ensure that the student athletes receive academic as well as psychological support services as an essential component of their treatment plan.

Recommendations for the Counseling Profession

The counseling profession must address the unique challenges faced by African American collegiate athletes through education and advocacy. The profession has an ethical responsibility to advocate for vulnerable populations and must therefore speak out against discrimination and racism, both individual and institutional. Counseling professionals should educate the public, including college students, on the role played by the media in propagating racial stereotypes, including the glorification of African American athletes and the failure to highlight the many accomplishments of other, non-athlete African Americans.

In addition to education and advocacy, the counseling professional should develop interventions tailored to the unique needs of these athletes. Counselors should be trained in screening for, diagnosing, and treating depression, burnout, and substance abuse within this population. Counselors should also develop effective interventions to help African American male athletes balance their school and training and successfully integrate their public and private personas.

Counselors should not neglect the basics when working with African American athletes by making false assumptions and ignoring the glaring needs of the athletes. Often counselors may presume that because athletes are “popular,” they receive all of the necessities from the coaching staff to meet their basic needs. Counselors must remember that coaches simply want to win games, and they are not concerned about whether their players can use appropriate grammar when interviewed by the media or whether there are family members or significant others applying pressures to the athlete. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the counselor to include these elements into the therapeutic environment when counseling athletes.

Personal Statement

This research study was a valuable learning experience in terms of understanding both myself, and the experiences of African American athletes. The bracketing process was valuable in helping me to identify my own stereotypes and biases, which admittedly included the perception that African Americans were more successful in athletics than Whites. The ability to set this perception aside when conducting the interviews helped me to become more objective and empathetic towards the three young men.

The most impactful statement from the three interviews was Carl’s description of racial harassment in response to his performance. I was shocked and saddened that White college students and perhaps other individuals in the stands would overtly harass and threaten him in this manner (negative name calling). As the only African American baseball player on the team, incidents such as this must have served to increase his feelings of isolation and fear. This particular story, in conjunction with the experiences and feelings expressed by the three study subjects, strengthened my resolve to advocate for this vulnerable population. Racism, whether openly expressed as in the case of Carl or more subtly revealed through stereotypes and biases, is

never acceptable. Counselors have an ethical duty to speak out against racism and can play an important role in raising awareness about this issue on college campuses across the nation. Although there have been indications that the climate in America has changed to what appears to be regression related to race relations (Harper, 2016), we know that the climate has not changed in terms of the need for monetary success. These young athletes will continue to stimulate the monetary economy and motivate investors to continue to invest in their lives; however, at what price? If we continue to allow these athletes to offer their talents, which results in the contribution of monetary resources to American society, yet not equip these athletes with appropriate tools to be successful off the sports field, we have certainly not provided them with the support that they desperately need. Although counseling mechanisms have been recommended in this study, it is a strong belief after talking with these young men that they are in need of a student athletic counseling center that would support their unique challenges. Due to the stigma that is, at times, attached to receiving counseling, a counseling center within the athletic center would be an effective means of addressing these athletes' challenges without them feeling the stigma that may be associated with the need for counseling.

Many athletes suffer in silence because they do not want their coaches or the public to know that they are experiencing problematic issues. Some coaches may observe some qualities of a psychological disorder in an athlete but may ignore them, stating to the athlete, "just kill on the field," in an effort to avoid publicity about the athlete's need for counseling. However, if a counseling center is located in the athletic department at universities, the stigma would be eliminated. Athletes who need counseling would feel less pressure about obtaining counseling services. Also, family therapy would be an approach that would be acceptable if the counseling clinic was located in the athletic department because families would be more prone to participate

and less fearful that “others” would learn about their problems. Currently, although there are counseling centers on university campuses, athletes seldom utilize the services due to many factors, such as stigma, isolation from teammates, and lack of playing time.

