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Athletic Capital and African American Perceptions of Success

by

Keona L. Lewis

Dedication

It is with great humility that I dedicate this manuscript to my daughters, Deja and Adia who willingly sacrificed more than should ever have been asked of them as we pursued together this degree. Thank you, Deja, for cooking dinner on those nights when mommy was writing. Thank you, Adia, for always having an encouraging word and a funny story. Thank you both for goodnight hugs, no matter how rough my day had been, I love you.

Acknowledgments

I must first acknowledge my God, who continuously gave me peace in the midst of the many storms that arose throughout this process, I am eternally grateful. To my family and closest friends, thank you. Your love and patience have been my rock.

I would like to thank my wonderful committee for agreeing to walk this journey with me. I appreciate the enthusiasm and support that you gave and the contributions that you made in support of this project. Dr. Greenbaum, Dr. Bird, Dr. Rodriguez, Dr. Jackson, Dr. Tyson and Dr. Elam, thank you for helping me take my abstract ideas and transform them into a work that may be able to make a difference in the lives of young people across this nation. Thank you Dr. Ward, for keeping me focused and reminding me that this project is important. Thank you Dr. Thomas, for the watchful eye you have kept on me throughout all of these years. Thank you Drs. Mann and Jones for the encouragement and invaluable advice you gave throughout the writing process. Thank you, Dr. McCray for being my big, younger sister and always keeping me on track, you inspire me.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the culture of sport among African American male football players as well as African American perspectives on sport and success. A case study of six African American, Division 1 FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision) collegiate student athletes was conducted along with seventeen supplemental interviews with community members, parents, coaches and former athletes and fans. The participants answered questions that explored education, success, identity construction, ethnicity and sport. Archival data was also reviewed framing the discussion on football in Florida, links between education and sport participation and African American male academic achievement. While many perspectives varied, there were collective trends in relation to how African American Athletes in Florida define themselves as well as their perspectives on ethnicity and sport. The individual perspectives and collective trends are discussed in this dissertation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem:

The culture of sport in the United States affects young men of all demographics. However, its specific role in the acculturation of African American males is unique and vital in regards to academic success and identity construction. The effects of the culture of sport among African American men is compounded by the overrepresentation of black males in the higher revenue producing sports and the abundance of accessible role models who have obtained a certain level of social and financial success. At a very young age, black males are exposed to strict, social models for identity. They are required by society to negotiate those identities on external terms as opposed to being able to construct their own internal perceptions of who they are and who they would like to become. While all humans negotiate identities at different levels, the current educational, social and economic status of African American males necessitates that the specific population be examined and interventions developed. One of the more popular ways in which African American males are identified is as "the athlete". The label of 'athlete' for the black male is complex and will be examined more critically throughout this dissertation.

There has been an increasing interest in understanding the college student-athlete experience (Kissinger & Miller, 2009) however, these studies are predominantly

concerned with the student-athlete population as a whole and fail to address those issues most relevant to African American athletes. In response to this gap in the literature, I set out to examine black athleticism and from my interviews, I discerned football as the sport most patronized and supported by African Americans in the state of Florida. This research will examine African American collegiate football athletes in the state of Florida and their perceptions of educational achievement, athletic capital, identity construction and the negotiation of public spaces. For the purpose of this research, athletic capital represents the ways in which athletes use their physical talents in their particular fields of play to access social, cultural, and economic opportunities for mobility. The negotiation of public spaces is representative of the ways in which athletes, whose lives are in the public sphere, negotiate identity and authenticity within framework of competing roles.

Background Information:

While there have been researchers who have examined the idea of a biological correlation between "race" and athleticism, (Harrison, et al 2002; Hoberman 1997; Entine 2000) generally speaking, this idea has been scientifically discredited, specifically as a result of the broadly accepted understanding of race as a social construct as opposed to a biological fact. However, while the idea of race as a social construct is widely accepted among academicians, it has not been transmitted to the masses in a way that has allowed the general public exposure to the concept. As a result, the belief in a genetic advantage on the playing field for African Americans still exists both among many African Americans, as well as many people of varying ethnicities (Entine, 2000; Reese, 2000;

Sailes, Gary & Harpending, Henry: quoted in Reese).

While there are some African Americans who believe they can achieve a level of success away from the playing field, a large number of black youth believe they more likely have a chance of becoming a professional athlete than of becoming an academic professional. According to one report, (Simons, 1997) sixty-six percent of black males in America between the ages of thirteen and eighteen believe that they will earn a living by playing professional sports. This skewed sense of reality has also been discussed by a number of scholars (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Sailes; 1998; Weber, 2007). Approximately, fifty percent of African American males graduate from high school in four years. As such, African American male athlete career aspirations have fueled a great deal of controversy and debate among African American academics, parents, and educators.

Another interesting component of this phenomenon is that it represents a collective emphasis away from some of the ideals and beliefs that were prevalent in the African American Community one generation ago which focused on educational achievement and communal advancement (DuBois, 1903; Willie, et al, 1991). In his book, *Darwin's Athletes*, John Hoberman asserts that African Americans have been deluded into believing in the idea of the sporting arena as a place founded on ideas of a meritocracy where acceptance and equality are accessible for all. It is this belief that has redirected the African American focus toward athleticism and away from academic achievement (Hoberman, 1997). In conjunction with Hoberman's assertion many African Americans now believe parents put too much pressure on young black males to be

successful athletically, hoping their sons will succeed like athletes such as Michael

Jordan (Shropshire, 1996; Sailes, 1998). This pressure perpetuates the cycle, as young

African American males continue to identify themselves as athletes first. While this

project is not primarily concerned with establishing causal relationships between

phenomena, it should be mentioned that African American male success academically,

specifically in Florida, has not improved to levels that are comparable to that of the larger

society (Florida Council on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, 2007 Report). Thus

lack of African American male academic success is a continuing concern; the ultimate

goal of this research is to expand the discourse surrounding African American male

achievement in a way that redefines blackness not only in the minds of African

Americans, but across ethnicities. This research will present African American student

athletes' perceptions of success and identity, examine the over-identification of African

American males with professional athletics and the stereotypes and ideas that are

commonly held regarding black athleticism, as well as discuss possible interventions that

may assist support programs designed to increase African American male student-athlete

achievement.

There is a long history of attention paid to sport and society by sociologists (Adler

& Adler, 1991; Bordieu, 1991; Coakley, 1998; Lapchick 1999; Shropshire, 1996;

Zimbalist, 1999), with many academic journals dedicated to the study of sport in society

(e.g. *Sport and Society*; *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*; *Journal of Sport

and Social Issues*; *Journal of Sport Behavior*). In contrast, anthropologists have paid little

attention to the study of sport, especially the role of sport in African American

communities. As a result, while there are a number of theories offered to explain the role of sport in the African American Community, there is a lack of studies that take a bottom up, ethnographic approach to discerning the feelings and beliefs of community members themselves. For example, in the book, *Race and Sport,* edited by Charles Ross (2004), "single-mother" homes were discussed as a reason for a greater African American male deviance and perhaps focus on athletic success as well as for higher athletic participation (Smith, 2004). This view was also echoed in a study conducted by the Women's Sports Foundation, where they correlated single-parent homes with lower sport participation for girls (Sabo & Veliz; 2008). While there may be some correlation between athletic participation and socio-economic status, to isolate "single-mother or parent homes" as a causal variable, apart from its interconnectedness with socio-economic and other environmental factors is irresponsible.

Anthropologists, equipped with their ethnographic methodologies and cultural relativism as a foundational principal, are equipped with the specific skills needed not only to answer many questions that have eluded surveys and questionnaires for decades, they are also in the unique position to give voice to many young African American males whose voices have historically been suppressed by a sport culture that provides no space for individuality or dissent (King & Springwood, 2001). ESPN Sports Commentator Chris Berman (1999) wrote an article where he described American sports as a "Melting Pot" that is based on an unbiased reward system that is based on merit and not race. This view of the meritocracy of American sports undermines any discussion of race or inequitable treatment by deleting race as a contributing variable. As in the case of

Donovan McNabb, and many others, athletes are constantly reminded by fans, coaches, commentators and educators that they are in a position of privilege and therefore have no right to complain (Silver, 2007). It is as if their status as a collegiate or professional athlete was given to them and not earned. This is a belief African American athletes fervently resist. It is a perspective that needs to be explored and it is the goal of this project to provide a space for that examination. Ethnographic methodologies will provide the framework for collecting data that will broaden the body of knowledge surrounding black athleticism, identity construction and achievement.

Another dimension I will address is the role of images in the formation and perpetuation of stereotypical ideals that surround African American male athletes and sport participation. Sporting images affect both the participants as well as the spectators and as a result, some spectators (fans) of those sports may accept the same stereotypes into which many African Americans have bought. While a causal relationship between media images and behavior is notoriously difficult to prove, anecdotal evidence abounds. For instance, when I questioned a White eighth grade boy about sports and race during a 2006 class research project, he stated that when he saw a black boy playing football or basketball, he knew that boy could probably "make it to the next level," while he himself could not. Thus he grouped all African American boys into the category of athlete, without a second's hesitation. He also excluded himself from self-identifying as an athlete by stating that he played tennis, "but anyone could do that."

In the book, "Beyond the Cheers", authors King and Springwood state, "Sports has become an increasingly important space in which individuals and institutions struggle

over the significance of race" (King & Springwood 2001: 8). It is within this contested space of race and sport that anthropologists can utilize the knowledge and skills that are central to the discipline as they explore and expose the many layers of this phenomenon. For many African American males the role of athlete is usually accompanied by the baggage of stereotypes, such as being labeled criminal, sexually deviant and a dumb "buck" (King & Springwood, 2001). The irony of the way in which African American males are stereotyped and their bodies are presented is that while they are being policed they are also being ascribed the label of privileged. In any other context this would seem absurd, but in the public space of "black athleticism" these ideas coexist with very few challenges. It has been stated that some believe African American male athletes are in a position of privilege, and as a result should be happy regardless of what some may view as exploitative policies (Rhoden, 2006). In his book, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, Rhoden discussed African American male athletes as having evolved from literal plantation houses to the institutionalized metaphorical plantation houses of the NCAA and Professional Sporting Leagues. He described the general public as perceiving of black athletes as having achieved the "Promised Land" and thus it is believed that they should be grateful. He asserts the general perception is that black athletes should be even more grateful than their white peers because of the amount of money they make. It is along this line, within the framework of code words like "character" and "discipline" (King & Springwood, 2001) that some also believe they have a sufficient reason to hold black athletes to higher standards than non-athletes and their white counterparts (King & Leonard, 2010).

An example frequently observed at the collegiate level is class attendance. Non-athlete students are afforded the luxury of missing a class with minimal repercussions. However, student-athletes do not have that option. They not only must report to class, but they must report early enough to ensure that they do not miss the attendance monitor sent by the athletic department to check student-athlete attendance. The penalties for a student-athlete missing a class without receiving prior approval can be severe. While classroom attendance is important and reinforcing the importance of attending every class is helpful, the double standard exists. The same double standard is often compiled when race is injected. For example, King and Springwood discussed the decisions of both Kobe Bryant and Drew Henson. They were both outstanding high school athletes with opportunities to earn large amounts of money by forgoing college and choosing a professional career. The only notable difference between the two was their race, with Bryant being 'black' and Henson being 'white'. They discussed the media's framing of Kobe Bryant versus the coverage given to Drew Henson. The title of an article regarding Bryant was titled, "School's Out" (Bamberger, 1996). While the article on Henson was titled, "Golden Boy: Michigan-Bound Quarterback and Yankee Bonus Bay Drew Henson-- Who Also Averaged 22 Points in Basketball and 4.0 in the Classroom Is almost Too Good to be True" (Montville, 1998). The authors noted that it was believed that college would, "Refine Bryant, granting him the opportunity to earn a diploma and to improve his game. It not only would make him a better player but a better person as well" (King & Springwood 2001: 121). This example depicts what the authors believe to be a double standard exacted upon black athletes. They consider the greater rules and

penalties that accompany the higher standards to be another example of the ways in which the larger sporting entities like the National Football League and the National Basketball Association continue policing black, male bodies in public spaces (King & Springwood 2001: 101).

The public acceptance of the over-policing of morality and behavior of the Professional Athlete is also reinforced by the idea of the meritocracy of sports. This idea promulgates the belief among many spectators and participants of sports that the sporting arena is a meritocracy that "evens the playing field." "There is no racism in sports. King and Springwood also describe this common held belief stating, "Race does not matter, is not an issue in sports, then, because it promotes individual opportunity and achievement without regard to race, while encouraging racial interaction, if not racial harmony" (King & Springwood 2001: 29). However, if the history of race and sport is viewed collectively, there has been a clear and documented history of uneven playing fields and racism in sport (Ross, 2004; Shropshire, 1996; Sailes, 1998; Wigginton, 2006). It is through the power of images that ideas that may vary in content from the collective knowledge that each individual possesses are presented, transmitted and reinforced throughout society (Bristor, Lee & Hunt, 1995). As a result, while the aforementioned belief is widely accepted, history has proven it to be a misrepresentation of reality.

While some suggest sport should be viewed as an autonomous field (Washington & Karen, 2001), for the purposes of this examination, the sporting arena, specifically in the larger revenue producing sports of collegiate and professional football, can be viewed as a microcosm of American society as a whole. A place where black bodies are both

loved and hated at the same time. It is a place where black is still seen as deviant and in

need of control. This institutional control is often hidden within code words like

"discipline" and "character" which are buzz words whose subjective nature provides

fertile ground for a type of hegemony that counters the meritocracy argument for sports

participation. The purpose is to maintain control while at the same time positioning black

bodies as desired and considered by some, physically gifted in terms of strength, speed

and resilience. An example of this can be seen in the stereotypes afforded to different

positions in the football arena of play. Stereotypically, only the most intelligent football

players can play the position of quarterback. In 2007, Donovan McNabb pointed out in

the national media the fact that at that point in time, there were only 6 black quarterbacks

playing in the NFL. After voicing his opinion about that fact, McNabb was met with a

barrage of commentators and fans who insisted he should "stop whining." It was asserted

that black athletes in the NFL, specifically African American Quarterbacks, should

"accept responsibility for their own shortcomings." While Donovan received some

support for his position, the overwhelming response was negative, falling back on

familiar stereotypes and beliefs that have stifled discussions about race in the past. For

example, one online blogger wrote,

> "When black athletes or black people in general fail at anything then the race card comes out. It seems nowdays that anytime they face any kind of adversity they cry that white [America] is keeping them down. This is why they will always get scrutinized. Some day they will realize that [you're] accountable for your own success or failure in life. No one gives you anything easy, no matter what color you are. It's also tough to have [sympathy] for black athletes who make 10 million a year and can't stop getting arrested. [Whose] fault is that?"

"Donovan McNabb Takes on Race—Good Points, Awful Timing." By: John Ryan (2007)

These types of beliefs remove all public spaces for dissent from African American athletes by devaluing their experiences as irrational and void of any real merit, or to quote the term most frequently used, "playing the race card." The unfortunate problem is that McNabb is not the only athlete to have his dissent silenced. Throughout the history of sport, athletes have been forced to choose between standing up for what is right and pleasing the people who pay their tuition and salaries. For example, in 1968, Tommie Smith and John Carlos silently protested on the medal stand at the Mexico City Olympic Games at great cost to them socially and economically (Harris, 1993; Reese, 1999; Wiggins, 1997). However, recent events have pointed to a small shift in the power paradigm. Most recently a number of athletes publicly announced that they would not play for a team if the political commentator Rush Limbaugh was permitted to become a partial owner in the franchise. There were some media commentators and sports analysts who quickly chimed-in, attempting to silence and denounce those athletes who spoke out. However, on October 12, 2009 ESPN's Chris Mortensen reported that the National Football League Player's Association (NFLPA) formally opposed the sale. In an email written by the NFLPA Executive Director, he stated,

"I've spoken to the Commissioner [Roger Goodell] and I understand that this ownership consideration is in the early stages. But sport in America is at its best when it unifies, gives all of us reason to cheer, and when it transcends. Our sport does exactly that when it overcomes division and rejects discrimination and hatred."

At least seven NFL players publicly denounced the potential sale stating they would never play for a team owned by Limbaugh. Rush Limbaugh had been a polarizing character on race issues and sport and subsequently, he was removed from the group seeking to pursue ownership and the players' voices were not only heard but supported as

well.

Research Questions:

It is evident that race, racism and an inequitable system of power permeate professional, collegiate and high school athletics. It is through this lens that some of the problems associated with ethnicity and sport are being examined and confronted within this dissertation. This study will examine football and African American collegiate football athletes in the State of Florida. The research questions in this project were developed using a grounded approach. During a summer field study project in 2007, I was able to interview African American athletes, coaches and family members who informed the questions that were later asked as a part of the study. One question that must be examined is in what way a system rooted and embedded in systemic racism creates a niche for young African American males? It is also important to enquire about the role that sport, saddled with its history of exclusion and then limited inclusion in the U.S., plays in the lives and aspirations of young African American men, specifically in the State of Florida, which is considered a major source for football talent. What are some ways African American male athletes define success and what role does athleticism play in that definition? In what ways have sports and athleticism contributed to the internal construction of identity of African American males? Considering the systemic links between athleticism and education found in the United States (specifically in regards to football), what role do community and educational institutions play in the success or failure of student athletes?

This dissertation will answer these questions by examining the literature

surrounding African American discourse on sport as well as how "blackness" is defined. It will also examine the issues surrounding the ways in which African American male athletes negotiate identities between two hostile systems: Education and Sport, with an emphasis on the ways in which African American athletes themselves can lay the groundwork for a reconstruction of "blackness" in American sport.

According to Robert Sands, "Anthropology is one of the few social sciences that still find the study of sport beyond, or perhaps beneath, the discipline" (Sands 2002:7). Toby Miller asked the question, "What might explain the continuing marginality of sports to anthropology and social theory even as it is central to popular, folk and commodified life?" (Miller 1997; 115) Jennifer Hargreaves, a feminist sociologist of sport, believes this neglect could be a result of the idea that mainstream ideas about sports are concerned with the physical body, which is viewed as "natural" and "unchangeable," and thus not deserving of analysis (Hargreaves 1994:6). Although generally missing in academic examinations of identity, ethnicity and sport in regards to African-Americans, anthropology can offer great contributions to this line of inquiry. This dissertation will examine how anthropologists and other scholars have examined males and the construction of black male identity, specifically in regards to athletics. It will also provide a space for a discussion of the implications of racialized images on identity construction and the pressures placed on African American males who desire to pursue athletic careers.

Anthropology can offer great contributions to the study of sport, as well as to the previously established study of race and ethnicity in the United States. This dissertation

will contribute to the current anthropological knowledge by examining the culture of American sport and its role in the perpetuation of racism and the racist ideals that mirror those that remain in the mainstream society. It will also contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding ethnic studies, specifically in the U.S. Sport is an institution and currently sits as a significant component of culture, globally. This research will illuminate some of the problems, issues and controversies facing young African American athletes in American sport, and will specifically examine the major revenue producing sport of football. According to the Florida Council on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, in 2006 there was almost a one-to-one ratio of black men in college compared to black men in jail (Florida Council on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, 2007). Are there some interventions that can be initiated that may fuse the lure of sports with the productive future goals and aspirations of the students playing them? The answer could possibly be yes, but first there must be a clearer understanding of how young African American males perceive and define success and what role, if any, sport participation plays in that success. There also needs to be a mending of the split between those who support athletics among African American youth and those who believe them to be a distraction. Perhaps some of the answers to how this can be done can be found in the youth actively participating in sports today. This will then force all people to challenge their ideas about race in the 21st century, improve existing conditions for all athletes and expand the body of knowledge around anthropology and sport.