A counseling center for athletes would provide a holistic approach to counseling that would address the unique challenges that these athletes face. The counseling center would provide the support that these athletes need such as traditional counseling services, tutorial counseling where there is actual tutorial assistance provided to the athlete and not the athlete’s designee, career assistance to provide realistic perspectives for community transition or transition into professional arena of sports, help utilizing effective strategies for coping with issues of racism and discrimination, and advice regarding budgetary issues such as how to balance money beginning with their scholarship funds. These athletes are in need of “real” counseling services that will address “real” issues that they are experiencing, and their families will need to be included as a significant component of the services. This can be accomplished with the establishment of counseling centers for these athletes.

Policy & Recommendations

The success of a college athletic program depends heavily on the well-being of its athletes and their perceptions of the supportiveness and inclusivity of their institutions (Raglin 2001). The National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), in recognition of the role of the environment in bolstering athlete participation, created the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in 2005. The purpose of this department is to implement policies at all levels of a program that advocate for the needs of a diverse athlete population and to mitigate the common structural barriers to participation for athletes from every socioeconomic background (NCAA). This essay examines the issues related to inclusivity in collegiate sports and discuss certain activities and

policies that programs can implement that will help improve the well-being of their diverse athlete populations. Specifically, it looks at how introducing cultural competency training among the administrative staff and increasing the accessibility of psychological counseling can have a beneficial impact on student athletes' performances.

There is a serious disparity between the ethnic and racial composition of most school's administrative and training staff and the population of athletes they are there to support. Though the gaps are decreasing, the problem remains persistent. For example, the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) evaluated the racial composition of its members and compared this data to the racial composition of collegiate athletes. Though the percentage of black, non-Hispanic trainers increased significantly between 1997 and 2015 (from 1.2% to 3.4%), this greater representation is nowhere near the percentage of black, non-Hispanic athletes who compose about 15.4% of athletes in all divisions (Grantham 2015). The safety and well-being of minority-group athletes cannot wait for the racial composition of administrators to match theirs. Instead, cross-cultural training needs to become a requirement for every member of the program's administration. Effective programs will emphasize how administrators can use their discomfort in cross-cultural situations as a learning experience and will demonstrate how cultural differentiation, or the maintenance of one's home cultural while operating within an alternative values structure, can be a valuable asset for the program (Chebium 2015).

Racially sensitive and culturally responsive programs must go beyond rhetoric to ensure the success of student athletes after they have left the institution. Administrators must recognize how de facto race-neutral policies may actually contribute to racial disparities and the achievement gap between student athletes and non-athletes by ignoring the systemic racism that was built into the structure of college athletics (Cooper et al 2017). Accordingly, the success of

diversity initiative in athletics need to be based on outcomes rather than intent. One tool to help bridge the divide between the mission statements of colleges and the outcomes experienced by the athletes is to compensate coaches, trainers, and administrative employees based on the academic rather than athletic performance of the program's participants. This would help ameliorate the 'win at all costs' trend seen in many programs and replace it with an emphasis on the student in 'student athlete' (Saffici & Pellegrino 2012).

A central factor in the ability of the program to recruit and retain high-level athletes is the ability of the coaching and administrative staff to build a trusting relationship with a diverse group of students. Programs that reach out to athletes' families and demonstrate a concern for the holistic well-being of athletes are more likely to find loyal athletes who wish to join the program (McCaw 2014). Administrators who work to build open communication channels with their athletes and who view the purpose of the program as building moral and character development rather than solely athletic development will find that a team can succeed regardless of their win-loss ratio. Honesty and positivity are two coaching skills critical to this holistic approach. Holding office hours where students can receive tutoring or mentorship related to non-athletic subjects is one of the easiest methods for achieving this lofty goal (The Importance). Demonstrating concern for an athlete's growth off the field is a straightforward way for white administrators to earn the trust of black athletes.

Elite athletes face additional challenges to their psychological well-being of which the counselors working with them need to be aware. First, programs need to ensure their athletes understand how an emphasis on sports psychology can improve their athletic performance. To achieve this goal, coaches, trainers, and other support staff must be well versed on the resources that are available to athletes. They also need to have a better understanding of the purpose of

psychological counseling in the athletic setting to help circumvent the labelling of those seeking help as mentally ill. Coaches who better understand sport psychology are more likely to make it a part of the regular athletic training program rather than viewing it as a tool to treat problematic behavior (Gee & Luiselli 2010). Along with the misperceptions associated with sports psychology, a survey of undergraduate student athletes revealed that many viewed psychotherapy as an additional time constraint placed on an already busy schedule. A program that encourages athletes to be well-rounded people and moves away from the ‘win at all costs’ philosophy will find the integrating psychotherapy into the general training schedule rather than as an after-thought will produce more resilient and healthier student athletes (Watson 2006).

Student athletes, like all people, have a hierarchy of needs that need to be met to ensure that they are functioning physically, mentally, and socially at an optimal level. When these needs become stressed, the athlete’s overall well-being can become severely diminished (Lundqvist & Raglin 2015). Those athletes who struggle financially will likely have a difficult time meeting some of their most basic security needs, like a safe environment and healthy food choices. To help mitigate some of these problems, athletic administrators and psychological counselors who work with student athletes need to be aware about how student financial aid and scholarships are awarded and paid. They also need to know which athletes do not live in student housing and help them find ways to access to nutritional and housing assistance provided to their on-campus counterparts (Summers 2014). According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, student athletes concerned with the quality of their housing or the availability of nutritious food sources will be unable to achieve higher levels of psychological well-being until their most basic needs are met. Increasing the number of psychosocial needs that are met will help student athletes remained focused on achieving the stated athletic and academic goals of their programs (Sari 2015).

Counselors working with student athletes should use the tools developed in motivational interviewing to build trust with their clients and increase their internal motivation to engage in health-maintaining behaviors. The emphasis on goal attainment through incremental steps essential to the technique of motivational interviewing is particularly relevant to the psychological profile of an elite athlete. Therefore, the appropriate application of these methods can increase athlete retention in psychotherapy (Donohue et al 2018). The use of motivational interview is also helpful when white counselors work with black athletes because it places the client rather than the counselor as the agent of change. Qualitative data has shown how the disconnect between the aims of the counselor and the aims of the client can prevent the formation of the necessary therapeutic relationship (Levitt et al 2016). Empowering the athlete to set their own goals and standards can help alleviate the consequences of a ‘white savior complex’ in which the black client is seen as the passive recipient of the white counselor’s assistance.

Along with the utilization of the tools of motivational interviewing, counselors also need to be flexible in the theoretical approach they use in the counseling sessions, particularly when working with non-white clients. In a reflection about her time spent as a white counselor working in Uganda, Georgina Green (2014) acknowledges that the techniques of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) were not as useful in this population as they were in her home country of England. She argues that CBT was too focused on fixing what was broken rather than enhancing what was already working for a client. Certain situations in sports psychology are more appropriate than others for the implementation of principles from CBT. To assess the appropriateness of the strategy, counselors must perform in-depth needs assessments for each client (McArdle & Moore 2012).

In conclusion, there are several policy steps college athletic programs could take to improve mental wellness for their diverse athletes. First, the administration should require cultural competence training for all staff at every level of the program. Then it should incorporate psychotherapy sessions with a sports psychologist or other counselor as a regular part of the training process. Next, to help build social support, coaches and other trainers need to be available to athletes for mentorship in non-sports related subjects. Counselors working with athletes must always assess their most basic needs before moving on to higher psychological challenges. They should use motivational interviewing to empower their clients, an important step for building a therapeutic relationship between a white counselor and a black athlete. Finally, they need to be flexible in their approach, using the principles of CBT when appropriate but also drawing upon more holistic counseling theories. For these actions to be effective, however, counselors must work with athletic administrators to ensure the program is placing a significant value on the psychological and social well-being of the athletes and is not making competitive performance and higher priority than academic performance.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a brief summary of the study's purpose and methodology. The major themes identified in the previous chapter were considered in light of existing literature, and implications for research and counseling were presented. A personal statement was presented which described the need for greater awareness regarding the vulnerability of the study population and a need to provide effective services to these athletes and their families with the inclusion of student athletic counseling centers.