Reflection:

On a more reflexive note, this topic is of particular interest to me on two fronts. The first is from an educational perspective. I have had a number of experiences as an educator that have led me to question the link between athletics and education, specifically as it relates to African American athletes. The juxtaposition of athletes being cheered on Saturday and jeered Monday through Friday sparks quite a few questions as I see it played out in my everyday life. A few years ago, I was at an awards banquet for my daughter who was in middle school at the time; as I sat down, I immediately noticed the ethnic breakdown of the seating patterns within the room. Most of the African American kids were sitting together. I knew this seating arrangement had to be mandated, because my daughter was sitting with her class as she had been instructed, so it appeared logical that there was a reason for the seating. My peer, who sat alongside me, and who, coincidentally is still a middle school teacher, explained to me that they are probably sitting together because they are all in the same class. Seeing the angst in my eyes, she went on to explain to me that classrooms are constructed on test scores and most of the black kids probably have similar test scores. I have been out of the classroom for some time now, but I distinctly remember many students of many ethnicities having varying abilities, in the same classroom. Although that arrangement may be more difficult for the instructor, it can often provide many benefits for the students, so I was concerned. However, there I was watching this group of African Americans sitting together as the school's staff began handing out awards. Towards the end of the awards ceremony an award was finally handed to an African American male. I was absolutely

horrified to see that the only award given to an African American male was for "best overall athlete." Even more upsetting was the response of the crowd when the student's name was called. In fact, his peers leaped out of their seats and it sounded as if it was the loudest applause of the evening. I was extremely surprised, and even more disappointed. Realistically, what does "best overall athlete" really mean in the sixth grade? I was upset, and the event really bothered me; in fact as I write about it now, it still does. I began to think about my nephew, who, when he turned nine years old, was being recruited by the number one AAU Nine and Under Basketball team in the country at the time. The team paid for a hotel room for my sister and her family for a full week so that my nephew could play for them in the national tournament. He also received new sneakers for agreeing to play on the team. He was allowed to miss practice until the week of the start of the tournament because the team and tournament were in another city. My nephew was nine years old! These experiences inspired this dissertation topic. I began to ask questions like, "What are the effects of ascribing such strict definitions of masculinity and brotherhood in the African American community?" It is imperative that we find out the answer to this question and many like it. My nephew cries when he loses, regardless of the circumstances; winning means that much to him. I want to know how the culture of sport and society as a whole restrict African American male identity construction. Are their perceptions of themselves consistent with society's beliefs? With so much pressure on young African American males to succeed on the playing field, what are the consequences to athletic failure? These are some of the questions I am interested in examining. I will not be able to address all of them within the framework of my

research, but they are viable questions that would benefit from anthropological consideration.

This research has also allowed me to reflect on a personal level about the ways we negotiate identities and the varying challenges African American, male athletes face as they attempt to meet the expectations placed on them. It was through the examination of the ways in which the case study participants negotiate public and personal identities that I began to understand better the ways I negotiate my own identity spaces. I began to understand how very complex are the spaces I negotiate on a daily basis. For example, I am not just a doctoral candidate, I am an African American, female, doctoral candidate who also must occupy the spaces of mother to teen-aged daughters, daughter to aging mother, and mentor to countless young people. I juggle these roles every day and while they are all connected, they each require something different if I am to maintain them. It often gives me the feeling of treading water, but I better understand the benefits of being equipped with the skills to tread water and for the most part, successfully. However, the young men who participated in this case study are not as well equipped and thus face many more challenges as they attempt to thrive in often hostile systems.

Throughout the data collection process I was privileged with the opportunity to receive candid answers to a number of the questions discussed earlier. It is my hope that I will accurately present those experiences in a way that will validate and honor all of those who were kind enough to agree to participate. It is also my hope that through these experiences we can began to reexamine and define what it means to be black and an athlete in America.

As a fan of many sports, and football in particular, this research has been extremely personal for me. Each of my nephews either currently, or at one point during their adolescence played both football and basketball and in supporting them, I have been able to spend a good deal of time in the stands and stadiums at varying levels. My past interactions between parents and coaches and random fans shaped my desire to learn more about the culture of sport and the role it plays in African American communities. However, it was during my undergraduate years at Florida State University where I became fully indoctrinated into the culture of football in Florida. The experience that first comes to mind is that a football game during my first semester at FSU where a complete stranger (undoubtedly filled with alcohol) yelled down the row to ask if anyone wanted anything from the concession stand, because he'd just won some money on a bet. We all yelled out our orders and he promptly bought and delivered them to everyone who had ordered something. There was a real sense of community, between complete strangers from practically different worlds. It was at that point when I began to understand the potential in sport to blur boundaries and communities, even imagined ones. This experience and many others have shaped my approach to both the subject of football in Florida as well as my relationship with the participants. In many ways, they represent my nephews who desire to participate in collegiate athletics one day. Perhaps if I can contribute to solutions today, they may be able to benefit from them in the future.

Since beginning this project, I have begun working for the athletic department at my University. It has been an invaluable experience that has not only allowed me to continue to explore the successes and failures of the six athletes in my case study, but it

has also added to the richness of my analysis as I take real world experiences and apply them to the data discussed within this research. Working with student-athletes, specifically the same population I examined has made this dissertation even more personal for me. It has given me an opportunity to apply the information I've learned and see the change over time within each student-athlete I come in contact with.

The data collection for this dissertation consisted of participant observation, participant interviews and an analysis of archival data. The interviews were comprised of 6 case study participants and 17 supplemental interviewees. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes and the data collected provided insight into the aspirations and life experiences of African American athletes and communities. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature, along with background information on the topics relevant to the study. Chapter three describes the research methodology in detail and chapter four presents the results and findings of the data collected. Lastly, chapter five includes conclusions, recommendations and possible implications. It is within the framework of this dissertation that I hope to expand the body of knowledge surrounding African American athleticism and challenge pervasive stereotypes that persist affecting black youth.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Since its inception, collegiate athletics have grown to astronomical levels of popularity in the United States. In fact, due in part to 24 hour sports media coverage, athletic related problems and issues are capable of garnering the attention of the national media. As popularity has increased so have the number of academicians who have taken an interest in examining the issues facing student-athletes. As a result, numerous articles have been published and books written addressing this subculture (Kissinger & Miller, 2009).

Parham's (1993) work on student athlete stressors identified six different challenges faced by student-athletes:

1. Balancing athletic and academic responsibilities;

2. Balancing social activities with the isolation of athletic responsibilities;

3. Balancing athletic success and/or failures with emotional stability;

4. Balancing physical health and injury with the need to continue competing;

5. Balancing the demands of relationships with entities such as coaches, teammates, parents and friends; and

6. Addressing the termination of one's college athletic career

It is from within each of these categories that relevant research on student-athletes should focus (Kissinger & Miller, 2009).

Historical trends of collegiate student-athlete research were examined in an attempt to learn more about the previous research done of the subject (Twale & Korn, 2009). These researchers examined the topics that have been researched on student-athletes published in scholarly journals between the years 1970-2008. They found that research on college student athletes has increased exponentially over the last four decades (Twale & Korn, 2009). While higher education journals have increased the amount of space allotted for student-athlete research, social science and law journals have decreased the amount of space devoted to student-athlete issues (Twale & Korn, 2009). According to the data, women appear to be researching issues that affect women most often and this may be due in part to increased interest over the last few decades as women gained entrance into collegiate athletics (Twale & Korn, 2009). Ironically the researchers noted a failure by earlier researchers to evaluate issues affecting men in collegiate athletics and as a result, the collective knowledge of the male college student-athlete has been rendered "underwhelming" (Twale & Korn, 2009).

In an article addressing recruitment, admission and retention of first-year student athletes (Sanders, et al., 2009), the researchers discussed the likelihood of a high school athlete playing professional sports in their particular field. They stated that while only one out of every 50,000 high school athletes will ever become a part of a professional sports team, in the minds of many high school student-athletes, this goal will become a reality (Sanders, et al., 2009). The researchers highlighted this view as being prevalent among African American athletes participating in the "glamour sports of baseball, basketball and football" (Sanders, et, al., 2009). The researchers in this study presented a

number of stereotypes as justification for their positions. For example, they stated, "competitive athletes are most often driven by ego orientation" (Sanders, et al., 2009: 33). They also asserted that the ego oriented mind doesn't perform well in a classroom setting, and this is possibly part of the problem facing student-athlete achievement. According to the article, athletes placed in classroom environments where there is no competition suffer from a lack of motivation to achieve (Roberts, 2002). These statements make a number of assumptions that are based on stereotypes. For example, the idea that athletes are "ego oriented" assumes an understanding of the mind and motivation of all athletes.

Hewitt (2009) discussed the recruitment process of high school athletes and the high stakes and pressure that accompany athletic recruitment. According to the article, there were 380,000 student athletes competing in 23 sports at over 1000 NCAA member institutions (Hewitt, 2009). As a result Hewitt attempted to examine student-athlete perspectives of the recruiting process. A total of 22 athletes were interviewed through focus groups, in person or via the telephone. Essentially, his responses highlighted the intense pressure placed on student athletes when making decisions on the institution they will attend. This study did not discuss ethnicity, and it would have been interesting to have compared the responses.

There has also been research that has examined student-athlete expectations. It has been found that student-athletes suffer immense pressure while trying to meet both athletic and academic expectations (Stephen & Higgins, 2009). It is important to understand that the student athlete's experience on college campuses is decidedly

different from the experiences of non-athletes (Ferrante, et al., 1996; Parham, 1993). Compounding those differences are the stereotypes many student athletes face on college campuses (Ferrante, et al., 1996). In addition to the pressures faced by student-athletes while negotiating competing expectations, inequitable high schools and unrealistic perceptions of their academic ability can lead to a loss in self-confidence, self-efficacy and academic motivation (Fletcher, et al., 2003).

Research examining athletes' experiences with identity issues have been in existence for a while (Kissinger & Watson, 2009; Nelson, 1983; Parham, 1993; Petipas & Champagne, 1998). However, still missing are examinations that focus on African American athletes' identity development and interventions. Additionally, research examining African-American student athletes as a subgroup among the general population of student-athletes is also missing.

Michelle Moses (2002) addressed issues facing the development of authenticity and cultural identity. She defined authenticity as, "a state of being, within which one has the ability to act in keeping with one's true self, that is to make uncoerced choices and to feel public affirmation of one's personal identity, of which one's cultural identity is a central part" (Moses, 2002: 26). As such, it is important to resist the temptation to lump all student-athletes into a general mold. Equally important to their talent on the playing field are their cultural experiences and identity construction in determining athletic and academic success. Each of these factors needs to be taken into account when planning African American student-athlete support and interventions.

Sport, Identity and Ethnicity

Many anthropologists have studied identity, ethnicity and media images (Chaitin, et.al., 2009; Friedman, 1994; Mano & Willems, 2008; Pink, 2001; Rouse, 1995; Srinivasan, 2006; Vermeulen & Govers, 1994). One critical area of interest to the study of identity is in how identity construction affects academic outcomes among young people. In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire expands the idea of the awakening critical consciousness. In it, he discusses the idea that it is the oppressed that must make the stand and oppose the maintenance of the status quo. True humanitarianism and generosity work to improve the ability of the most vulnerable to shape their own destiny and fortunes. Freire asserts that it is only through the power of the oppressed that true freedom for all can be attained. It is under this idea that the rationale for examining identity formation specifically amongst adolescents is based. Henry Giroux discussed the need for educators to produce not only learners but also citizens. Giroux insisted educators and citizens, in general, should engage in "border pedagogy," which includes the "dual task of not only creating new objects of knowledge but also addressing how inequalities, power and human suffering are rooted in basic institutional structures" (Giroux 1992:29).

Identity, Academic Success & Resiliency:

In regards to athletic aspirations among African-American males, potential options for identity are limited. Jonathan Gayles (2005) interviewed young African-American men who, in spite of their academic achievement, did not want to be identified

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as high achievers. In fact, when discussing an "us versus them" scenario, one of the students included himself in a group of lower achieving students, referring to the group as "us," as opposed to his fellow National Honor Society members whom he included in the "them" group. The students examined in Gayles' work understood the value of achieving in high school. This understanding was evidenced by the students' commitment to high academic achievement; however, they sought to diminish that achievement in an attempt to "reduce the power of good grades as a marker of identity" (Gayles 2005:255). This type of achievement reduction can also be seen in African-American athletes. In fact, a commonly- held stereotype among many Americans is that athletes are not smart (King & Springwood, 2001; Sailes, 1998; Shropshire, 1996). For example, there is often a great amount of attention given to African-American athletes when they perform at or above average level academically. An example can be seen in the Gayles' discussion with a high school basketball player who was also a high achieving student: "Sometimes they have a problem believing me like I'm lying or something. Like, '4.4? And you're good at basketball? Nooo'" (Gayles 2005:255). The need of African American men to negotiate multiple and often juxtaposed spaces, in order to secure academic, financial and social success is a phenomenon that requires further examination.

Sadowski notes, "Identity is the lived experience of an ongoing process—the process of integrating successes, failures, routines, habits, rituals, novelties, thrills, threats, violations, gratifications, and frustrations into a coherent and evolving interpretation of who we are" (Sadowski, 2003). Identity encompasses all that individuals do and is not just a reflection of how they behave and see themselves. It is an

internal understanding of one's self... As a result, how identities are developed and the ways in which they are molded are important factors in shaping young adults. These factors should be examined. According to research, a great deal of a student's success or failure in school centers on questions of identity (Sadowski 2003; Erikson 1968; Noguera 2003). Questions like, "Who am I?" "What kind of student am I?" "How do others see me?" "What do I want be when I grow up?" These are important questions both on conscious and unconscious levels. These are questions that must be answered before we can consider the more critical challenges referred to by Freire. It has been proposed (Sadowski et al, 2003) that as a result of adolescents spending a major portion of their lives in school, middle and high schools are both mirrors and shapers of the identity development experience. This idea is especially important when studying African American football players because this age range is also when many young football players begin playing the sport on Little League teams and in high schools. There have also been studies that examined the educational experience and achievement of recent immigrants to that of second and third generation immigrants (Gibson 1991; Ogbu 1991; Portes 1997). The results suggested a strong link between strength of national heritage and school performance. It has even been suggested that the dual frame of reference afforded to students who have strong ties to their homeland has aided in their academic orientation to a new homeland (Ogbu 1991). This information is important as this study examines the cultural connections some young African American athletes have with the sport of football.

Many social scientists have asserted the idea that, a large percentage of young, African-American males identify with professional athletics (predominantly football and basketball) and desire to become professional athletes (Edwards 1973; Majors 1990; Sailes 1998; Shropshire 1996). Anthropologists' resistance to the study of sports as a viable topic for analysis has been documented as well (Blanchard 1995; Hargreaves 1994; MacClancy 1996; Sands 1999). Even rarer are studies by anthropologists that examine African American sport participation and the sport culture that exists in America today. As a result, very few anthropologists, and social scientists in general, have examined the topic of identity construction and athletic aspirations among African-American males. Kirsten Benson (2000) discussed the effects of low academic expectations framed by colleges and universities on African-American male student athletes. She was able to collect these data by conducting qualitative interviews at a large, predominantly white, public university with a highly ranked, Division I football program (Benson 2000:226). One of her major findings was that the academic performance of the student athletes was directly affected by the limited attitudes and expectations of peers, advisors, teachers, and coaches (Benson, 2000:229). Many of the students did not believe their advisors and coaches had any confidence in their academic abilities. For example, one student stated, "They're just like, 'Well, he's dumb, so let's put him in this easy class to get his GPA back up,' without even looking at my schedule or what I want to do. … I guess they know better than I do, huh, but it didn't come out to be that way. You know, without even looking at me!" (Benson, 2000:230) Benson's work represents a good start at examining student perceptions; however, missing in her

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work is a critical analysis of the institutions and systems in place that resulted in the student athlete being put in that specific situation in the first place. Such systems and institutions include the U.S. public school system, the NCAA Clearinghouse and the manner in which it monitors high school student athlete academic progress, as well as the many loop-holes that allow students to enter a university setting before they are academically in a position to succeed. An example can be seen in the Junior College System set up to provide an alternate route for collegiate football players to attend larger colleges and universities for which they may not have qualified upon graduating from high school. As a Learning Specialist working with student athletes, I have seen multiple cases of student athletes transferring into universities with transcripts that were filled with courses that were not accepted by the four year institution. For example, courses like Weightlifting I, II and II, as well as Football Strategies I, II, and III represent the types of courses that elevate the student's grade point average, but cannot count towards the Bachelor's degree. When the university declines to accept those courses, the student's grade point average suffers, as well as their hopes and aspirations for their major. The student is, at that point, routed into whichever major(s) will accept the grade point average, with no regard for his actual career interest. As a result, examining student perceptions is important and should be coupled with an analysis of the systems in places that shape those perceptions.

Media Images, Ethnicity, Identity and Power

No discussion of the media and their representation of ethnicity should be complete without an examination of power. Both print and television media have played

a major role in the maintenance and perpetuation of the hegemonic influence those in power have had in framing identities, specifically in relation to people of color. The power to define collective and individual identity and knowledge is the power to control. The hegemonic relationship of power and identity is at the core of this discussion surrounding media images of sport and black athleticism. How are African-American athletes defined and portrayed in the media? Who decides what images will be displayed and how those images will be captioned and portrayed in the media? Can these definitions be challenged? If so, who should challenge them? If there is to be a useful discussion about the need for individuals to construct their own identities, specifically in regards to media representation, it must begin with truthful discussions about gender and ethnicity.

An example of the media's use of stereotypes and oversimplified images as a basis for the representation of minority groups can be seen in Bird's work on the negotiation of identity in response to media representation of American Indians. Bird also noted (Livingstone 1999) "Media cultures provide not only interpretive frameworks, but also sources of pleasure and resources for identity formation which insure that individuals…have a complex identity of which part includes their participatory relations with particular media forms" (Bird, 2003:115). This idea was echoed by King and Springwood, as they discussed Native American Mascots in collegiate athletics and will be discussed in greater detail shortly (King & Springwood, 2001).

JoEllen Shively (1992) examined the perceptions of Anglo and Indian men of Western movies. She found that both the non-Indian and Indian men often identified

with the cowboys, rejecting any identification with the Indians portrayed in the movie. However, their reasons for enjoying such films varied. Indian men saw the movie as an opportunity to indulge in the fantasy of being free and independent (like a cowboy). Non-Indian men saw the film as a representation of their proud heritage and ancestry. Researchers have also examined the movie *Dances with Wolves* and the way it constructs identity for both American Indians and the society at large (Georgakas, 1991; Castillo, 2003). Essentially, these articles found, as others have as well, that the media has aided in the perpetuation of stereotypes that continuously misrepresent the American Indian. For example, Churchill (1992) discussed Kevin Costner's attempt to break barriers by casting American Indians in the American Indian roles. This action, whether benevolent or not, also added to the public's perception of D*ances with Wolves* as being authentic and realistic. Native American identity is a very provocative topic in sport research. King and Springwood discuss the hegemonic relationship surrounding Native American identities being hijacked and overrepresented as college mascots, while continuing to be invisible as athletes. Native Americans on college campuses are often forced to negotiate spaces that elevate a historical perspective while at the same time remaining virtually invisible in public spaces. Their identities are often misappropriated and met with anger, aggression and violence when those images are challenged (King & Springwood 2001). While Native American representations are important and a major theme that is visible in collegiate athletics, issues surrounding African American representation in college athletics may be more urgent and thus the focus of this research.