The results associated with research question one indicated that elite African American athletes who attend predominantly White universities face challenges related to overtraining, fear

of losing scholarship opportunities, fear of fans turning against them, and fear of failing to meet competition goals. These findings indicated that African American athletes are under significant pressure to succeed due, in part, to the need to maintain their funding to attend college and due, in part, to stereotyping of African Americans as gifted in athletics at the expense of academics. This pressure can lead to overtraining, which in turn can result in physical and emotional exhaustion and decreased performance.

Results from the second research question revealed that African American athletes experience depression and burnout as well as racism. The findings regarding depression are inconclusive when compared with existing literature that suggests participation in athletics may have a protective effect against this mental health disorder. However, the study subjects did describe feelings associated with burnout, a phenomenon linked to depressive symptoms and overtraining. Racism is a significant force in the lives of these and other minority athletes, leading to feelings of fear and social isolation.

The results from the third research question indicated that African American athletes may use different coping strategies to deal with increased pressure, overtraining, fears, racism, and discrimination. While these factors served to motivate the athletes to succeed, they may have also contributed to substance abuse. Two of the three subjects reported a history of substance abuse, one of which struggled significantly to remain sober so that he could continue to play his sport. The existing research literature does not support the idea that African American athletes at predominantly White institutions experience substance abuse more frequently than Whites. The difference in the literature and the findings of this study suggest that substance abuse among this population is an area in which further research is needed.

Cumulatively, these findings have important implications for the counseling profession. In order to best serve this vulnerable population, counseling trainees must develop multicultural competencies and obtain greater knowledge of the challenges faced by these athletes. The profession can serve members of this population by providing academic support, as African American athletes graduate college at lower rates than White athletes, helping athletes to manage their time and to recognize the symptoms of burnout and overtraining, screening for burnout, depression, and substance abuse, and providing culturally sensitive interventions and prevention programs to African American athletes. Counseling professionals must strive to eliminate racism in universities and colleges and advocate for the equitable treatment of African American athletes by their peers, their coaches, and the institutions at which they are enrolled.

Finally, universities must begin to invest in these athletes in a holistic manner. These athletes bring in millions of dollars to universities who build laboratories and student centers with funds from sporting events, yet universities fail to provide a structure for these athletes to become successful off the field. This study has proven that there are numerous challenges that are unique to this population. However, there is limited advocacy for improving the success rates of these athletes off the field. There is also limited research considering the uniqueness of their challenges. These young men continue to be viewed as simply a monetary commodity that is a necessity to universities' revenue stream. It is time to begin to advocate for the preparation of these young men for success off the field. We need to spend an equal amount of time preparing them for community success just as the coaches spend the time preparing them for success on the field. One method of accomplishing this goal is to advocate for universities to utilize some of the funds that these young men bring into the university to sponsor a Support Clinic for their well-

being. In this manner, the university wins, the family wins, the athlete wins, and the community wins.

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Yin, R. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Yin, R. K. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE publications.