Robert Entmann and Andrew Rojecki (2000) examined varying aspects of the issue of "race" and the media. While the information presented was informative, the authors' refusal to attempt to assess any accountability to those making the decision and thus reinforcing the stereotypes left the article incomplete. However, Rojecki and Entmann were able to establish a sound argument supporting the need for a more critical examination of the role of the media in perpetuating racism and the dissemination of misinformation, specifically in relation to how ethnicity is presented. The authors stopped short of blaming the "media" for any wrongdoing. In fact, they often apologized for their findings, remarking that they were probably not saying what they appeared to be saying. For example, on pg. 84, the authors essentially asserted that, even though all of the evidence points to the effects of racism on the decision to portray African-Americans in the news differently than European-Americans, it would be "misleading to lay this pattern at the door of racist or white-dominated news organizations where people of color are underrepresented" (Entmann & Rojecki 2000:84). The authors continue by stating that the perpetuation of stereotypical and misleading images and information by the media was the result of "structural forces" again failing to discuss what those forces were or how they should be addressed. They did however assert that the blame was not to fall on the media. It is important to critique bodies of work like this. They allow researchers to better gauge many of the issues that were prevalent in the 1980's and 1990's, in regards to ethnicity, identity and the media.

Another key component of media images, specifically in how they relate to ethnicity, is the role of the news media in perpetuating erroneous messages and images of

identity. Therefore, it is assumed by many that the news, as an objective body of investigative journalism, presents the entire story, bolstering the perception of the news media as reliable, neutral and truthful. Reese (1990) examined the construction of the news as well as the role of the media in shaping stories and cultural ideals, interrogating the "journalistic paradigm," which is based around an idea of "objectivity. He shows that the news media are everything except objective, asserting that the use of this paradigm inherently restricts the range of questions considered appropriate for study (Reese 1990:423). So, where the journalistic paradigm suggests that the news and journalists are guided by the reality of the event, Reese's work suggested the idea that the news shaped the events themselves by determining the ways in which those events would be represented.

Reese also discussed the hegemonic role of the news media, stating:

> Indeed, the self-policing character of the news paradigm is essential for its hegemonic effectiveness. Values that pose a threat cannot be suppressed directly by ruling interest; doing so would contradict the commonsensical notion that the media are free to report from within their own autonomous position. Instead, the media enforce their own boundaries by insisting that reporters with non-mainstream values keep them out of news accounts and through the natural workings of their own routines (Reese, 1990: 425).

He later stated, "By accepting valueless reporting as the norm, the media accept and reinforce the boundaries, values and ideological 'rules of the game' established and interpreted by elite sources" (Reese, 1990: 426). Reese insisted that the critically-

conscious citizen must examine the structural systems at work in the construction of news and not just the individual journalist or news editor. He asserted there is a need for examining the journalistic paradigm for "repairs" in order to understand how that paradigm reinforces and justifies hegemonic boundaries. He argues for a real examination of how the system attempts to re-establish and enforce the paradigm when there appears to be a hole in its structure. Paradigms are not static, but are continuously negotiated, as is society, (Reese, 1990: 436); as a result they need to be continuously examined and if needed updated in order to address contemporary societal needs.

Anthropologist Helan Page (1997) introduces the concept of "embraceability" in relation to African-American males. She notes, "Wherever the public I/eye or national imagination resides in white public space, its mainstream media agents learn to disregard the identity imperatives of marginal others and resort to universal claims as to what 'we Americans' or 'we fans' will tolerate and will not, what 'we' want to see and do not want to see, what 'we' are willing to embrace and what 'we' reject as unembraceable" (p. 106). Essentially Page is arguing that gendered and racialized information is embedded within black male imagery and how that construction is filtered through the whiteness of a national seeing I/eye (Page 1997:106). She also asserts that national perception is informed by that I/eye. African- American males are shaped by the media imagery perpetuated through the media and the only hope for escape is through the label of embraceable. However, embraceability is only an enduring label if the man remains unthreatening as gauged by the national seeing I/eye. This concept is extremely important not just to African Americans generally but to African American athletes specifically.

Applied to black athleticism, this concept directly relates to the ways in which certain African American athletes achieve a level of embraceability while others do not. Michael Jordan represents the archetype for embraceable black athlete. While to the contrary, Lebron James recently descended from embraceable athlete to unembraceable. He was the most beloved son of Cleveland, Ohio, until he decided to leave for Miami. His decision to publicly announce his departure from Cleveland left many upset and shifted his status from embraceable to unembraceable. Recent polling data showed Lebron's "likeability" rating had a dramatic drop among white Americans while among African Americans his support remained constant in some categories and increased in others. The concept of embraceability places African American athlete acceptance into a tenuous category contingent on assimilation and devoid of dissent.

An equally important aspect of the media's representation of African-American athletes can be seen in its incessant link between black bodies and crime. While there have been many instances of African-American athletes and criminality being linked together in media narratives, it was the 1995 O.J. Simpson trial that forced all Americans to examine how African-American athletes are framed. O.J. Simpson was a former professional football player, Hall of Famer member and Heisman Trophy winner. He was famed for having transcended race, until the now infamous trial. There had never been a trial of such spectacle before the Simpson trial, nor since. The verdict was announced, and for a week the news repeatedly showed African-American citizens cheering and European-Americans distraught. While not all African-Americans were happy with the verdict, many saw it as vindication for the many innocent African-

American men who had been wrongfully convicted of murders in the past. Also, while not all European-Americans thought O.J. was guilty, many saw the verdict as a miscarriage of justice. The nation appeared to be split, polarized by the verdict. However one question that was rarely asked (not ever asked on mainstream media), was, "Exactly when did O.J. Simpson return to being black?" It had been a while since he had been publicly associated with the "black community." Perhaps it was when TIME Magazine released a darkened image of O.J. Simpson for the cover in 1994, which coincidentally was when he took his arrest photo ("mugshot"). More importantly, is the issue of O.J. Simpson's meteoric ascension from African American collegiate football player to "raceless" celebrity. This issue goes back to Page's concept of embraceability as the world watched O.J. descend to his current unembraceable status, in spite of strong African American support.

While the O.J. Simpson trial was serious and warranted media coverage, history is riddled with examples of less heinous actions leading to unprecedented amounts of media coverage and resulting in the black athlete receiving heavy penalties. NFL Linebacker Ray Lewis was charged with murder for riding in a limo with a dozen other people. One of whom later got into a fight and killed someone outside a nightclub. Lewis, who wasn't at the scene of the crime, went on trial for murder. Michael Vick was sentenced to two years in prison for dog-fighting, and while dog-fighting is wrong and worthy of punishment, his sentence represented the first in the state of Virginia's legal history that a first-time offender received prison time. Public perceptions and media representations

framed many of the aforementioned criminal infractions into moral dramas which were later transformed into major transgressions and possible career ending scandals.

Another stereotype often ascribed to African-American male athletes and perpetuated in the media is that of the hypersexual "buck" (King & Springwood 2001). While the prevalence of cross ethnic dating has increased, old ideas still persist. It was well known in the 1960's that dating outside of one's race was expressly prohibited. Once African American athletes arrived at universities, coaches and professors often participated in policing the dating practices of the athletes (Olsen 1968; Lapchick 1991; Spivey & Jones 1975). Richard Lapchick suggested that a white paranoia perpetuated the view that black athletes are potential rapists. He reported that from 1988 to 1990, a total of 30 news accounts of female sexual assault by athletes were produced. Of the thirty, twenty-one were by white athletes. However, when an African-American athlete is the focus of such a report, it is his blackness that is foregrounded, through text and image, while white athletic sexual crimes remain racially unmarked (King & Springwood 2001:118; Lapchick 1991:248).

Another important aspect of identity in relation to sport and the media is the framing of masculinity. While academia has seen an increased amount of attention to the study of masculinity, masculinity is, and has always been, shaped by the society in which it is being examined. Studies examining masculinities are a fairly recent trend and as a result there are gaps in the literature. It is also the case that many define the masculine by its relation to the feminine. As a result, a study of masculinity must include an examination of femininity. (Connell 1995: 71) In fact it has been postulated by some that

women's status in society will not improve and change for the better until men themselves change (Coward1992; Whannel 2002; Lemons 1998, 2007)

The same can be seen when discussing gender and sport where oftentimes, being masculine strictly means not being feminine; however femininity is defined by the person in power. Anderson (2005) discussed the challenges that accompany being a gay athlete. Anderson interviewed 60 gay male athletes in North American high schools, colleges and professional sporting teams. In his text he discussed the role of homophobia in establishing masculine hierarchies on the playing field. He also critically examined the hegemonic role of masculine hierarchies in the maintenance of power both on and off the field.

The boundaries of manhood/masculinity are an ever shifting line that remains the topic of construction, policing, and contestation, as all socially constructed boundaries. The role of the mainstream print and television media in constructing and promoting those boundaries provides an interesting perspective on the issues and institutions that help shape the minds and consciences of young African American male athletes. It is often through athletic performance that African American male identity is constructed, ascribed and promoted within African American communities.

Sports and the culture of sports permeate all corners of American life. Sport enculturation for many young people begins at a relatively early age. Before some children enter Kindergarten, they have already been introduced to organized T-ball leagues, or gymnastics camps. Parents often attempt, at earlier ages than ever, to discern if their child has talent or gifts that can translate onto the playing field.

American sport culture has reached a level where parents mortgage their homes in order to foster their five or six year old's athletic talents. It is an era where talent scouts identify children as young as elementary school aged as deserving of special attention and "gifts" to help parents nurture their child's talent. This is also an era when little league moms and dads readily and aggressively challenge coaches who are not giving their children what they deem to be adequate playing time. This is an era in American society where elite gymnasts peak at approximately fifteen-years-old and often times end their careers performing for a collegiate team at the age of 23. Sport, as an institution, is embedded within every social setting in American society. For example, executives discuss lucrative deals on the golf course and some Division IA college coaches earn seven figures.

While the effects of sport culture can be seen in every facet of American life, this was not always the case. Some researchers have suggested the increased popularity of sports is due in major part to the media, specifically television and the corporate-cartel mind set of the varying league owners and stakeholders (Andrews & Jackson 2001; Dunnavant 2004; Jozsa 2003; Oriard 1993). However, the idea that the media are to blame for the state of American sport culture is far too simplistic an answer to a very complex question. How has sport, specifically collegiate sport that began in the halls of Ivy League schools, transitioned, from the pastime of the upper class to the past-time of the masses? In what ways, if at all, have shifting ideologies changed the role of sport in American society? Each of these questions will need to be examined if a true analysis of the role of sport in American society is to be discussed.

The current popularity of football necessitates a more critical examination of its place in American life and specifically within the state of Florida. While the culture of sport in American society is far too complex a topic to examine without examining interrelated issues such as class, gender, age, and race/ethnicity, an attempt must be made to confront these issues and the many implications that accompany them. The state of Florida, specifically, is considered by some to be one of the top states for collegiate football recruiting. As a result, the role of football and collegiate athletics within the state of Florida and the implications of the relationship between the two must be examined as well.

History of age, class, gender, and race in American Sports:

Robert Sands defines sport as, "a cultural universal having the following features: a human activity that is a formal and rule-directed contest ranging from a game like activity to a highly institutionalized structure; competition between individuals or teams or can result in internal competition within an individual; a basis in physical skills, and strategy, chance or a combination of all three; and potential tangible rewards for the participants, monetary, material, or status" (Sands 1999:3). In early American history, sports were a mixture of transplanted traditions and ideals that accompanied British settlers to the Americas and the environments and circumstances that were present in the North American landscape. While many sports in the Northeast were forced to adhere to Quaker and Puritan ideals of proper and right, many Southern regions played more aggressive and even violent games (Rader 1998:17).

However, along with transitional economic and industrial ideals, the nineteenth century saw the development of a shifting American economic ideology that began to see greater divisions based on class and structurally perpetuated through American institutions. This shift was also evident in sporting cultures and communities. While the term culture remains a contested construct within anthropology, for the purposes of this paper, culture is defined as a group's shared and socially transmitted perceptions, ideas and values that shape and define experiences and frame behavior. While this shift was solidified through the development of inclusive communities for the wealthy, there was also at this time an ethnic middle and lower class that developed a parallel culture to what was considered the wealthy normalized culture of the powerful. It is within this "parallel-culture" that we began to see the development of sports like prize-fighting and horseracing, specifically in the Northeast where strict moral laws dictated leisure activities and gaming. (Rader, 1998) However, in spite of the popularity of many of these sports, they remained outside the realm of the respectable games of leisure of the day. It is also within this realm of "less-respectable" games of leisure that baseball was born. While baseball may have originated as a less-respectable boy's club, by the 1860's baseball had become both commercialized and produced for the masses.

It was also within the nineteenth century that American society saw the rise of sporting communities based on race/ethnicity, status, and class. Many ethnic minorities (e.g., Germans, Irish, and English) formed sporting communities whose relationships and bonds were transmitted from the club to often segregated, closely-knit communities (Rader, 1998). Wealthy Americans formed country clubs and sporting communities to

the exclusion of less wealthy, non-white Americans. It should also be noted that it was the children of these wealthy patrons who were instrumental in the founding of many prevalent collegiate sporting communities during this time (Rader, 1998; Bloom & Willard, 2002).

It has been stated that the first organized football games at the collegiate level were used as initiation rites for incoming freshman (Miller 1987; Oriard 1993; Rader 1998; Smith 1988). However, as a result of the violent and disorderly behavior that accompanied the ritual, the tradition was outlawed. It should be noted that Harvard and Yale played significant roles in the initial framing and popularity of organized collegiate football. One Yale football player, in particular, had an influential role in establishing a set of standard rules that have become the basis for what we now call American football. This influential figure was Walter Camp, who played on Yale's football team from 1875 to 1882. It was he who suggested the rule changes that framed football in a unique way that made it more easily distinguished from, what at the time was a very similar sport, rugby. These rule changes also played a pivotal role in catapulting football from a small-scale game with very little audience and newspaper readership to the more large-scale spectacle of the 1890's and 1900's. It was also during this time that a clear connection could be seen between education and athletics (Rader, 1998). During this time period, adult managed youth programs like the YMCA began to establish prominence in cities that were looking for leisure options for young children residents. As a result, boys' sports programs became more popular and were believed to act as interventions designed

to better control the leisure time of young males (Hardy & Ingham 1983; Kett 1979; Rader 1998).

Between 1890 and 1950, sport grew and began to achieve greater prominence in American culture. It was also during this period that colleges began to consider the difficult challenge of running profitable athletic departments and providing the best academic environment for their students. It is also the era that college football began to flourish and maintain a following of its own (Jozsa, 2003; Dunnavant, 2004). As a result, recruitment began to play a vital role in the growth and development of the sport. In fact, recruitment remains today a key component of maintaining the balance between athletics and academics. However, all of these advancements were still to the exclusion of both African-Americans and women (Rader, 1998; Ross, 2004).

From 1950 to the present, public interest in sports and the culture of sports has increased greatly. It was during this time that the popularity of television and the rapid growth in commercialism within collegiate and professional athletics began to be seen and the economic impact felt by communities throughout the United States (Dunnavant, 2004). Television rights and deals were brokered between large media conglomerates, the professional sporting leagues, and collegiate teams. It was also during this time that a there was a large increase in the popularity and profitability of football in American society. In the early stages of American football, there were no organized leagues. Hard working men with full-time regular jobs scheduled football matches and played for leisure on Sundays. However, in the early years, football was a sport played by ethnic minorities and thus ranked outside the circle of "respectable" leisure activities. It was not

until 1922, in an attempt to increase both profitability and respectability, that the National Football League (NFL) was founded in Canton, Ohio (Rader, 1998). Unfortunately, it would be 30 years before either of these goals was met.

During the NFL's first 35 years, over 40 teams joined the league, struggled, and then expired (Rader, 1998). There were also a number of important rule changes that were made during this time that increased the offensive flexibility of the teams, which in turn, increased excitement within the game of football, and thus increased fan support. All-star games between the top collegiate senior football players and the championship NFL team for that year were played in an attempt to increase popularity. Also, the NFL draft was instituted in 1936. While the first 35 years were challenging for the NFL (The Great Depression and World War II took place during this time), the league managed to persist through it all (Jozsa, 2003).

It was not until the mid-1960s that football's popularity began to rival that of baseball in American society. A major component of the increase in popularity appears to be the televising of professional football. Television opened the door for millions of people to access football from the comfort of their homes (Dunnavant, 2004). It also allowed them to participate in social communities that would be otherwise out of reach. It allowed what Appadurai called, "Imagined Communities" (Appadurai 2005:31-32) to be formed and maintained through a belief that it did not matter where a person resided, they could still be apart of the family (team).

It was also in the 1960s that American sport culture was forced to address the issue of race/ethnicity. While sports were integrated "symbolically" in 1947 when Jackie

Robinson signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers, racism and inequity in football based on race is still a factor that must be acknowledged and addressed (Mangan & Ritchie, 2004). While theories of genetics and athletic ability have been around for centuries, it was in the 1970's that theories of black genetic disposition to athleticism in football began to be asserted as the reason for the overrepresentation of African-Americans (Jarvie, 2002). While this argument is still debated today, (Entine, 2000; Ross, 2004; Shropshire, 1996) it should be acknowledged that African-Americans are only overrepresented in two sports: football and basketball. According to Sailes, African-Americans make up approximately 80% of the NBA players and 65% of the NFL players (Sailes 1999:30), yet it is important to remember there are many more sports that have an extremely low representation of African-American participants. In fact most sports fall in the latter category (e.g., golf, tennis, bowling, soccer, hockey, swimming, rowing, water polo, rugby, skiing and, curling). Of the three sports with the highest representation of African-American athletes (football, basketball and track & field), football and basketball are the highest revenue producing (Shropshire, 1996; Sailes, 1998; Dunnavant, 2004).

Although these two sports are the greatest in producing revenue, it is not surprising that both of these sports are heavily monitored. In fact, both football and basketball are the two most rule-laden sports in America. Rules that would not be acceptable in any other sport (or business) are created and enforced in football and basketball. For example, football is the only American sport that requires the athlete to attend college before they may declare themselves a professional. This rule is disguised by a three year wait requirement which generally creates an age restriction of

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approximately twenty-one years old before a football athlete can try out for the NFL and forfeit his amateur status. While theoretically it would be possible to skip college and try out for the NFL three years beyond high school, most scouts and football novices would tell you that it is virtually impossible to enter the NFL without attending college. This is due in large part to the way the NCAA and the NFL partner to corral the best talent into a pseudo-farm system with little competition (Dunnavant, 2004; Jozsa, 2003). The National Basketball Association (NBA) entertained a similar rule requiring the athlete to be at least one year removed from high school before he can try out for the NBA. The issue with the NBA's rule is that many players have shown in the past the ability to transition from high school to the professional basketball league. In fact, many players who have tried out for teams and were given contracts right out of high school have seen success in the league. Players like Kevin Garnett, Kobe Bryant, Jermaine O'Neal and LeBron James are recent and popular names of basketball players who decided against attending college. Each of these players has seen a great deal of success; in fact, at least three of them played in the 2008 NBA Playoffs. There are also an even greater number of basketball athletes who attempted the transition from high school to the NBA unsuccessfully. While this argument deserves attention, it should be noted that there are also a great number of young people who failed to make the transition from high school to college successfully. The idea that society has a right or responsibility to police the independent career and educational decisions of its individuals appears to be ludicrous, except in relation to athleticism.