Yong Jae, K., Yonghwan, C., Wonseok, J., Sagas, M., & Otto Spengler, J. (2017). A hierarchical approach for predicting sport consumption behavior: A personality and needs perspective. *Journal of Sport Management*, 31(3), 213-228. doi:10.1123/jsm.2015-0142

Zimbalist, A. (2001). *Unpaid professionals: Commercialism and conflict in big-time college sports*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board

4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · www.ecu.edu/ORIC/irb

Notification of Continuing Review Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Kimberly Outlaw](#)

CC: [Mary Jackson](#)

Date: 4/22/2019

[CR00007698](#)

[UMCIRB 14-000299](#)

Re: Exploring The Challenges Of Elite African American Male Athletes AT
Predominately White Universities: Three Descriptive Case Studies

The continuing review of your expedited study was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 4/17/2019 to 4/16/2020. This research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6&7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Document	Description
Background.docx(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Background.docx(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Consent Forms(0.01)	Consent Forms

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418

IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: Invitation to Participate

Dear Participant,

I am Kimberly Outlaw a doctoral student at East Carolina University in the Department of Addiction and Rehabilitation Studies. I am asking you to take part in my research study entitled, “Exploring The Challenges Experienced by Elite African American Male Athletes at Predominately White Universities: Three Descriptive Case Studies”. The purpose of this research is to understand the challenges African Americans face while attending college and competing in their prospective sport. By doing this research, I hope to learn about the challenges African American athletes face while attending college and playing sports.

Your participation is voluntary. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are an African American athlete that participates in collegiate sports at your prospective university. I am asking to interview you about your collegiate experiences. The interviews will be audio recorded. The amount of time it will take you to complete this study is approximately one hour. Because this research is overseen by the ECU Institutional Review Board, some of its members or staff may need to review my research data. However, the information you provide will not be linked to you in any way. Therefore, your responses cannot be traced back to you by anyone, including me.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the UMCIRB Office at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of UMCIRB Office, at 252-744-1971. You do not have to take part in this research, and you can stop at any time. If you decide you are willing to take part in this study, thank you for taking the time to participate in my research.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Outlaw, MSW, CSOTS, MAC, CSAS, MSWAC, CCBT, LCAS-A

Principal Investigator

APPENDIX C: Background Information

Background:

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Home location:
4. Sport:
5. Profession and educational background:
6. Years in sport of any kind:
7. Sports participated in:
8. Years in current sport:
9. **Q1.** In your opinion, why do elite African American male athletes experience challenges at the collegiate level?
10. **Q2.** How would you describe being an elite African American male athlete at a predominately White university?
11. **Q3.** How has the student-athlete dealt with these challenges?

APPENDIX D: Curriculum Vitae

CURRICULUM VITAE

Kimberly R. Outlaw, MSW, LCAS-A

(252) 702-7488 (Cell)

Outlawk14@ecu.edu

Credential	Institution Name	Area of Study
Ph.D. Earned (2019) Spring	East Carolina University, Greenville, NC	Vocational; Addiction & Rehabilitation Studies
M.S.W.	East Carolina University, Greenville, NC	Clinical Community/Macro/Micro Social work
B.S.	East Carolina University, Greenville, NC	Child Development & Family Relations; Minor: Human Services
Certificate	East Carolina University, Greenville, NC	Substance Abuse
License	Licensed Clinical Addiction Specialist-20276-N.C. (Active) Clinically Certified Sex Offender Treatment Specialist (Active) Clinically Certified Sex Addiction Specialist (Active) Masters Addiction Counselor (Active) Master Social Work Addictions Counselor (Active) Certified Cognitive Behavioral Therapist (Active)	Substance Abuse Mental Health Mental Health Substance Abuse Substance Abuse

ACADEMIC WORK EXPERIENCE

**East Carolina University School of Social Work, Greenville, NC. August 2014
- Present**

Adjunct Professor: Courses Taught Introduction to Social Work; Introduction to Social Work Practice with Special Populations; Social Work Practice with Families and Groups; Advanced Clinical-Community Practice: Community Partnerships; Advanced Clinical-Community Social Work Practice: Individual and Families; Social work Policy II; Addiction Crime & Criminality

Pitt Community College. August 2016- December 2016

Adjunct Professor: Courses Taught: Group Process I

Johnston Community College. August 2014 - May 2015

Adjunct Professor: Courses Taught: Introduction to College Success Skills

East Carolina University. August 2010 - May 2014

Graduate Assistant: Courses taught Human Growth & Development; Contemporary Alcohol/Drug Abuse Issue; Family Treatment in Substance Abuse Counseling; Introduction to Rehabilitation Counseling; Substance Abuse & Treatment Rehabilitation; Group Process

AREAS OF RESEARCH EXPERTISE

Administration/Leadership in Collegiate Athletes
Student Athlete Identity Development
Individual Counseling/Psychotherapy
Substance Abuse Counseling
Athletes & Depression
Social Justice for Student Athletes
Race & Gender in Sports
Collegiate Sports Policy

CLINICAL PRACTICE

Dixon Social Interactive Services, Kinston, N.C. 2013 - Present

SAIOP Therapist. Conduct Substance Abuse Disorder and-Mental Health assessments for both adolescents and adults utilizing biopsychosocial model. Complete authorization review for patients seeking services submitting reviews to LME/MCO Formulate Person Centered Treatment Plans for clients with Co-occurring disorders. Consult with Physicians to initiate appropriate treatment plans for patients with co-occurring disorders, reviewing clinical progress with on call physicians. Conduct individual, family and group therapy sessions for clients with Substance Use Disorders. Develop crisis intervention plans for clients presenting with sever disorders that have become a danger to self and others in the community. Assist clients in creating aftercare plans to support recovery efforts which include community support systems such as AA/NA. Provide quality assurance measures to Qualified Professional staff to ensure proper delivery of services and that caseload sizes are maintained in accordance with program standards.

East Cove Psychiatric Services, P.A., Kinston, N.C. 2015 - 2015

Therapist. Provided client with oversight of East Cove suboxone program. Trained staff to ensure proper protocol are adhered to. Collected data to monitor program outcomes. Provided clinical services of group therapy and individual session to client suffering with co-occurring disorders. Engaged client in both medication management and cognitive behavioral therapy interventions. Collaborated with Medical Director for the development of integrative behavioral health services. Reviewed all patient records to ensure client rights are adhered to and clients are provided with appropriate level of care.

Positive Influences, Goldsboro, N.C. 2014 - 2015

Therapist. Offered mental health and/or educational services to children and adults in need of psychiatric help and assistance with life skills due to severe mental illness. Worked directly with patients to help them develop the skills necessary to live as independently as possible. Assisted on an interdisciplinary team mental health professional such as psychiatrists or psychologists to lead educational or supportive groups, provide individual counseling, assist clients with developing practical skills needed for employment or independent living, and consult with outside professionals or organizations, such as social services. Responsible for filling out treatment plans, counseling notes and maintaining accurate case files as well as participating in regular supervisory sessions.

Family Works Psychological Center, Goldsboro, N.C. 2011 - 2013

Therapist: Responsible for substance abuse screenings, assisting with substance abuse orientation and education; Providing case management duties of making referrals to other community agencies, half-way house, job readiness, mental health agencies to follow up with medications; completing paper work for intake process, making sure clients understood all documents; engaged in ongoing record keeping assisting with charting client's progress; assist therapist in substance abuse groups; ensure clients were making progress toward agreed upon treatment goals that were developed based on assessment, review treatment plans to ensure compliance with goals; following agency policy on crisis intervention strategies for clients at risk.

Eastern Psychiatric & Behavioral Specialists, Greenville N.C. 2009 - 2011

Therapist: Assessment and treatment planning for substance clients; assist with counseling in groups for addictions and mental disorders, providing family education about substance abuse, providing drug educations to parents at risk for substance dependency, providing case management services to clients with substance dependency and mental disorders, engaged in the referral process for clients who did not meet criteria for program, weekly staffing of clients progress with clinical staff, link clients to community resources AA/NA and half way houses.

Lenoir County Migrant Education Program, Kinston, N.C. 2009

MSW Intern: Member of a seasonal team that implemented recruitment, eligibility, enrollment and placement activities for a comprehensive child development program serving over 725 infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Managed a caseload of families and children in fast-paced program. Ensured timely completion and documentation of children's health and disabilities-related services. Ensured access to and documentation of a wide range of support services for enrolled families. Provided transportation and other types of support for children's health & disabilities services.