This debate is actually a manifestation of the hypocrisy that plagues professional athletics in American society. After all, there were no sneers or jeers when Maria Sharapova declared her professional status while she was still a teenager. While the Williams' sister's decision is accepted now, Venus Williams, in particular, also received considerable negative media press immediately after announcing her decision to forego her amateur status and pursue a professional tennis career. Admittedly a great deal of the negative press focused on the way in which her father chose to train her and her sister; however, she was also accused of not being ready and in need of better coaching and time. Whereas in the case of Maria Sharapova, the tennis world praised her intelligence and strength on the tennis court and her father received praise for his coaching. Of course, in reference to African American male athletes, examples of positive praise for a black athlete choosing to nurture his talent as opposed to pursuing higher education are virtually non-existent. Some may consider Tiger Woods the exception, however, perhaps his multi-ethnic heritage and appearance mitigate his image and counter balances some of the weight of being a black athlete. Another example is the hundreds of high school baseball players who sign contracts to play for Major League Baseball Farm Leagues, most of whom never make it to the Major Leagues. Why is it that so many people find themselves upset at young African-American athletes who choose to pass on the college dream? Similarly, there are no public uproars when non-athletic high school seniors decide to forego college for a career. While people may not agree, there is no blanket set of values placed on all young people who make that decision. In fact, that type of blanket labeling is only seen in reference to African-American male athletes.

Another example is the trend among a number of NFL athletes allowing their hair to grow relatively long by wearing dreadlocks. As a result, the NFL announced it is entertaining a rule that would require athletes who wear dreadlocks in their hair to tuck the dreadlocks inside of the helmet. While it is unclear how the dreadlocks will all fit under a standard helmet, even more disturbing is the lack of respect for individual rights. However, they are not infringing on all individual rights, only the rights of those players who wear dreadlocks.

A similar example can be seen in the NBA. In a response to the desire to rid the NBA of it's "hip-hop" image, the NBA successfully passed a rule that banned jewelry from being worn on the outside of the shirts of athletes who were not playing in the game and dressed in regular clothes along the bench. They created this rule citing a dress code policy that had very little to do with the actual clothes worn by athletes who were not playing and more about distancing the league from the hip-hop culture. These are just a few examples of the far-reaching authority of the two professional leagues and owners over the players. It also touches on the pervasive way in which racism and race based policies are still played out in professional sports.

Brief History of Football:

Football is one of the greatest revenue producing sports in American society. While at its inception it was an obscure knock-off of the more popular rugby, football has become a staple in American society. In 1970, 10 million fans watched 26 teams participate in 182 games. By the year 2000, 31 teams were watched by 20 million

spectators while participating in 248 games (Jozsa 2003:21). Along with the multibillion

dollar national television contract and the approximately 66,000 per game attendance

counts, the NFL has become extremely profitable (Jozsa 2003:21; Quirk & Fort

1992:333-361).

Collegiate football plays an important role in the success of the professional

league (NFL). In fact, as discussed earlier, it is virtually impossible to enter the NFL

without first playing at the collegiate level and secondly being rated by talent experts.

Each year, Todd McShay and Mel Kiper (draft day experts) list their ranking of the top

football athletes available for the draft. While some teams draft for talent, others draft to

fill specific voids on either the offensive or the defensive sides of the team. Even still,

others draft on more subjective criteria. For example, in the 2008 draft, the number two

player overall was picked over the player ranked higher than him at his position because

of "pedigree" (ESPN 2008 Draft Day Coverage). The commentators repeatedly stated he

was "relentless" and "the son of a hall of famer," but at no time did they assert he was the

best player at that position, and in actuality, Mel Kiper had the other player ranked

higher. Another example is the player who was ranked as the number one athlete in the

NFL Draft. He was a running back from Arkansas and described as being "explosive"

and a "game breaker." However, the sports experts claimed his problem was that his

family was a liability and a team would need to invest extra energy in ensuring his family

did not influence him (ESPN 2008 Draft Day Coverage). The media and sports

commentators went on to explain that the athlete's mother had been a crack cocaine

addict six years earlier and his brothers had participated in gangs. They also mentioned

he had fathered two children "out of wedlock" and although they were not worried about him getting into trouble himself, they were concerned about his family. In fact, a few suggested he would need to cut himself off from his family if he desired to succeed in the NFL.

While this player was drafted fourth overall, the discussion about his family definitely tarnished his reputation, his options, and his earning potential on draft day. His earning potential was negatively affected because the order in which players are drafted determines the amount of money they will be paid. The number one draftee will sign the largest contract of the draft. So, if a player drops five picks, his earning potential drops as well. The NFL draft is a system set up to give each team an opportunity to pursue the top football players in the country. Each team is given a predetermined rank and order, based on their winning percentage during the previous football season. They disperse their talent scouts in search of the players that will meet the needs of their team for that year. One of the most unsettling aspects of the draft is the way in which the athletes are characterized and labeled by the sports commentators and media experts. Within the context of the NFL draft, identities are being framed and solidified through a sport language that is both covertly racist and at the same time collectively accepted by many ethnicities.

For example, during the 2008 NFL Draft which was broadcast on ESPN on April 26, 2008, I jotted down some of the words used to describe the top drafted white athletes. The words used included:

- "Great mechanics"
- "Character which can not be coached"

- "Intelligence, which can not be coached"
- "Technically the most sound"

In contrast some terms used to describe the top African-American talent drafted included:

- "Physical"
- "Powerful"
- "Quick"
- "More of a power guy"
- "Strength"

In regards to one player, one of the ESPN commentators stated the athlete's "football IQ is still growing [however] his physique, if he takes off his shirt, he looks like Tarzan." These and other terms used to describe athletes perpetuate the stereotype of the African-American male as an instinctive animal. One with pure, raw talent that must be controlled, trained and in many respects, civilized before they can be completely human. Research indicates that student-athletes are confronted with this and many other stereotypes and they furiously attempt to escape them. When discussing issues faced by student athletes, the students expressed concern regarding, "the media attention given to the unruly personal and sport-specific behavior of high profile athletes will reflect on their own reputations" (Stephen & Higgins, 2009). This quote highlights the effect of negative stereotypes, reinforced by the 24 hour sports news cycle have on student-athletes.

The age requirement in place in the NFL provides an example of the league's attempt at control. More specifically, an examination of the relationship between college and professional football provides a solid explanation of the need for the age requirement.

The most obvious is the rules ability to allow the NFL to funnel the best talent in the nation directly into the league, which in turn eliminates any competition for the nation's top football talent. It also insures and solidifies the connection between a player and his fans, which can translate into revenue for the teams that draft the most talented and popular players. Lastly, it solidifies the NFL's role as the sole proprietor of professional football and thus the benefactor of all its revenue, while simultaneously providing a secure role for collegiate institutions as the sole training ground. How lucrative would collegiate football be if the best talent chose to bypass college? The NCAA does not have to concern itself with this question because of the age requirement initiated by the NFL. This fact also solidifies the NCAA's monopoly on the best football talent in the country.

Originally the governance of each college or university was the responsibility of the individual school. However, it was not long before athletic conferences were developed to help regulate college football and place each team on an equal platform. As a result, the NCAA regulates those individual conferences and schools ensuring adherence to the rules and equity in play (Eckard, 1998; Hales, 2003). Regardless of the conference, prestige of the school or skills of the coach, developing winning teams requires the consistent recruitment of talented and gifted athletes. As a result, well-structured, intensive recruitment systems have been developed that identify the most desirable recruits and monitor the movements of the recruits in a way that allows each college or university the opportunity to gauge the likelihood of signing the recruit to a scholarship (Langelett, 2003). In the past, college coaches relied heavily on alumni and

friends within the community to help recruit high school students of interest. However, today a student is more likely to receive a home visit, phone call, or text message from the head coach or an assistant/position coach. Another part of the recruitment process is the offer to the athlete to visit the college or university that is interested in signing him. If an athlete is extremely talented he will be invited to attend many colleges and universities for visits. In this setting the coach will often meet with the athlete and his parents and discuss his plans for the athlete, both academically and athletically, should he choose to attend the college or university. Also on this visit, the recruit may get the opportunity to hang out with other players on the team in an attempt to get a true perception of that university. Another side to the recruitment process is the bestowing of gifts, or subsidies given to the athletes to help supplement their needs prior to (in some instances) and while at the college or university and a member of the team. The bestowal of gifts is an illegal act and the consequences can include the suspension of the student or team, if the infraction is systemic (Byers & Hammer, 1997).

This issue of "pay for play" is a central topic in the debate surrounding student athletes on college campuses, specifically football players (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Goplerud, 1997). In its most simplistic form, one side of the debate argues that student athletes should be allowed to get jobs and earn extra money. Their argument is that football student athletes earn a great deal of money for their respective colleges and universities. However, they are not allowed to earn money for themselves. Many young athletes struggle with not being able to take a girlfriend out to dinner or purchase gas for a car and the college or university offers no solutions for the athlete within the

established NCAA rules and regulations. The other side of the debate believes the athlete

is a student first, with responsibilities to the university and football team as a scholarship

athlete. A job might impede their ability to learn and fulfill their commitment on the

playing field. The most common explanation for the denial of student athletes' rights to

gainful employment centers around the issue of amateur status. The NCAA has stated

that if they pay athletes to play football, then they are no longer amateurs and thus

ineligible to play collegiate football (Mueller, 2004).

Football in Florida:

Research on football in Florida and African American participation was

essentially non-existent. While there has been work done on American football, a

scholarly analysis of the data and trends surrounding football participation in Florida has

not been completed. As such, I collected data from the Florida High School Athletic

Association (FHSAA), archived newspaper articles and blog entries, the National

Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and Florida sports websites like Rivals.com to

create a contemporary picture of football in Florida today. The following synthesizes the

data collected.

The state of Florida is a unique and talent-rich state for American high school

football. In January 2008, eight players from one south Florida team committed to attend

and play for the University of Miami (Rivals.com). In fact, as of February 2008, the

University of Miami signed 11 players from two south Florida high schools. Currently,

there are 37 players in NFL whose hometown is located in Dade County. In the 2008

NFL combine, at least 37 players who played either high school or college football in the

state of Florida tried out for NFL team rosters (Databasefootball.com, nflfanhouse.com).

Of all the colleges and universities with players in the NFL, the University of Miami has

the most and Florida State University has the third highest number of players in the NFL.

This fact is even more outstanding, considering the fact that both of these programs have

seen limited success in recent seasons on the football field. Where each of these teams

dominated college football in the 1980's and 1990's, the twenty-first century has not seen

the same level of success, with both teams falling out of the top 25 in the 2007 season.

As a result of the above-mentioned facts, the state of Florida is considered by

some to be the "king of football at the high school level" (Blustein, 2008), and the large

talent pool of prospective college players make football "big business" in the state. There

are currently at least three high schools in the Tampa Bay Region recently granted

contract deals with Nike for their uniforms and team apparel. While this type of

reputation can be viewed as a positive for the teams that were given the contracts, this

relationship between corporate America and high school athletics may prove detrimental

to the education and well being of the athletes, both at the elite programs as well as those

programs not considered elite, for a variety of reasons. It should be noted that elite status

is based solely on playing field performance and is in no way dependent on academic

criteria or success.

The state of Florida has four Division I-A football teams that have spent some

time in the top five within the last ten years. In fact, there was a time when Florida State

University (FSU) finished 14 seasons in the Associated Press's top five while playing in

five National Championship games and winning two National Titles (Blackmon, 2008).

The University of Miami (UM) was essentially equal to that level of success during the same time period. The University of Florida (UF) has won two National Titles and the University of South Florida (USF) saw its highest ranking in its ten-year history during the 2007 season (Ranked #2 at one point in the season). While these are not the only college football teams in Florida, they are the most well known and successful. They also are known for recruiting heavily in the State of Florida and often get the first opportunity to court some of the best talent. In regards to funneling players to the NFL, they are unparalleled.

In the 2008 draft, at the end of what some consider the worst season in modern history for both Florida State University and The University of Miami, each program had students invited to attend the NFL combine (a pre-draft work out designed to give scouts the opportunity to see what each player has to offer athletically).

- Florida State University had four athletes invited
- The University of Miami had six.
- The University of South Florida had three athletes invited.
- and the University of Florida had two.

While these numbers appear small there are only approximately 150 open roster spots in the NFL yearly (Sailes 1998: 29) This means that if given a spot on an NFL team, the top four football programs in Florida will have contributed over 10 percent of the new players in a draft that saw one of the worst years' performances for two of the more well known football programs (FSU and UM). Without going into speculation as to why the programs performed so poorly, it is important to mention that poor performance is a subjective term based on fan and program expectations that are admittedly extremely high. This means that what would have been an acceptable and successful season for

other teams (in regards to winning game percentage, attendance, and ticket sales and revenue) turned out to be unacceptable for these teams. Head coaches within the state of Florida have lost their jobs for less. As stated earlier, there are currently 37 NFL players from Miami-Dade County alone (databasefootball.com, nfl.fanhouse.com). The University of Miami has more active players in the NFL than any other college or university with 43 players and Florida State University is not far behind them with 41 players, as of the 2008 draft. Of the 37 players invited to the combine, 12 played college and high school football in Florida with four playing only college football in Florida (databasefootball.com). This leaves 21 athletes who played high school football in the state of Florida and collegiate football outside of the state of Florida. The 2008 NFL combine invited Florida high school or collegiate players who played for:

West Texas State	Louisville
Oregon State	West Virginia
Virginia Tech	UC-Berkeley
Alabama	Louisiana State
Arizona	East Carolina
Wake Forest	N.C. State
Marshall	Nebraska
Georgia Tech	Southern California
Tennessee State	Iowa State
Auburn	Morgan State
Pittsburgh	

(VSM Florida FB, 2008)

This information highlights the point that the state of Florida has a definite impact on collegiate and professional football. However this relationship, as previously examined, starts well before the athlete reaches the college or university.

According to the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA 2008), in the 2006-2007 school year 401,117 boys participated in high school athletics and 397,388 girls participated for a total of 798,505 high school students playing a sport. There were 502 football teams that were made up of 38,744 participants. Of all the sports counted, football had the highest number of participants, which was more than two times the number of participants in the next three highest sports (Outdoor Track and Field-15,020; Basketball-14,456; Soccer-14,173; Baseball-13,834). (FSHAA 2008) One possible reason for the apparent popularity of football over other sports in Florida could be access. Pop Warner football is the term given to "little league" football programs in the state. Pop Warner football leagues are extremely organized, and heavily based in African-American communities. For example, the City of St. Petersburg, Florida, has at any given time, at least three different Pop Warner teams based on the south side of the city, the part of the city with the heaviest concentration of African-American residents. Another key aspect is the relatively small registration fees that accompany football participation at the Pop Warner level. Parents could register their child for approximately 50 dollars for the season, and in the case of financial hardship, some scholarships and waivers may be offered as well. This is in considerable contrast to some AAU junior

basketball leagues that require hundreds of dollars for participation, as well as the funds to support teams that travel out of the local area.

Another benefit of the State of Florida for football players is the climate. Young children can go outside and play a game of football year round as the climate permits. This can really be an asset, specifically in regards to spring training. Another possible reason could be the image and prestige attached to football and football success. Because the state has produced so many great athletes in the past, it is rare to go into an African-American community in Florida and meet a young African-American male who does not personally know another African-American male who has garnered a certain level of success on the football field. This could possibly bolster the young athletes' belief that he could also achieve such a goal. While each of these explanations probably plays some contributing role in the popularity of football in Florida, specifically amongst African-Americans, it does not explain the relatively low numbers of Hispanic-Americans participation in football in the state of Florida. This in fact suggests that the question is more complex and should be examined further, specifically in regards to overall participation and popularity across ethnicity.

However, in Florida, football is extremely popular among young African-American males and part of the answer can be accounted for within the level of success these athletes achieve on the playing field. For the third straight year in a row, the state of Florida has had a team win the high school national football championship. Miami Northwestern won the title in 2008, and Lakeland High School won it the two preceding years. What made the 2007 football season even more outstanding for the State of

Florida is the level of competition and great programs that came out of the state. There were arguably three great teams in the state that could equally have been given the honors of National Champion. While Miami Northwestern won the state 6A title, Pahokee (H.S.) won the state 2B title and had won state titles in four of the preceding five years. While Pahokee is a smaller school, they actually defeated four larger 6A programs during that season (Blustein 2008). Another 2007 powerhouse was Miami's Booker T. Washington High School, located approximately four miles away from Miami Northwestern. Although they had been beaten by Armwood, in Seffner Florida, during their past four meetings, they won the matchup in 2007 and went on to win the Class 4A State Championship. In fact, Larry Blustein argued they were one of the best in the nation. This belief was validated when Miami Booker T. Washington won the class 4A state title.

While South Florida is considered by some to be a 'hotbed' of high school football talent (Blustein, 2008; Blackmon, 2008), the Tampa Bay Region (Hillsborough, Pinellas, Polk, Pasco, and Sarasota/Manatee Counties) has seen its share of success as well. From 1996 to 2006, the Tampa Bay Region won eight state titles and placed second 10 times. The Tampa Bay Region also had:

- Nine players placed on the FHSAA finals all-time Top performance list
- Two players on the FHSAA all-time rushing list
- Five players on the FHSAA all-time passing lists
- Three players on the FHSAA all-time receiving list

A Tampa Bay Area team has won first or second, or both, in the state 4A and 5A Championship game for four of the last five years. Two Tampa Bay Region teams contended for the State Championship in 2008 with Plant High School (Tampa, FL)

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beating Armwood in the Playoffs. Plant High School went on to win both the 2008 and

the 2009 State Championship (FHSAA.org).

Armwood High School in Seffner, Florida, spent the majority of the 2007 season

ranked in the top two for Class 4A. Armwood won all its 2007 season games handily

within the county, but lost against Booker T. Washington in Miami in the Semi-finals,

destroying their hopes of winning a state title and denying their fourth appearance in the

Class 4A title game in six years. Their final 2007 record was 13 wins, 1 loss. The 2008

season ended with one loss as well, to the aforementioned Plant High School in the State

Playoffs. While Armwood suffered some key offensive and defensive losses, of the

seniors on the 2007 team, all received and accepted scholarship offers with the exception

of one who was offered a scholarship from the Army and declined it. The 2007 team sent

players to UF, USF, Auburn, Western Kentucky and a number of smaller schools in the

Northeast.

Because of the popularity of football in Florida and the relative amount of success

many young African-American males are exposed to via the media or through their

communities, the institution of sport can be very influential in their lives. According to

the FHSAA 2006-2007 sports participation survey, sports participation steadily drops

from 9th grade (122,146-boys; 114,478-girls) to 12th grade (79,162-boys; 83,249-girls).

(FHSAA 2008) If sport can be an educational link for young African-American males,

why are not more resources being allocated towards increasing the positive outcomes that

have been associated with sport participation? This question is central to the research at

hand.

African American Social Status, Mobility and Attainment in Florida:

According to the Department of Corrections, in 2005-2006, 42,174 African-American males were incarcerated. A year later, in the 2006-2007 school year, 47,608 African males were enrolled in Florida's community colleges, state universities, and select private institutions. While the National data shows a 4:1 ratio of college to prison among African-American males, the data in Florida are much closer, almost equal (FCSSBMB 2008:31). The Florida Council of the Social Status of Black Men and Boys (FCSSBMB) recently released both its 2007 and 2008 reports. In it the Council detailed the state of African-American males in Florida in comparison to the Nation, by focusing on four areas: economics, education, foster care, and health.

The report focused on education and criminality as its basis for asserting the need to improve educational attainment amongst African-American males. While high school drop-out rates can be viewed as a predictor of criminality, it may be dangerous to approach the educational needs of African-American males from that perspective. The council risks perpetuating the very phenomenon it hopes to counter. The issues with educational achievement among African-American males run far deeper than criminality. To purport that either will single-handedly deter the other is misleading and an oversimplification of a very complex social problem. According to the Florida Department of Education, in 2006, more than 50% of Black males in elementary school (grades 3-5) performed below grade level in math and reading. More than 65% of African-American males in grades 6-8 performed below grade level in math and reading

and 84% in high school, grades 9-10 scored below grade level in reading. Sixty percent of African-Americans in grades 9-10 scored below grade level in Math on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). These numbers can be compared to their white counter parts respectively: 23%, 32%, 55%, and 24% (Florida Department of Education PK-20 Data Warehouse, 2007). According to the FCSSBMB, African-American males are more likely to be retained, more likely to drop out and less likely to graduate than their white counterparts (FCSSBMB 2008:25).

The council also chose to examine economics in relation to black criminality. As stated earlier, it would probably have been more informative to examine economic status through educational achievement. The committee examining the state of the black economy in Florida defined black wealth as, "that which consists of increasing economic opportunities through:

- Entrepreneurship
- High wages
- Home ownership
- Educational advancement
- Good health." (FCSSBMB 2008:9)

The council examined how educational achievement translated into personal wealth. According to their findings, it did not translate at all. While African-Americans age 25 and older, earning a graduate degree, nationally, have increased by 62%, the Floridian marketplace continues to be dominated by low employment opportunities (FCSSBMB 2008:17). Also, according to the U.S. Census (2006), blacks have the lowest average household income at $30,858 a year; behind Hispanics ($35,967), whites

($50,784), and Asians ($61,094). The report also reported statewide poverty rates as

follows:

White: 12.6 (4.3 increase from the national average)
Black: 23.4 (1.5 decrease from the national average)
Hispanic: 16.5 (5.3 decrease from the national average)

(FCSSBMB 2008:14)

While these rates are slightly better, the fact still remains that as of 2006, approximately

one in four African-American Floridians were living in poverty. More recent numbers

would be interesting to examine, considering the current state of the economy

nationwide. Essentially the committee on the economic welfare of black men and boys

found that while all African-Americans are not employed in low wage careers, a

disproportionate number are, and this trend negatively affects their social status.

(FCSSBMB 2008:15). In conclusion, the council wrote:

"The status of Black wealth in the state of Florida is negatively affected by the lack of
entrepreneurial opportunities, low wages and high poverty levels, high costs of
homeownership and increased foreclosures, and low educational outcomes. While
nationally the Black community has made some forward strides, its advances are
significantly outpaced and surpassed by those of other ethnic groups, causing Blacks to
suffer a dual minority role behind the White community and its closest ethnic minority
group Hispanics and Latinos, in all areas."
Florida Council on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, 2008: 18

It is clear that there are a number of barriers facing African-American males in

Florida. While economic issues and incarceration are important, equally, if not more

important are educational achievement and health status. It should not come as a surprise

that young African-American males latch onto what they believe is their best chance at

success, through illegitimate means. The Council on the Social Status of Black Men and

Boys made involvement with the criminal justice system the backdrop for many of its

findings; however, perhaps it would be more fitting to make educational attainment the backdrop and allow the results of higher levels of achievement to affect the economy, health options and the overall social status of African-American men and boys. Education is not the only variable effecting African American achievement. In fact, also important are the systemic inequities in policing and the criminal justice system that must be addressed if real intervention and success are to be attained.

Anthropology and the Study of Sport

While the study of sport has received a good amount of attention from varying social science disciplines, there has been a relatively small amount of attention afforded to the study of sport by anthropologists, with an even smaller percentage studying American sport and specifically American football. This is both surprising and unfortunate considering the major role sports and the sporting industry currently play in modern society. Some have asserted that the prevalence of sport in modern societies, globally, speaks to the universality of sport and games (Blanchard, 1995). Sport's enduring presence and cultural ties also allude to the clear historical link between sport and human history. Anthropology is a discipline that is founded on tenets of cultural relativism and ethnographic research. As a result, anthropologists are uniquely positioned to illuminate cultural phenomena whose initial importance may have been overlooked, by being able to observe that same phenomena through a more critical and culturally relative lens. Many of these phenomena are not examined and often go unnoticed because they are embedded within a larger system that appears more prevalent or interesting and thus

is afforded more attention. This oversight can lead to social scientists overlooking some of the smaller nuances of the beliefs or behaviors contributing to the human history and human behavior. It is through anthropology's holistic approach to studying human behavior that sport can be viewed within the context of all aspects of society and appropriately positioned as a socially structured institution with many components as well as an agent of control and change.

According to Robert Sands, sport is not only universal but one of the best indicators or expressions of culture. It reflects culture and behavior in sport can be applied to that of the surrounding culture. He argued that a close look at the sports of a society and related behaviors can reflect a blueprint of those important and valued behaviors that are the foundation of the larger culture in which the sport is embedded (Sands, 1999).

"Anyone who reads the newspaper, watches television, or listens to casual conversation on the street is undoubtedly aware of the ubiquitous nature of sport. It is everywhere, it flavors our national culture, and permeates every corner of our daily lives. It has become almost its own medium of communication and has important ramifications for international and multicultural relationships. For these reasons, I can think of no topic that should be of greater interest to social science in general and anthropology In particular. It is this assumption that underlies the anthropology of sport and gives purpose to the book that follows."

-Kendall Blanchard, *The Anthropology of Sport,* 1995, Preface, xvii

History of Anthropology and Sport:

While there has been relatively little attention paid to the study of sport by anthropologists, there have been some anthropologists who have devoted their attention to it. One of the first anthropologists to do so was Sir Edward Burnett Tylor. While E.

B. Tylor has been called the father of anthropology, he is also one of the first anthropologists to devote considerable attention to the study of games and sport within his work. In 1879 Tylor wrote, "The History of Games" and in 1896 he published, "On American Lot-Games as Evidence of Asiatic Intercourse before the Time of Columbus." Through his work, "The History of Games," Tylor examined sport language and the impact that language can have on that society's language and vocabulary. He discussed metaphors from sports outlasting their original position within the constructs of that particular sport (Tylor, 1879; Blanchard, 1995). Within his later work, "On American Lot-Games as Evidence of Asiatic Intercourse before the Time of Columbus," Tylor attempted to build a theory of diffusion and culture contact that could examine the nature of prehistoric cultural contact between geographically distant groups of people (Sands, 1999; Blanchard, 1995). One common critique of anthropological sport studies during this time is embedded the tendency to examine the sport phenomenon within the context of broader cultural processes as opposed to an examination of sport as an independent topic. For example, sport was examined as an extension of another ritual, as opposed to its own independent topic. As a result, these earlier studies failed to provide a framework for modern day studies of sport (Blanchard, 1995). However, it should also not be ignored that these earlier works examining sport played a substantial role in present day understandings of sport. The early nineteenth century also included work done by James Mooney. Mooney worked for the Bureau of American Ethnology and developed a description of the Cherokee racket game. His description was published in the *American Anthropologist* in 1890. In this study, Mooney describes the Cherokee Ball Play. He

describes the rules of the game, as well as its role within the social context of the society. Mooney examined one particular game he witnessed being played in September of 1889. Within this observation he was able to examine the game's importance to the community, specifically in regard to ritual preparation and bet-making amongst individuals. While his examination of the game was fruitful, in regards to the collective knowledge of Cherokee Ball Play, by failing to base his account on a series of games (or at least more than one), it is impossible to analyze his findings in relation to other factors that may have influenced the game he observed. Essentially, he provided no comparative data to use as a possible frame of reference in analyzing his data. If he had based his observations on the Cherokee Ball Play over time, current sport anthropologists would be in a better position to ascertain which features of the play were constant over time and space.

An important contributor to the study of sport in the early twentieth century is Stewart Culin. In 1903 Culin published, *American Indian Games,* and in 1907 he published *Games of the North American Indians*. He is credited as the first ethnologist to develop an 846-page, comprehensive and systematic look at the many games and sport activities of 225 different Native American Indian tribes (Blanchard, 1995; Sands, 1999). While some of Culin's views can be seen as culturally biased and products of the dominant worldview in the West at the time, he and his work contributed greatly to the knowledge of anthropology and sport. Like Tylor, Culin's work was mostly descriptive and unfortunately not very useful in developing a framework for sport research. On a more positive note, it was a vast and comprehensive collection that has had a lasting role

in the documentation of Native American people over time. Another example of early work by anthropologists in the study of sport includes Elsdon Best and Von Karl Weule. Elsdon Best's work, *The Maori* (1924) described the play activities of the Maori, which he observed first hand. Von Karl Weule aimed to develop an ethnology of sport, with a goal of (1) tracing culture, particularly to the sport aspect, back to its beginnings, and (2) putting sport as an item of culture into its proper theoretical perspective (Blanchard, 1995). His work was filled with cultural biases and methodological flaws that left his work virtually useless in regards to an anthropological understanding of sport in society. Weule's heavy reliance on secondary sources also highlighted many of the downfalls of his methodology. Similar to the work previously discussed, Weules' work was descriptive and he attempted to interpret what was seen through his cultural lens.

Raymond Firth (1931) wrote about dart matches in Tikopia. Through observing the dart match and its interconnectedness with the larger society, he created work that re-established the role of sport and its functions within society and can be seen as important to the current understanding of sport. Also around this time, Alexander Lesser published his study of the Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game (1933). Through this work, Lesser was able to emphasize the role of this particular sporting activity on the Pawnee culture, again establishing the link between sport and cultural processes. Lesser's work was also instrumental in challenging Culin's assertion that all Native American games were, "either instruments of rites or descended from ceremonial observances of a religious character (Culin, 1907:109). He believed his work showed that was not always the case (Lesser, 1933: 330).

In 1959, John Roberts, Malcolm Arth and Robert Bush published, "Games and Culture." This article is considered to be the first systematic attempt within the discipline of anthropology to, "delineate the constant features of 'games', and stimulate the productive theoretical debate regarding the general role of play and the special role of sport in human society (Blanchard, 1999: 17). The authors used the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) at Yale University to examine cross-culturally the nature of games with other aspects of culture. The authors also were able to create a tenuous link between environmental conditions and the physical skill sets and games of the society located within that environment.

While there were still relatively few anthropologists examining the role of sport in society, some in the discipline argued for a clear need to do so. For example, Leslie White's 1964 address to the American Anthropological Association (White, 1965:633-634) suggested the discipline was in a prime position to analyze professional sports. Joyce Reigelhaupt in 1973 suggested the time had come for a serious consideration of an anthropology of sport (Reigelhaupt, 1973: 378). It was also during the 1970's that Clifford Geertz wrote his famous essay on the Balinese Cockfight (1972), in which he describes the difficulties associated with observing and analyzing cultural experiences. His work also provides an illuminating example of the need for cultural relativism within the study of sport. Behavior that appeared irrational to the observer (Geertz) served a purpose amongst the participants of the cockfights. It is important, however, to note that while this work has contributed greatly to the body of knowledge surrounding sport research among anthropologists, it was not a stand alone piece of research. In fact, it, like

many works during that time was actually part of a larger work that examined the evolution of anthropology and was designed to reignited the discussion of theory in anthropological discussions. In his 1971 work entitled, "Man at Play," Edward Norbeck asserted that the phenomenon of play should be taken seriously and considered an important component to the human experience.

Since the 1970's the amount of interest in the study of sport within the discipline of anthropology has increased greatly. This is due, in part, to the work done by anthropologists to establish sport as a legitimate area of inquiry. In 1973, Edward Norbeck organized a symposium at the American Anthropological Association that involved several papers on the study of sport and play, and in 1974 he created The Association for the Anthropological Study of Play (TAASP). Another important factor to the increased interest in sport as a topic of inquiry can be attributed to the amount of work being done by social scientists outside the discipline of anthropology in the area of sport research. Work done by historians, educators, sociologists, psychologists and economists (Boyd & Shropshire 2000; Cantor & Prentice 1996; Coakley 2001; Dunning 1999; Dyson 1993; Dacyshyn 1999; Zimbalist 1999) have contributed greatly to the increased popularity and interest in the study of sport. While sociologists played an important role in examinations of sport and society, anthropologists were able to contribute to the cross-cultural impact of sports on societies through ethnographic methods.

One of the more important texts in regards to the anthropology of sport is a book written by Kendall Blanchard and Alyce Cheska. Their work is credited with being the

first text devoted to *The Anthropology of Sport* (1985). While it was created originally as an introductory text to the anthropological study of sport, it still represents an important contribution to the study of sport and the role of the discipline of anthropology in expanding the body of knowledge surrounding sport studies. In this book, Blanchard and Cheska sought to address the absence of anthropology in sport research, while at the same time establishing the foundation for an "anthropology of sport." They also attempted to expound on the need for more attention by anthropologists to the role sport plays in culture and society. They discussed sport as consisting of many varying relationships between play, games, leisure and recreation, and as being connected with capitalism, globalization, war, violence, media and education. The authors constructed the study of the anthropology of sport, as a specialty field within the broader discipline of anthropology (p. 22), asserting that this subfield would have 12 objectives:

- To define and describe sport and leisure behavior from a cross-cultural perspective.

- To study sport in non-Western societies, as well as in modern Western societies.

- The analysis of sport as a factor in acculturation, enculturation and cultural maintenance and adaptation to change.

- A view of sport as contributing a perspective on other aspects of cultural behavior.

- An analysis of sport behavior in human prehistory.

- An analysis of sport language.

- An examination of the role of sport in a multicultural educational environment.

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- The development and administration of sport programs for special populations.

- The application of anthropological methods in the solution of practical problems in sport settings, such as physical education, recreation and intramural programs.

- The application of anthropological methods in the development and administration of programs in physical education, recreation and intramurals.

- The development of constructive leisure-time activities that utilize the sport model.

- The development and fostering of attitudes conducive to cross-cultural understanding.

Blanchard believes it is within this framework that the anthropological focus can provide an arena for the examination of specialized problems such as the relationships between sport and ethnicity, as well as an examination of gender in sport. It was also Blanchard's hope that the anthropology of sport would become a, "distinctive social scientific approach to the analysis and understanding of sport and the practical application of the resulting insights to real problems." (Blanchard 1995:23)

Blanchard firmly situates sport within the subfield of cultural anthropology Blanchard hoped the anthropology of sport would be able to help provide answers and possible solutions for current sport related social issues.

In this book, Blanchard discusses methods and research design. He asserted that a straightforward approach to ethnography and data collection can eliminate the need for a formal theoretical model. At the same time, he asserted that ethnography itself could be used both as a theoretical framework, as well as a method. While the research process

within anthropology is generally viewed within the terms of fieldwork and participant observation, he does admit that there are many options for data collection within the field of anthropology. Participatory action research and archival analyses are examples of more options for methodology in sport research. As a result data collection techniques should be a direct reflection of the research project's goals and practicality.

Blanchard also discussed in his text the need for the anthropology of sport to be applicable. It is Blanchard's hope that work done within the sub-discipline of anthropology of sport would not only contribute to the general body of knowledge about culture, but would also work to solve some of the social problems surrounding institutions of play. It was within this framework that he discussed the relevance and need for applied anthropology, not just in the study of sport, but within the entire discipline. He proposed the idea that anthropology can no longer be the "science of the exotic, but that anthropologists should be willing to also focus their expertise on American social systems. Blanchard's book was originally published in 1985 and twenty-three years later, there still appears to be a preference, amongst anthropologists to study games and play in "the exotic". One of the most challenging aspects of this dissertation paper was finding American-trained anthropologists interested in the games and sports Americans play and observe. There remains a huge gap in the literature in that regard.

While some of Blanchard's ideas may be seen as rooted in the old, traditionally western paradigm of the hierarchy of cultures (e.g., Evolutionary hierarchy of games and activities and the frequent use of the term "primitive"), another important aspect of Blanchard's book is its ability to act as a foundation for future anthropological sport

research that can impact societal institutions and individuals from a bottom up approach. As a result, it has had a lasting influence on both the study of play by anthropologists, as well as how anthropologists are trained to study sport and games.

An example of the impact of this book can be seen in the work done by Robert Sands (1999), almost 15 years after Blanchard's 1985 original release of his book. Sands states while, "the 1990's produced a plethora of sport and culture research, yet, most notably anthropology has contributed little to this area of study" (Sands 1999:6). He asserts that while many other disciplines offer undergraduate or graduate courses devoted to an examination of sport, very few anthropology departments offer anthropology of sport courses. While there are some anthropologists who have written ethnographies on sport and culture (Bale and Sang 1996; Brownell 1995; Henning et al. 1998; Klein 1993; MacClancy 1996; Sands 1991, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2002), missing from these examinations is an explicitly clear examination into the culture of sport in America and its role in the African-American community. Also missing is a critical examination of sport as an institution that exacts power and control, while at the same time reinforcing those systems of control, specifically in regards to its role in the African-American community. Robert Sands has done work looking at both African-American sprinters and football players, but his methodology may afford some barriers to a true investigation into the culture of sports specific to African American males. There is still a large gap in the anthropological literature that examines attitudes and aspirations of young African-American Athletes and their parents, and there is a need for anthropologists to engage in this discussion and to lend the anthropological lens to the discourse.

Anthropology of Sport Today:

One provocative and potentially constructive method for the study of sport can be seen in the work done by Sands. This type of ethnography has been called "experiential ethnography" and requires complete immersion into the population over an extended period of time. Through this type of ethnography the researcher participates in the sport and as the researcher becomes more skilled in the particular sport, they become privy to more insights into the nature of that sport and its participants. This method not only provides a richer collection of data, it also allows the ethnographer to establish a new level of reflexivity by becoming another "voice" within the population being observed. Within this method Sands discusses the ethnographer transcending from an "outsider" to an "involved insider" which also affords a unique position for reflection. Two examples of "experiential ethnography" within Sands' work can be seen in, "Instant Acceleration: Living in the Fast Lane," (1995). In this ethnography Sands examined collegiate African-American track and field sprinters. Also in "Gutcheck!: An Anthropologist's Wild Ride into the Heart of College Football" (1999) Sands examines junior college football in California. Within both of these ethnographies, Robert Sands presents the data from the position of participant and observer. He asserts that participation is multi-leveled and as a result should be understood within the context of the observer's level of participation. He believes all levels of participation open doors to greater insight and new levels of experience and participation and thus deeper levels of understanding. According to Sands, a researcher can not "really experience organized football unless there is a journey from the grandstands to participation in touch or tackle football games

in the park" (Sands 1999:26). Within his work, Sands advocates intensive participation

through "experiential ethnography". Some key components of intensive participation

include:

- The researcher participating as one of the population in every aspect of their interaction;

- The researcher traveling through numerous layers of participation from a passive observation and participation at the outset, to extensive participation and becoming one of the population, not only in behavior but in a cognitive understanding of that cultural universe;

- The researcher staying in the field for a lengthy period of time which gives the researcher control over social fluctuations in interaction that occur infrequently and allows a more stable and complete picture of that population to emerge;

- Observation that becomes integrated within the participation;

- Interaction as an important part of validation.