Lenoir County Department of Social Services, Kinston, N.C. 2008

Child Protective Services Intern: Received screened, evaluated, and investigated referrals/complaints relative to alleged child neglect and alleged institutional abuse; presumed the necessary measures to ensure the protection of children and to do related work as required.

RHA Howell Child Care Center, La Grange, N.C. 2003 - 2004

Rehabilitation Technician: Provided maintenance programs and services to client with multiple handicaps; under general supervision, assisted with activities of daily living, and documented skills necessary to work with individuals with aggressive and or self-abusive in a responsible care giving style.

Children's Village Academy, AmeriCorps, Kinston, N.C. 2002 - 2004

Tutor/Mentor: Assisted students in all operational and academic functions of the learning center, assisted in subject specific disciplines and helped with learning skills (including computer skills), etc., as required, helped students with subject content according to individual strengths.

PUBLICATIONS

PEER-REVIEWED AND REFERRED PUBLICATIONS.

Outlaw, K., Xu, L. Aeby-Carpenter, T. Aeby, V. Lu., W. (2015). A Review Of Mind Gym: Revisiting a Sports Management Classic *Journal of Sports & Exercise Medicine, 1 (5), 159-160.*

Outlaw, K., Toriello, P. (2014). Off The Court: Helping African American Athletes Address Behavioral Health Concerns While Using Motivational Interviewing *Journal of The Human Behavior In The Social Environment. 24 (5), 557-564*

Outlaw, K. Toriello, P. (2014). The Impact of Coaches' Behavior On African American Female Athletes' Playing Satisfaction: A cursory Review of the Literature. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 24 (5), 612-620*

Babatude, O. Outlaw, K. Forbes, B., Gaye, T. (2014). Revisiting Baby Boomers and Alcohol Use: Emerging Treatment Trends. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 24(5), 597-611.*

Outlaw, K., Xu, L. Aeby-Carpenter, T. Aeby, V. (2017). Unnecessary Roughness: Exploring depression and substance abuse in competition in a sample of African American: Life Science Press 2017; 1(1) 1-6 doi:

Outlaw, K. Aeby-Carpenter, T. Aeby, V. (2018). Opioids and Athletes: A Growing Problem and a Deadly Combination, 4 (1), 63-69.

C.A. Adedoyin Outlaw, K. Jackson, M. (2018). Substance Use Disorders among adolescents: Rethinking Addiction Interventions: Vol. 1 (1), 1-7.

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Outlaw, K.R., (2016, January) Challenges Faced by African American Male Athletes. To be presented (poster) at American Association of Social Behavioral Sciences

Brunson, J. Outlaw, K.R. (2015, January) African-American Men and Depression (Suicide) The Invisible Epidemic, Social work Lecture Series, East Carolina University, East Carolina Heart Institute, 115 Heart Drive, Greenville NC 27858

Outlaw, K. R., (2013, March). Motivational Interviewing & African American Male Athletes, East Carolina University, 5th Street, Greenville NC 27858

Outlaw, K.R. (2013, September) Chaired Discussion: SEARNAS: A Celebration of African American History/Cultural Diversity, East Carolina University, 5th Street, Greenville NC 27858

Outlaw, K.R., (2012, January). Academic Racism in Regard to Athletes (poster/lecture) at The Student Human Rights Project Colloquium San Diego, CA.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS/ORGANIZATIONS

Member	National Association of Social Workers In Sports (Sub Committee Member)
Member	Student Addictions and Rehabilitation Association
Member	Student –Athlete Human Rights Project
Member	National Association of Social Workers
Member	Council on Social Work Education

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Member	Kinston Teens, Kinston, NC 2014 – Present
Team Leader	AmeriCorps 2003 - 2007