"Anthropology, Sport and Culture" edited by Robert Sands, 1999:27

While this method is provocative, it drastically limits the scope of the type of topics an

anthropologist might consider examining. For example, a female researcher may find it

difficult to engage in a game of touch or tackle football in the park. Should this then

disqualify that researcher from studying football in American Society? Another example

would be Sands own work examining African-American track athletes. Would it be fair

to say that he really can not examine African-American athletes, unless he's actually been

one? Obviously, that is not a belief that even Sands completely complies with. This idea

also takes the attention away from what can be perceived as the greatest strength of

experiential ethnography, which is the level of knowledge that can be gained from an informant, who is also the researcher. This process can eliminate many of the documented problems that can come from relying on informants. This relationship to the activity being studied also presents another challenge. That challenge pertains to the positionality of the researcher and the many ways that position can affect the data collection. While this type of experience can be seen as useful and beneficial in some ways there are also negative consequences that could be seen as a result of the "insider" or "native" status. For example, a researcher who plays organized football may be less likely to critically examine behaviors that the researcher along with other insiders, have normalized. While reflexivity has been used as a tool to flush out such biases, reflexivity within the context of participation and insider status is often more difficult. Lastly, there are also concerns about objectivity that should be raised. Becoming a member of the group being researched positions the ethnographer as the observed as well as the observer. This is a position that historically has inspired questions about the researcher's objectivity and ability to critically examine the phenomena being studied. An example of this criticism can be seen in discussions surrounding "native anthropology" (Moore 2005).

Another example of sport anthropology that can be seen as an example of the work Blanchard hoped to see is represented in the work of King and Springwood (2001). In this book the researchers hope to provide, "a history, an ethnography, and a social critique of racial spectacles in intercollegiate athletics" (King and Springwood 2001:5). The authors examine ethnicity and sport within college athletics. They state their desire

as being to examine the overly simplistic racial terms that are often used when describing American collegiate athletics (e.g., 'red', 'black', and 'white'). They attempt to bring attention to the political economy of racial categories and signs within collegiate athletics. They do this by examining the two greatest revenue-producing collegiate and professional sports, football and basketball. They examine recruitment and retention policies of college athletes as well as outcomes of student athletes once they leave the college or university. The authors examine the African-American athlete, as well as the role ethnicity plays in collegiate athletics. They discuss identity construction, destruction and reconstruction through the context of "white" owners and coaches, "black" bodies and "red" mascots. They also discuss issues surrounding power and contestation by quoting Foucault's 1979 description of power that alludes to the pervasiveness of power and its ability to produce the illusion of power, pleasure, forms of knowledge and discourse. They discuss the power structure surrounding ethnicity and collegiate athletics by focusing on the spectacles associated with contemporary intercollegiate athletics, including halftime performances, commercialized staging, media coverage, public violence (crowds and media induced panics based on perceptions of race and athleticism), and political protests (e.g., protests at many NCAA Division I A institutions that use a Native-American caricature or symbol as their mascot). They outline the number of ways and techniques many institutions (re)constructed, contain, and challenge racialized images, imaginaries, identities, and imagined communities during the last twenty years" (King & Springwood, p. 5). The authors also examine the social relationships between social identities, performance, history, and power. At the

conclusion of this book, the authors present research that requires readers to re-examine how they view sport as a spectacle. It also encourages the reader to take a critical look at the product being consumed and how those images and ideas perpetuate the reconstruction of ethnic identities in sport. The authors are able to highlight little nuances of collegiate athletics that could very easily go unnoticed by the uncritical or unfamiliar eye. An example of this is a discussion of a shift in collegiate athletics that went virtually unknown or at least unexamined academically. "Native Americans, once celebrated as embodied athletes, now operate largely as empty images, African Americans, formerly excluded from the spectacular economy of college sport, are currently energized as star players and troubled delinquents. Largely invisible but pervasive through out, Euro-Americans remain constant as spectators, coaches, administrators, journalists and athletes; they perform and police frequently unmarked as racial subjects" (King & Springwood p. 4). The authors present a historical examination of sports history through accounts of desegregation. They then use these accounts to develop a comprehensive conceptualization of hegemony, specifically in reference to ethnicity and sport. They also discuss issues of multivocality and the theoretical concept of "spectacle" (Debord, 1970/1967:10). This work by King and Springwood has been lauded as a pivotal work by anthropologists and has even been considered as having elevated the study of college sport (King & Springwood, 2001). Within this work, the authors use quotes and interviews from a wide variety of athletes, coaches, media personnel and college/university staff members. This work does what Blanchard hoped to see and what many social scientists hope to see more of.

Cynthia Hasbrook, a sport sociologist, completed research titled, "Young Children's Social Constructions of Physicality and Gender" (1997). In this study she examines childhood sport involvement amongst first graders in a predominantly black and lower class school. Her goal was to gauge student perceptions of athletic participation, gender and physicality. While completing this research, she initially chose a positivist approach and relied on quantitative methodology for her data collection (e.g., questionnaires collecting demographic data completed by the students). She followed this methodology for years before she decided there was a need to gather more in depth data that could answer questions outside the parameters of her surveys. In total she followed the students for three years spanning from first to third grade for the students. She volunteered in the classroom as the teacher's helper. This role gave her access both to the student's records as well as to the students themselves. She discussed the challenges to establishing her role within the classroom. She found this task tricky, on the one hand not wanting to be seen as an authoritative figure while at the same time wanting the students to feel comfortable enough to be open and honest about their thoughts and feelings. Throughout the ethnography she reflects on the challenges that arose from studying children of such an early age. Some of these challenges included students paying more attention to her than to their lesson. This problem is often seen when researchers want to participate and observe without altering or changing. Often, as with this study initially, the presence of the researcher can affect the behavior being observed. The population she chose to examine was also problematic because it was not a representative population and thus her findings were not as generalizable as she

attempted to assert. For example, she suggested that African-American boys from a lower socio-economic background were more likely to be aggressive at recess and bully other students. However, seventy-one percent of the population at the school was African-American, and the researcher failed to account for that overrepresentation in her findings. As a result, while her findings may not be completely useful, she was able to shed some light on the challenges that can be associated with a research project that examines the perceptions of young children.

Mark Grey (1992) examined the social capital that is afforded immigrants when they participate in more popular culturally-American sports (e.g., basketball, baseball and football, and not soccer). Within this research he was able to gauge student perceptions of acceptance and exclusion both from the perspective of the immigrant as well as the perspective of the American students. His research was part of a two-year study that originally examined ethnic relations within the community. His role observed and recorded resources for immigrants within the school system. However, within the context of the original research he began to better understand the meanings and status linked to immigrant participation in American sports. Within the text Grey describes how invaluable his ethnographic toolkit was, along with the failings of surveys and questionnaires. By participating in the day-to-day functions of the school, he was able to become part of the school environment and thus privy to information that he would not have been able to access through a survey. Through this study Grey advocated the need for anthropological research to be completed in domestic settings (within the U.S.) and

the importance of addressing some of American society's most important questions and issues through a qualitative approach.

Douglas Foley (1999) follows a north Texas high school football team throughout its season. Foley used participant observation by riding on the bus with the team to away games. He interviewed coaches, administrators, Booster Club supporters and players and attended pep rallies at school. He describes the original distrust of the students towards him; however, the students eventually got used to him and opened up to him as a friend and mentor. He was also able to establish relationships both within the school and the community surrounding it. Within the sport research previously examined, most researchers have agreed on the need to observe critically the behaviors and cultural norms of the group being researched. While surveys and other quantitative tools will allow the researcher to collect data, the most colorful and meaningful information can only be accessed through a method that allows the researcher to establish the type of rapport needed to secure insightful information. This information is crucial in discovering perceptions of young people.

The last three decades have seen an increased interest in sport studies by social scientists. Brown et al.'s (2003) study of the perceptions of racial discrimination among African-American and White athletes is a good example of recent work by sport sociologists attempting to discern perceptions of athletes specifically in regards to racial discrimination. While some sociologists have examined African-American perceptions in sport (Anshel 1990; Benson 2000; Harrison et al. 2002; Harrison & Lawrence 2004), many studies discuss the African-American in sports without giving a real voice to the

individual African-American athlete (Shropshire 1996; Sailes 1998). One exception to this pattern is Suzanne Lawrence's examination of African-American athletes' experiences of race in sport.   In a 2005 article, Lawrence examined the specific incidents in which race is perceived to have played an important role in their athletic careers. She also sought to describe what, if any, relationships are central for African-American athletes in their sporting environments (Lawrence 2005:100). She used a mixed methods approach in this study, using purposeful sampling because of the difficulty she found in finding volunteers who wanted to discuss race. This sampling strategy resulted in eight participants, who were given a bracketing interview, followed by initial and follow up interviews totaling approximately one to one and a half hours. The interview text was analyzed using an interpretive research group who examined the text both independently and later collectively. Through the research, Lawrence concluded that for all eight students examined, race was a key issue in their lives. While she acknowledged the limitations with her study in regards to sample size and the inability to generalize her finding, her results are clear and contrary to the widely held public belief, that the sporting arena is color blind and race doesn't matter.   Suzanne Lawrence sought to give voice to those African- American athletes and their experiences. However, still missing is ethnographic research that examines African-American perceptions of athleticism and identity. Also missing is a body of research that seeks to give a voice to African-American perceptions of athleticism as social and cultural capital. These are gaps that can be filled by anthropologists studying sport and are vital to our understanding of the lives and challenges facing African-American boys and men.

There are a number of methodological challenges to studying career and future

goal perceptions and aspirations of young African-American males and their parents.

The first is the gap in the literature in this area. While it is exciting and un-forged

territory, there is also no framework for how this research should be completed. As such,

while exciting, such an undertaking will be a challenge. Another challenge can be seen

in the above mentioned case by Cynthia Hasbrook, in that it is extremely difficult to

interview young children. Many times, young children attempt to please adults,

especially when completing tasks. As a result, the researcher may have to discard those

responses which appear to be a clear attempt at answering the way the child believes the

researcher wants them to answer. Another challenge could be that of constructing a tool

that will allow the researcher to gauge a response from the child that is in a language the

child can understand. Often the questions and concepts the researcher is attempting to

answer are beyond the grasp of children under a certain age. A nine-year-old may not

have experienced the type of racism that a 17-year-old may have experienced through

his/her interactions within sport. Access to athletes could also present a challenge to the

researcher, especially if the researcher is a woman. High schools and universities keep a

close eye on their athletes and are very selective about who will be granted access into

their inner circle Football, is a highly masculine and violent sport. It may be extremely

difficult to gain access through the school or university due to preconceived ideas about

women and football. Another major challenge has been the lack of attention paid by

researchers to the study of athlete perceptions and aspirations for future goals,

specifically by anthropologists. Faye Harrison challenged anthropologists 10 years ago

when she wrote, "anthropology has again reached a moment in its history when it cannot evade the pervasive power of racism. At a time when racial inequities are being denied as a reality and as a priority for public policy, anthropologists have a special responsibility to help form and mobilize a critical consciousness that can challenge both government and citizens to fulfill the promise of democratic justice" (Harrison 1998:624). Sport in American society is a great platform to use in opening the door for a discussion on class and ethnic inequities. However, there are huge gaps in the literature that anthropologists will need to help fill. While this leaves the field wide open, in terms of new research, it also fails to provide any framework for how this type of research should be conducted. Another challenge may be seen in the attitudes of students, parents and school administrators. Many people resent the status of African-American athletes and may not understand the relevance and importance of this type of research. African-American athletes are perceived as being privileged and considered "whiners" if they complain about the way things are going for them. One former UF basketball player stated he was told by a professor that basketball was the only reason he was able to attend the university. So, essentially, he should just be quiet and glad they allowed him to enroll. These types of attitudes have been perpetuated and framed by the media and the culture of sport. They are also the exact type of attitudes and belief systems that this research will challenge.

The implications for the study of African-American perceptions of sport, in regards to career aspirations are huge. The social status of African-American men in the state of Florida, as well as in the nation as a whole, is in a perilous state. Florida has

approximately the same number of African-American males in prisons as it has in colleges and universities. At the same time, the state of Florida had 401, 117 athletes participate in sports through the Florida High School Athletics Association (FHSAA 2008) during the 2006-2007 school year. Football is the most popular sport in the state and provides a perfect opportunity for intervention. According to the FHSAA, sport participation declines as students matriculate through high school. As a result, a better understanding of the goals and aspirations of young African-American males can help administrators better assess resources and services that will be needed to support the student athlete in pursuit of his goals. Many academicians get upset because of the high numbers of African-American males who aspire to be professional athletes as their career goals (Shropshire 1996; Sailes 1998; see discussion in King & Springwood 2001: 119-128). While this goal is unobtainable for many, it is not unobtainable for all. Instead of ignoring or brushing these young men off when they express their hopes and desires, it would probably be more beneficial to discern what the child is really seeking through becoming a professional athlete. Is he interested in playing a game that he loves for a living? Or is he interested in being in a position to take care of his family? Is he interested in driving a nice car? Or is he interested in having enough food to eat? These are the questions that can be answered and better inform interventions that will help support the student as he/she strives for those goals. Perhaps a better understanding of what exactly these young boys mean when they state they aspire to be a professional athlete will help better inform public opinion as well as policy.

One of the benefits of an anthropological examination into the study of sport involves the ethnographic tool kit that is essential to anthropology. This project used qualitative methods to examine African American perceptions of success and the negotiation and development of identities. The following discussion more closely describes the methods used to collect data for this dissertation.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This chapter outlines the methods I utilized to answer the following research questions: 1) In what ways, if any, does a system rooted and embedded in systemic racism create a niche for young African American males? 2) What role, if any, does sport, saddled with its history of exclusion and then limited inclusion in the U.S., play in the lives and aspirations of young African American men, specifically in the State of Florida which is considered a "hotbed" for collegiate football recruiting? 3) How do African American male athletes define success and what role, if any, does athleticism play in that definition? 4) In what ways have sports and athleticism contributed to the internal construction of identity of African American males? 5) Considering the systemic links between athleticism and education found in the United States (specifically in regards to football), what role do community and educational institutions play in the success or failure of the student athletes?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted ethnographic research at an FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision) member institution football program in the State of Florida. In the past, the FBS was titled Division I football; however, that title has changed, and with the expansion of the Bowl Championship format, those schools whose conference champion receives an automatic bid to a Championship Bowl game at the end of the season or who are considered bowl-eligible at the end of the season are included as

members of the FBS. I used participant observation as well as semi-structured interviews to access information from 23 participants. Six of the participants were a part of a case study. They were African American, male, collegiate football athletes whose progression I followed over time, conducting multiple interviews. The other 17 participants include coaches, parents, fans, former athletes, administrators and academics, who were gracious enough to participate in an interview that lasted approximately an hour and a half. The interviews and field notes were transcribed and reviewed multiple times, coded and categorized by themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The state of Florida was chosen because it is considered to be a "hotbed" for recruiting talented football athletes for collegiate teams (Bluestein, 2008). Florida is also interesting in that there appears to be a perception of exceptionalism among African American, Floridian football players. As one athlete stated, "If I line up against someone who's not from the State of Florida, I ain't gon' lie, I expect to beat him." Another athlete expressed the same sentiment stating, "There's just something about us boys from Florida! If you look in college and in the league, what do you see? Florida athletes making an impact." These views and others including the number of African American male athletes who are recruited from the state of Florida to play collegiate football are the reason Florida was chosen as the location for examination. I relied primarily on participant observation, which took place at little league, high school and collegiate football stadiums around the region. I then conducted semi-structured interviews with current and former student athletes, coaches, parents, fans, administrators at a Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institution and academicians. I also incorporated archival data collected from the National Collegiate Athletic

Association (NCAA), various newspaper articles, the Florida High School Athletics

Association and various colleges and universities from the state of Florida within my

analysis; these were used to provide a relevant and historical context for the qualitative

data collected.

Research Setting:

This research was conducted in a number of settings. The participant observation

was completed at little-league, high school and collegiate football games where I

observed fan (spectator) behavior as well as pre and post game rituals. Each of the little-

league, high school and collegiate football games were observed over a two and a half

year period in the State of Florida. The collegiate players who participated in this study

all attend a Football Bowl Subdivision Institution, formerly Division I, in Florida and

were highly recruited out of high school. The University has an enrollment that exceeds

30,000 students and offers over 200 degree programs. The additional interviews took

place in various places as I attempted to make the interview as convenient as possible for

the participants. As such, interview locales, while all in the State of Florida, varied.

They ranged from a small coffee shop to the athletic department at the university.

Locales also ranged from back yard barbeques to office conference rooms. The student-

athlete interviews took place in the athletic building at the University.

Participant Observation:

Much of my insight into the culture of football among African American boys has

resulted from my participation in the stands of football games as well as through the

assistance of my key informant, a former Division 1 football athlete who left school early in an attempt to pursue a professional career. While he never played professional football, he was able to secure a professional position in law enforcement and establish a successful post-collegiate career. He later returned to coaching high school football with aspirations of coaching at the collegiate level. At the start of this project he coached at Hazelview High School; during the data collection of this research he became employed as a collegiate coach in 2009 at an FBS school in the State of Florida. In the summer of 2009 he resigned from his position in law enforcement and began coaching collegiate football full-time at an FBS football program in Florida. My key informant was invaluable in that he opened the door for me to meet and speak with a number of fans, coaches, current and former athletes that I may not have gained access to without his connections and assistance. Football in Florida is clearly a male-dominated arena and the entré I gained was a direct result of my key informant's support and buy-in for this project, as well as his belief that this research needed to be completed. African American athleticism and sport in general are complex phenomena and multiple points of entry were needed in order to access the many facets of the issues. As such, the contacts I made with the athletic department at Southeastern State University were vital in the data collection process, specifically as it related to the connection between athletics and educational outcomes. It is also within the Southeastern State University's athletic department walls that I have been able to continue to monitor the successes and failures of the case study group. My observations were recorded both in audio and in written field notes over the research period.

Pop Warner-Little League Football in Florida

My observations at the Little League fields also began in 2007 and they took place at two little league stadiums. Both football fields that were used for observations were located within the State of Florida. Both fields were also located in predominantly African American neighborhoods and consisted of predominantly African American football players. The age groups observed were 9-13. It was at the Little League playing fields where a large portion of the parent and spectator observations were made. It was also at the Little League fields of play that the first indications of externally imposed ideas about masculinity, sport and blackness were observed.

Hazelview High School, FL

My introduction to the "Hazelview High School" and its football program was through my key informant, who was a football coach at the school. The data collection from the Hazelview High School observations began as a class project in 2007 and continued through the 2008 football season. Hazelview High School opened in September of 1984 and is located in a rural suburb of a major Florida city. It is considered one of the premier programs in the state and has won more than one state championship since its inception. Hazelview High has placed a number of players at FBS (formerly Division I football) institutions and has strong community support as well as a strong and consistent fan base. Hazelview is not an affluent school and a number of the football athletes come from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Southeastern State University, FL

Southeastern State University is considered one of the fasted growing research universities in the United States. It is located in a region with more than 2 million residents and has a large number of commuter students. In the fall semester of 2008, the student body population consisted of 10.5% African American First Time in College (FTIC) students. The athletic department has an in-house academic center that works with the student athletes to ensure their success by providing both academic and social assistance for the athletes as needed. Some examples of the supports provided include tutors, referrals to disability services, academic coaches, advisors and mentors. Approximately 63% of the university's football players are African American and provided a good opportunity for conducting this research.

Interviews:

The Interviews were conducted in two parts. Some initial interviews were conducted as a part of a class project in the summer of 2007. Those interviews included coaches and former athletes who continue to play football in pick-up games and as members of an adult league, and who consider themselves to be fans of the game as well. These interviews were instrumental in fine-tuning the semi-structured interview protocols and grounding the research questions. The original interviews began with a general set of questions (see appendix B). The responses to the questions were used to inform some initial interviews with current and former high school coaches and athletes. These athletes were recruited through convenience sampling, as participants referred friends and

other athletes to the project and data was collected. The second set of interviews took place in 2009. These interviews included family members of athletes, coaches, administrators, academics and the six athletes who were included in the case study. The supplemental participants were each contacted through the initial interview participants. The case study participants were referred by their academic advisor, who was one of the supplementary participants. All interviewees were asked questions about their experiences with athletics. However, those participants who were part of the case study were asked more questions and observed for three semesters, including the entire 2009 football season. A semi-structured interview was chosen and conducted because it provided the flexibility needed to leave room for varying backgrounds and circumstances that would enrich the data collected. My key informant is a good example of the need for flexibility. He was a former student athlete, coaching for a high school during the first half of the data collection and a collegiate coach by the end of data collection. As a result, not only did his title change, but his experiences changed as well. Another example is the father who was a standout high school athlete, who answered questions in the capacity of a fan, former athlete and parent of an outstanding high school athlete. This type of interconnectedness speaks to the complex ways in which African Americans interact with sport, and the semi-structured interview allowed me to capture many of those complexities. All of the interviewees were asked questions about their experiences with sport. They answered questions about how they measured success, as well as the ways in which they attempted to convert their athleticism into social or cultural capital. The interviewees were also asked about their backgrounds, the values that were

impressed on them from their parents and the role those values played in shaping how they currently identify themselves.

This research consisted of 23 interviews, of which 6 participants agreed to be part of a case study. The case study participants included African American male athletes who were participating in an FBS (Division 1) football program at a university in the State of Florida. The following are brief biographical summaries of the case study participants. They have each been given aliases in an attempt to preserve their anonymity. A more in depth biographical description is presented within the results section.

Melvin Charles:

Melvin is in his third year at Southeastern State University and he plays the position of wide receiver. He was referred to this project by his Academic Advisor. She believed he would be able to contribute a different perspective to the study because of his background. Melvin is one of the more affluent African American athletes included in this case study. His parents both attended college and at one point had successful careers. They are now divorced and Melvin's relationship with his father is strained. Melvin has seen some success on the football field and is anticipating a new commitment to the academic component of his collegiate experience. Melvin's participation was invaluable and he expressed an interest in participating in the research in an attempt to "make life easier for those athletes who will come after him."

Geoffrey James:

Geoffrey is a sophomore who played the position of offensive lineman for Southeastern State University. Geoffrey's parents died when he was young and he was raised by his grandmother. Geoffrey's socio-economic background is low and he comes from one of the most impoverished regions in the State of Florida. Geoffrey originally attended another large FBS school in Florida, but later transferred into Southeastern State. Geoffrey has one child who is being raised by both the child's mother and Geoffrey's grandmother. Geoffrey was also referred by his academic advisor; he expressed an interest in allowing this interview to help him open up and perhaps "make a difference."

Bobby Dennis:

Bobby is a sophomore who plays the position of wide receiver for Southeastern State University. Bobby comes from a deeply religious family and that background has greatly impacted how he identifies himself. His faith is first in his life and his family is second. Bobby has faced some academic challenges; however, he appears to be consistently positive, often smiling and expecting the best. One of the comments made about him is that he "looks at the world through rose colored glasses," and that outlook contributed to his high level of engagement in the research. Bobby was raised by married parents residing within the home, and he remains extremely close to them and his family. Bobby hopes to use football as a path to earning enough money to invest in his parents' cleaning business and support his family.

William Jefferson:

William is a junior who plays the position of offensive lineman for Southeastern State University. William is the first male to attend college and is the youngest male of four brothers and a younger sister. Each of William's older brothers is either currently incarcerated or has been, and William is also the first male among his siblings not to have been arrested. William looks up to his brothers and a big part of his motivation is making sure they are proud of him. William was also raised in a deeply religious home and states that his faith is very important to him. William was extremely thoughtful and also contributed a unique perspective to the data collected.

Frank Miller:

Frank is a junior who plays running back at Southeastern State University. Frank's parents were not married and his father recently passed away. Frank was very close to his father and took his passing extremely hard. Frank's relationship with his mother is strained and while he states that he loves her, he also doesn't feel he can count on her or trust her. Frank has three children and has struggled negotiating his roles as student, athlete and father. While Frank described his issues with trust as a major barrier for him, he was very open and helpful and he provided useful and relevant data for this project. Frank was recently dismissed from the team as a result of rule violations.

Gary Reynolds:

Gary is a freshman who plays defensive line for Southeastern State University. My first contact with Gary was during his time at one of my observation sites, Hazelview High School. Gary is extremely close to his family. His sister is epileptic and he is extremely protective of her. Gary is learning-disabled and asserts he has had little external pressure to do well in school. His academic history laid the foundation for a number of challenges for him during his first full semester at Southeastern State University. Gary's academic struggles affected his athletic performance and he eventually ended up red-shirting (sitting out) his first year. This proved to be a good idea and Gary's academic performance greatly improved during his second full semester at Southeastern State University. There were a number of variables playing a role in his successes and failures and Gary spoke candidly about those influences throughout the interviewing process.

Athletic Administrators:

Three athletic administrators were interviewed from Southeastern State University. During these interviews I was able to use the information learned from previous interviews to inform the questions for the administrators. Two were very high ranking and the other's title held less rank, but the position provided greater contact with the athletes. From these administrators, I was able to better gauge the mission, needs and vision for the department, as well as the ways in which the program works to support the student athletes attending Southeastern State. A large component of these interviews

focused on what could be done to improve success and retention of student-athletes; the findings will be discussed later in the results.

Coaches:

Three high school coaches were interviewed. Each coach was also a former high school and collegiate athlete and one of the coaches played professional football as well. One coach in particular, Jonathan Raymond, was my key informant. He is an African American male football coach who coached at Hazelview High School. He is a former football player from Southeastern State University and currently coaches at Southeastern State University as well. He spends a great deal of time mentoring young African American male athletes and provided a great number of opportunities for me to collect data for this project.

Parents:

I also interviewed four parents of African American male athletes. One was a single mother with three African American boys ranging in age from three to 18 years old. The two others were parents of highly recruited student athletes who were also academically talented, young African American males. These parents have seen first hand the pressures placed on young boys by prospective coaches and teams. The last parent is a single mother of a young African American male who was unsuccessful in converting his athleticism into capital. His academics were not strong enough alone to warrant admission and his athletic talent was not strong enough to warrant a scholarship.

He graduated from high school with a certificate of completion and is still in the process of trying to pass the ACT, with the hope of being able to join the military.

Community Members, Fans and Former Athletes:

The last interviews discussed here are comprised of seven individuals who are African American community members, academicians, fans and former athletes. Of the two community members, one holds a doctorate degree in Sociology and the other runs an African American male mentoring program. Of the four former athletes, two are former collegiate athletes and they both currently play football in an adult league. Two others have not played football since leaving high school and the final interviewee is a former high school standout currently in his mid 50's. He never completed his high school coursework and failed to earn a certificate of completion. Each of these interviewees provided a different perspective on African American male athleticism and its role in the social and educational outcomes of black athletes. They also each provide a unique perspective on the multiple roles sports play in the African American community. Each of their perspectives is viewed through complex lenses that include the participants' own educational and economic background, ethnicity and worldview. These interviews both challenged and confirmed many of the ideas the case study participants highlighted in the findings below.

Development of the Research Topic:

This project began with a very broad research problem. "What role do sports play in student aspirations and student constructions of identity?" However, as the project progressed, the topic first widened and finally narrowed. I began to look at how I would collect my data and to ascertain what type of information should be elicited from my informants. I decided to utilize the grounded approach to data collection. Through this approach I was able to use information gathered from the population I was studying to determine my research questions and agenda. I developed a short and general survey to ascertain ideas and perceptions from volunteer participants.

I then used the data collected to inform the interview protocols later used in the data collection for this dissertation. The grounded approach was an asset and offered insightful information into areas of sports and culture. One of the first issues that arose from my initial interviews with former athletes was that African American athletes feel under attack by both the media and society at large. They supported this view with a litany of articles and news stories that verbally assaulted African American Athletes' intelligence, as well as their integrity, with accusations of criminality. An example of this was given by one of the participants when he discussed Allen Iverson. Allen Iverson is a well known professional basketball player, who is most known for his tattoos and hip hop style. He was charged by a district attorney with terrorism as a result of a domestic dispute with his wife. It was later determined that the District Attorney had overreached, but not before Iverson's face and reputation were splashed across the television. This idea of the law and media being used to attack African American players is a view very

widely held by both African American professional athletes and African Americans who are not professional athletes, and it was discussed often during data collection.

Another issue that was raised through my initial questioning of ancillary participants was the belief that educational institutions would use the athletes and not necessarily provide the support needed to succeed at the institution and later in life. This led me to question, "What services were in place to support students when they reached the collegiate level?" It also expanded my inquiry to the relationship between educational institutions, recruitment and student success. Unfortunately this question alone could encompass an entire dissertation and as a result, I sought to narrow the topic more by exploring specific themes analyzed from the initial data collection.

As a result of the preliminary interviews and research that was completed, I realized that this research needed to focus on student perceptions of identity and how they are shaped and formed. I also initially examined resiliency and questions like, "Why have some students succeeded where others have failed?" "Is it because of pure talent or the educational achievement and economic status of the student's family?" Getting the answers to these questions proved a most difficult task. Too often the interviewees themselves didn't know the answers to the questions, which made explaining their perceptions to me extremely difficult and often confusing. While the answer is most likely a combination of many factors, in regards to an institution like sports, with a clear history of discrimination systemically embedded within many of its rules, these questions still need to be examined and perhaps can encourage a broader discussion of

race as a social construction and its role in American society. Some of the topics that were discussed in the ancillary interviews included:

- Student perception of status as an athlete

- Identity (internal identification vs. external identification or how they believe they are perceived)

- Perception of academic achievement (What is success?)

- How does the student perceive their chances of success in regards to sports and their future aspirations?

- How does the student perceive sports in relation to dominant definitions of masculinity?

- Many young African American males begin playing organized football around the age of seven. Do the students perceive any effects created by the strict definitions of masculinity and success that have been placed on African American males at such a young age?

- Do the students have a perception of racism in sports?

From these topics I hope to answer the research questions presented in this dissertation and inspire more inquiry into African American athletes as individuals negotiating spaces that at times are juxtaposed and often in conflict.

Archival Data:

Archival research was also used in the data collection process. Information was collected from the Florida High School Athletic Association, the National Collegiate Athletics Association, Southeastern State University demographic, diversity and retention information, and local newspapers and online news stories. The Florida High School Athletic Association provided data regarding student sport participation and attendance. It also provided background information regarding which Florida programs were the most successful in football over time. The National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) provided information regarding graduation rates and retention for collegiate athletes. It also provided information regarding those schools that have the most success on the football field, as well as in the classroom. I was also able to collect a list of the member institutions, as well as their demographics and the ethnicity data of scholarship athletes. The NCAA also collected data regarding the cultural climate at institutions which provided a general idea of the climate of football across the country. The data gathered from Southeastern State University provided information specific to the collegiate athletes attending the university. With this data I was able to compare football graduation rates to the other sports at the university. I was also able to see graduation trends over time. This data also allowed me to better compare Southeastern State University athlete success to that of other FBS universities across the country. The archival data collected provided important background and foundational information that aided in positioning the data collected within a historical and applicable context. I was also given information regarding the case study participants' academic performance (past

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and present) as well as their individual demographic information.

Research Positionality:

Initially I began this project as a doctoral student attempting to learn more about African American athletes. However, over time my role has shifted as I have become more aware of my own interconnectedness with football and student athletes. I now have athletes who call me to help them pick out gifts for their significant others. Another athlete asked me to help him write an email to a professor. I am now positioned as a fan, family member, mother, mentor, and learning specialist/academic coach. As a result, I have acquired far more opportunities than limitations. I have seen first hand many successes as well as failures and it has helped me better understand the need to remember that these are individuals attempting to negotiate their worlds.

While I ran into some barriers, where limitations arose, opportunities always countered. An example of this can be seen in the role my gender played in the data collection process. I originally believed being a woman would set up certain roadblocks to building the type of rapport I would need to gain access to the information I was seeking. While there were some patronizing comments while interviewing a few fans and coaches, my gender actually was an asset in my student athlete interviews. Often times the athletes opened up to me more quickly because I was not associated with football and the athletic department. For a number of them, football was more like a job and they often didn't want to spend a large amount of time talking about "work." This opened up the door for me to ask questions that delved more deeply into who they were

as individuals and not just athletes. They readily shared information with me and I readily listened.

I was also able to take on the role of African American female mentor, which at the collegiate athletic level at Southeastern State University, appears to be missing. While there were women in positions of authority working with the athletes, not many were African American. This reality provided a niche for me as an African American woman. There are young African American male athletes who are very far from home and many of whom were raised by single mothers now forced to live on their own. My insertion was a welcome addition to their worlds.

Being the daughter of two educated professionals and having been routed early children routed academically into gifted classes. At the same time, I was one of those young African American children often accused of acting and talking white in school. As a result, I expected my language, background and education to present certain roadblocks to my ability to relate and build rapport with those athletes who were raised in more urban and impoverished neighborhoods. I was wrong in that respect as well. I explained my background and purpose for my study to each participant and was met with excitement and an eagerness to assist me that I had not expected. This also opened the door for the athletes to ask me questions about graduate school, careers, salaries and other questions they had regarding life beyond football. Overall, my ethnicity, gender and class created an optimum position by providing both access and a niche.

Ethics:

I was given permission from the athletic director to conduct interviews in the facility with those students who voluntarily agreed to participate. I obtained informed consent in writing from everyone I formally interviewed. I was later hired by the athletic department to work in the capacity of academic coach/learning specialist. However, no interviews were conducted for my dissertation after I began working for monetary compensation for the athletic department.

I have used pseudonyms throughout my dissertation in an attempt to protect the privacy and anonymity of my study participants. I have also changed the names of the schools and neighborhoods discussed in this study in an attempt to further protect the participant's privacy and anonymity. Also, my research proposal was reviewed and approved by USF's Institutional Review Board.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those
who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood
movie ectoplasms, I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone,
fiber and liquids -- and I might even be said to possess a mind.
Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows,
it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard,
distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my
surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination --
indeed, everything and anything except me.

-- **Ralph Ellison**, Invisible Man, 1952

Football in Florida is a cultural phenomenon that has received little attention over

the years by social scientists. Perhaps some believe football in Florida is the same as

football in any other state; however, in this research I discovered a collective identity

among African American football players in Florida. They perceive themselves as

different and whether the difference is real or perceived is less important than knowledge

that the athletes themselves believe it is real and it shapes who they are and how they

view themselves. This collective identity is accompanied by a superiority complex that

in many ways can be inferred by facts. An example of this can be seen in collegiate

football recruiting. The University of Miami signed eleven players from two south

Florida high schools. And as of 2008, there were thirty-seven players in NFL whose

hometown is located in Dade County. In the 2008 NFL Combine, there were at least

thirty-seven athletes who played either high school or college football in the state of

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Florida that tried out for NFL team rosters. Of all the colleges and universities with players in the NFL, the University of Miami has the most and Florida State University has the third highest number of players in the NFL (databasefootball.com & nfl.fanhouse.com).

Florida is considered a major site for collegiate recruiting and the National Football League has a considerable overrepresentation of athletes who played either collegiate or high school football in the state of Florida (IGN Sports, 2003; Blustein, 2008; Stephens, 2010). This information alone provides a rationale for exploring the relationship between African American athleticism and football in Florida. This research has shown that sport and football participation by African American males in the state of Florida plays a major role in the enculturation of many black boys within the state. This connection is essential to the discussion presented in this research that examined the current social status of African American males within the state of Florida.

As stated earlier, a black male in Florida is just as likely to be incarcerated or on court ordered supervision as he is to be in college. According to the Florida Department of Corrections, in 2005-2006, 42,174 Black males were incarcerated. While in 2006-2007, 47,608 Black males were enrolled in Florida's Community Colleges, State Universities and select private institutions (CSSBMB, 2007). The National data from 2005-2006 showed a 4:1 ratio of college enrollment vs. prison incarceration (CSSBMB, 2007). These data are striking, specifically in the way they highlight Florida's inability to meet national standards of educational achievement and positive social outcomes for its

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African American males. While the national 4:1 ratio is still a poor standard, Florida's 1:1 ratio exposes the dire need for greater research and resources devoted to challenging the current status of African American males. Essentially, for every one black boy who goes to college, one is either incarcerated or placed on court ordered supervision. In relation to social outcomes, that could easily translate into one black male being denied admission or financial aid to attend college. It could also translate into one less addition to many of our states service industries. Every other male is potentially being relegated to a substandard of living, which some criminological theories assert is the basis of major urban criminality (i.e. Anomie, Strain and Critical Theories).

These facts, coupled with the data on educational achievement for African American males in Florida, are alarming and must be challenged. Nationwide, schools are only graduating approximately 42 percent of the Black males who enter the ninth grade (CSSBMB, 2007). The graduation rates in Florida are better at 51.8 percent during the 2005-2006 school year, but still poor by most standards. According to the Florida Department of Education's administration of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), in 2006 more than 50 percent of Black males in elementary school grades 3-5 performed below grade level in math and reading. More than 65 percent in middle school grades 6-8 and 84 percent of Black males in high school grades 9-10 performed below grade level in reading, with over 60 percent performing below grade level in math (CSSBMB, 2007). These numbers are staggering and support the idea that researchers

should examine more closely the African American male experience and seek solutions to the problems that seem to be stifling achievement.

Case Study:

This qualitative study consisted of 23 interviews, of which 6 were included in a case study. The case study participants included African American male athletes who were participating in a Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) (Formerly Division 1) football program at a university in the State of Florida. The following are in depth biographical sketches of the case study participants:

The purpose of this case study is to provide a space where African American male athletes' lives and experiences can be shared free from the mediated lens with which we have all become so familiar. Images of athletes as out of control, unintelligent, hyper-sexed and deviant, spoiled brats permeate the national media and often international media as well. This case study examines six young men who, like each of us, has faced challenges as they struggle to discover who they are, who they want to be and the best path to achieve those goals.

Through these stories, I hope to challenge prevailing ideas regarding black male athleticism. The case study participants were candid, open and brave as they revealed many details of their lives that they hadn't shared with anyone else. As a result, it is my goal to present their stories in a way that will honor their contribution and provide a well-rounded informative description of each of their lives.

Melvin Charles:

Melvin is a junior wide receiver for Southeastern State University. Upon first meeting Melvin, he was well mannered and visibly shy stating, "I want to make sure I say the right things." Melvin was a multi-sport athlete in high school, playing football, basketball, baseball, soccer and track. Melvin is a native Floridian and first began playing organized sports around the age of four or five. Melvin's parents are divorced and his father is a former professional athlete. Melvin has one sister that he considers himself to be "close with" and either nine or ten half-siblings on his father's side of the family. While he is close to his mother, sister and niece, he does not consider his relationship with his father to be very strong and according to Melvin, that relationship is "still a work in progress." When discussing his relationship with his father, Melvin stated, "I don't want to say it but, since I've been doing good in football he's been around more…I started getting mad the more I thought about it. I didn't talk to him for 3 months. But now with the person I'm trying to be, it wouldn't be right to go off and all that. I forgive but I haven't forgotten."

Melvin's current grade point average is 2.6, but he appears to have had the academic background that could support better educational performance. He attended an upper middle class high school and qualified academically for Southeastern State University directly out of high school. He also has two parents who attended college, and he has expressed on multiple occasions his desire to complete his degree. He stated, "I want to go to the League, but I'm gonna get my degree." He also stated, "I wanna get my

degree most definitely. It would also be nice to graduate with a 3.0." Melvin's academic

standing faced challenges when he found himself almost ineligible to compete a few

semesters prior to these interviews. When asked about his academic challenges he stated,

"I almost lost my scholarship due to grades…it was lack of focus. I was too focused on

football. Then the semester before that it was my ex-girlfriend. Like we broke up and

she took all my books! It was bad. That semester I also had family issues. My mom and

dad were divorced when I was 6 and they were arguing back and forth."

Melvin believes he could work harder at his academics and stated that a re-

focused attitude has helped him better apply himself both on and off of the field of play.

One of the techniques Melvin has employed in order to maintain his focus is his, "focus

phone". It is a new phone number that he will only give out to those closest to him so

that he can eliminate some of the distractions he faces during the football season. When

discussing his new attitude he stated, "I was playing for all the wrong reasons last

season…for popularity and this and that. But now I've changed and I'm meeting with

my team Rev. (Reverend) I feel better because I'm playing for the right reason and not

being selfish…I just have to stay this way."

Unlike many of the other athletes in this case study, Melvin comes from a family

that is perceived to be one of substantial financial means. His mother is well educated

and his father is a former professional athlete. However, Melvin's outward smile hides a

number of inward struggles that go beyond material possessions. Some of his family

members frequently engage in activities that are not legal, which makes it difficult for

him to spend the type of time with his family that he would like. Melvin spent a good amount of time discussing the ways in which he attempts to negotiate both identity spaces (those perceived and those that are real). He is both a Division one football athlete, which comes with a set of rules and expectations, while at the same time being a member of a family that has a completely different set of rules and expectations. During the interview he discussed an incident where within an hour of getting out of the car with a cousin, that same cousin was pulled over and arrested for trafficking in narcotics. Had he been in the car, his academic and athletic careers would have been negatively altered forever. During the interview, he discussed in detail the struggles he faced between negotiating his obligations to his family and community, as opposed to obligations to himself. Each of the case study participants discussed this theme and it will be discussed later in the findings.

Geoffrey James:

At first glance, Geoffrey's size and affect were quite intimidating. It wasn't until he began to speak that his soft spoken words and mild mannerism were evident. Geoffrey is a 20-year-old, African American male who plays offensive lineman for Southeastern State University. Geoffrey was a dual-sport athlete in high school playing both football and basketball. He is a native Floridian and first began playing organized sports in elementary school. Geoffrey credits his environment for influencing him to play football stating, "It was mostly just my environment. It was kind of the thing to do. It

wasn't until high school that I realized I could go to the next level." He has continued to play organized sports since that time.

Geoffrey's childhood was very hard. He was born in a region of Florida that is impoverished. He stated, "It was hard. My grandmother raised me and it was hard. She worked in the field because she had to take care for me and my older brother." Geoffrey's parents both died when he was in the 6th grade in a car accident and as a result, his grandmother had to care for him and his brother. According to him, she took care of them by working in the sugar cane fields which is very hard, labor, especially for an older woman. Geoffrey appeared very aware of the sacrifices made for him and his siblings and spoke extremely affectionately toward his grandmother. He has a half sister who at one point he was very close to; however, distance has lessened their contact. When asked about the thing he most wanted people to know about him, Geoffrey stated, "Um…that I'm a good person. That's the first thing, I'd tell them I'm a hard worker." Geoffrey has one child who is currently being raised by both the child's mother and Geoffrey's grandmother. His relationship with his child's mother is strained; however, they try and work everything out for the sake of his son. I questioned Geoffrey as to how he supports his son being a collegiate athlete and he stated he absolutely supports his son, "Yes. Anytime I get money like financial aid or something, I send it for my son." Geoffrey's relationship with his grandmother and family are extremely important to him and he spoke affectionately of them as well as his desire to "make good on the sacrifices

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they have made". He credited this desire as his motivation for playing football and attending college.

Geoffrey originally signed with another FBS school in Florida. However due to "academic issues," including issues with the Clearinghouse system that clears high school athletes academically for college admission, he decided to transfer to Southeastern State University. The NCAA's Clearinghouse System regulates the courses student athletes must complete in order to be eligible to participate in collegiate athletics. Often, this is the first pit many black male athletes fall into while attempting to enroll in college. The issue is that while a college or university may admit a student, they must also get approval from the NCAA's Clearinghouse System. In the case of one athlete at Hazleview High School, his guidance counselor enrolled him in a class that was accepted by the University he desired to attend, but not by the Clearinghouse. As a result, he was forced to attend a junior college with the hope of later transferring to a Division I FBS institution. Geoffrey found himself in a similar situation, but when asked to go in detail about the incident, he declined, stating, "I felt like they lied to me. They got me up there thinking I was a part of something and I really wasn't. I could have stayed around until they figured it out, but I just transferred here."

While answering questions regarding football in Florida, Geoffrey stated, "Football in the state of Florida is real big. Everybody from Florida really wants to play football. Either they do it or they're not good enough. Football down here is everything…I really don't think other states see football like we see football in Florida."

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When asked about his perceptions of football players who are not from Florida, Geoffrey said, "I kind of think that I should have the advantage because I'm from Florida. It's kind of like a culture down here. Honestly, I think I have the advantage over that person."

Geoffrey stated a number of times during the interview that his education was important to him and that he would like to complete his degree before attempting to pursue a professional football career. While his responses to the questions regarding educational achievement were positive, it remains unclear as to whether or not he believed what he was saying and was wrapped in an internal struggle or if he was simply saying what he believed I wanted to hear. His discussion about his family presented an authentic desire to 'make good" on their sacrifices, but his outcome did not reach that level. I asked him why he thought some student athletes made self-destructive decisions like using drugs while on scholarship when they know they will be tested. Geoffrey's response was eerily prophetic considering his current status: "Sometimes like getting caught up with the wrong people and losing focus. Sometimes it could be like from thinking that you're untouchable."

Geoffrey's response is interesting because during data collection, he tested positive for a banned substance and was suspended from the team. He was given the opportunity to earn his scholarship back if he managed to stay out of trouble and kept his grades at a passing level. However, as of the writing of this dissertation, Geoffrey was officially dismissed from the team for another substance abuse infraction. Geoffrey and I

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met the morning of the day he was dismissed, and for the first time, he came into our

meeting with a plan on how he was going to turn things around. His plan was simple; he

was first going to decide on a major that focused on something he could enjoy doing. He

discussed sociology and communications as possible majors. His next steps were to

continue working hard in class. At that point he was passing all of his classes and trying

to earn his scholarship back. The last step he discussed was going home less, because he

believed that was where he faced the most temptation to do things that were harmful to

the achievement of his goals. I left the meeting feeling optimistic that he was finally

going to make the most of his opportunity. I was excited for him and admittedly

disappointed when I arrived the following day and discovered he had been dismissed. I

have not spoken with Geoffrey since the day of his dismissal and while his story is sad, a

great deal can be learned from him and will be discussed later in the findings.

Geoffrey's grade point average was approximately 2.1 and he does not appear to

have had the academic background that would support better educational performance.

As discussed earlier, he was raised in an impoverished region and attended a school with

equally limited resources. When asked about advanced placement and honors classes

Geoffrey was unsure as to whether or not he had ever taken one in high school. He

entered Southeastern State University with the cards stacked against him and

unfortunately was unable to defeat the odds. Ironically he was extremely happy with the

support he received from the Athletics' Academic Support staff. He described his

experience with the athletic department and academic support as "mostly good. A lot of people show you that they care; that's the biggest thing."

When asked about his academic challenges and current grade point average, Geoffrey had his own ideas about why he hadn't seen the success he desired. According to him, it was his reluctance to ask for help and his inability to utilize all of the resources available to him that led to his struggling academic status. This desire to place blame solely on his shoulders was a view voiced by all the case study participants. They absorbed all of the accountability for their academic standing, with little thought to the systemic and institutional factors that played a major role in their academic achievement. Geoffrey was not prepared for the level of rigor he faced at Southeastern State University. He attended a poor school in one of the poorest regions in the state of Florida; a state with a 51.8 percent African American graduation rate. From a structural perspective, his probability for success was extremely low. While this research is examining African American male athletes, it is important to note that all students whose educational foundations are rooted in poorer, lower performing schools enter colleges and universities at a major academic disadvantage from those students who attended higher performing and more affluent high schools. A disadvantage that is based less in their abilities than in the ability of their respective school districts to equitably administer an adequate education to all its students. This needs to be taken into consideration when advising, counseling, educating or mentoring college student-athletes.

Socially, Geoffrey faced additional challenges. He was by his own account "a loner." He spent the majority of his time alone or visiting home as often as he could. He actually chose Southeastern State University because of its proximity to his home town. He was very shy and the introverted nature of his personality negatively affected his social and academic status. We discussed his connectedness with others, including his coaches, and his response was, "I don't know, I just like to be alone. Besides you can't really trust anyone but yourself anyway." This belief and lack of trust was echoed by the majority of the case study participants and will have to be addressed by support programs if they are going to positively affect the academic and social well being of the African American student athlete.

Geoffrey needed a holistic approach to his support system that encompassed both academic supports as well as socio-cultural supports. Unfortunately for Geoffrey, the type of 24-hour-a-day support he would have needed to successfully matriculate through Southeastern State University currently does not exist. While improvement on the traits he highlighted would have aided him during his time at Southeastern State University, a more comprehensive support program that addressed the social aspects and pressures associated with being a black athlete at a predominantly white FBS institution might possibly have been more beneficial. For example, a psychosocial assessment at orientation could provide some of the missing background information needed to accurately assess a student's sociocultural history. It could also provide a clearer understanding of the academic challenges the student athletes have faced and possible

individualized interventions. A full time Learning Specialist would also provide a benefit

to an Athletic Support System. Too often tutors are ineffective in tutoring African

American athletes. Some of the complaints voiced by the athletes include, "She treats us

like we're dumb," "He's learning while he's tutoring me," "She just makes me read from

the book while she sits there, I can do that at home." A full time Learning Specialist

could also buffer the relationships between athletes and advisors. This relationship could

provide a safe place for dissent that would not result in retribution or hurt feelings.

Student-athletes are individuals first and all too often they get lost in the shuffle of so

many athletes and so many sports. As such, an individualized intervention approach

should be taken, and it should begin at the athlete's orientation into the program.

Bobby Dennis:

Bobby is a 20 year old, African American male who plays football for

Southeastern State University. Bobby was a multi-sport athlete in high school playing

football, basketball, baseball, and running track. Bobby is a native Floridian and he first

began playing organized sports around the age of six. He has continued to play organized

sports since that time. Bobby's parents are "happily married" and they currently own

their own business. While Bobby's parents may not be considered affluent, they came

into some money and invested well; as such they are far better off financially than the

majority of the other case study participants (except for Melvin). Melvin and Bobby are

different in that Melvin's socio-economic status is more overtly displayed, whereas

Bobby's is not.

Bobby considers himself to be religious and is extremely devoted to his family. When asked how he arrived where he is today Bobby responded, "Faith and hard work." Bobby discussed his athleticism as a gift from God stating, "It's like a gift from the Lord. A blessing and I don't want to take it for granted. Something He blessed me with at a young age that He didn't bless anyone else with. Because I feel like every football player has a different talent, they do something different from everybody else on the field. So I just feel like the Lord blessed me at a young age." He also credits God and his faith for the success he intends to have as he believes he will play professional football stating, "My athleticism will take me as far as I want it to. The Lord has already done his part, so I just have to continue to work hard and do my best." Bobby has a very positive outlook and gives the credit of his perseverance to God. He describes himself as a Christian first and uses his faith as his "anchor." He also discussed his desire for others to see him that way as well. Bobby discussed the perceptions of others when they first meet him stating, "People think 'athlete' at first when they meet me. At first that was a good thing, I was young and I liked the attention. But now it's just like, 'I'm more than an athlete'."

Bobby also discussed Floridian football players and his views echoed those of the other case study participants saying, "They're really good talented athletes. I wanna say they've got a swagger about them. When they play you can just tell it's them…I'm not gonna lie, we think we're the cream of the crop. I'm not even gonna lie. Cocky…or mostly confident, I mean we know we're good. This is what we do in Florida." These views echo the sentiments discussed by the other participants as well as the family members, fans and coaches regarding the level of athleticism and talent in the state of

Florida. As to whether these views represent reality impacting perceptions or perceptions impacting reality continues to be in debate. However, the understanding that this is the prevailing perception among many African American football players and fans is not up for debate. Also important is the role this paradigm of Floridian football superiority plays in the athlete's belief that he has a legitimate chance at playing professional football. While the certainty wanes as the athlete reaches the collegiate level, each athlete participating in the study, believed he would at the least be given a chance to try out for a professional football team; and if given that chance, he would be able to earn a spot.

Bobby graduated from high school with a 2.5 grade point average; he has struggled since beginning college. Bobby relies heavily on his parents for guidance and support throughout what appears to have been a very sheltered childhood. As a result, he appears to be lacking a sense of urgency both in the classroom and on the football field. An example was Bobby's description of his performance in the spring game. He stated, "I had a great game! I had a huge interception, it was really good." However, the article in the newspaper described that interception as his only highlight, apparently was overshadowed by the many mistakes he made, and went on to discuss his need for more practice and film time. An academic example is when he was asked about his grades at a particular point at the end of the semester, he stated, "I've got 2 B's a D and an F right now, but I should be able to pull those up." This overconfidence has not helped Bobby; in fact it has hurt him in many ways.

Bobby was ruled academically ineligible in the fall, but rejoined practices in the spring semester. When asked about his academic history, he stated, "I turned it on late in high school. I really played around a lot in ninth and tenth grade." His academic history appears to have caused some challenges for him as he has made the transition from high school to college. In fact, Bobby passed all of his classes for the first time since enrolling at Southeastern State University last fall while academically ineligible. Bobby was diagnosed with a learning disability and has been given a number of accommodations from the university. According to him, his biggest struggle is with time management and organization. He stated:

> Being an athlete is tough. You have to wake up early in the morning, take classes and you want a life…but it's so hard, it's tough. The most difficult part of being a student athlete is just like, trying to stay on top of everything. Like stuff is always slipping, I mean because you gotta like stay on top of this end, stay on top of that end. And then like sometimes when my momma calls me and she'll be like 'well baby you didn't call me all day.' I know ma, I've been so busy and stuff and I always like talking to my family. I'm very family oriented. It's just tough, it's real tough.

Like his peers, Bobby refused to make any excuses for his past academic challenges and academic improvement has been seen, especially since he has begun to take better advantage of the accommodations given to him by Disability Services. Students with documented learning disabilities are given a list of accommodations that

instructors are to give them through out the year. The specific disability determines the accommodations; but most often learning disabled students are afforded more time to complete assignments, and so on. Bobby has increased his use of his accommodations by actively giving his professors his accommodations letter at the beginning of the term and when extra time is needed he has taken it.

Bobby also spent a good amount of time discussing the ways in which he attempts to negotiate the public spaces of athlete, son, Christian and student. He touched on some of the struggles he faces between obligation to family and community as opposed to obligations to self. For example, when discussing the perception of athletes by non-student athletes, Bobby stated:

I feel like athletes are different from other individuals because we have so much weight we have to carry and so many things people expect out of us.   We just have to be on our P's and Q's at all times and show leadership. We deal with so much stress it's like sometimes we live two lives…You know, like I say currently right now, we wake up early in the morning like at 5:30. We have to be here at 6:00 and stuff. I mean, the average Joe is in their bed still asleep, definitely at my age 20 years old. If not they're in college waking up at 8:00. We're waking up at 6:00 and then have to go to class after we get done working out and stuff. They'll be like, 'Aw man, you football players got it made and I'm just like hold on man. It's no courtesy here, you know. I mean even though I choose to do it, it's hard though.

Through this quote Bobby discusses the frustration and difficulty living 'two lives' as he attempts to meet the expectations set for him both by others as well as by himself. While we all face the challenges of negotiating multiple identities, many of us have been better equipped to meet those challenges. All too often student athletes are admitted to colleges and universities without the tools to negotiate multiple identity spaces and perhaps this is an area where both research and resources would be useful.

William Jefferson:

William is a 21 year old, African American male who plays offensive lineman for Southeastern State University. William was a multi-sport athlete in high school, participating in football, basketball, wrestling, weightlifting, band and track. A native Floridian, he first began playing organized sports around the age of eight. William is the youngest boy of six siblings and the first of the males to attend college.

As William first entered the room for the initial interview he immediately gave a huge smile that worked in breaking the ice as we both appeared unsure of what to expect. That act gave the room a lighthearted atmosphere and the interview began smoothly. William readily answered all of my questions, once remarking that his academic advisor had previously labeled him a "silver tongue,"' who was able to talk to anyone, a quality that made this interview flow seamlessly.

When asked how he would identify himself, William stated," Umm, that's a good question. I guess I would tell you about my background. I'm a Christian growing up in church. I'm African American. I'm from a big family…I would say I'm an athlete as

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well but I guess I feel like when people find out you're an athlete things are treated differently. For instance when I first came to college everybody's trying to talk to everybody and I've seen like guys the first thing they say is I'm an athlete and well it seems like some people think they are owed something because they are an athlete. I feel like I'm an athlete so I have to do that much more than a regular person." When discussing the role of sport in his life, William stated, "Playing football helped me become more disciplined. More team oriented…we could be enemies, but if we both have a common goal let's make a pact to get what we need done. Football helped me with that.

William comes from a devoutly Christian home and credits his mother's strength through adversity as his foundation. When discussing his mother he stated, "Of course with my brothers being locked up, I've seen how it has affected my mother. I mean, I've seen her cry and my mother's a tough woman. I mean, like an Amazon. She's like 5'9" or 5'10". There's nothing my mom couldn't do…at least in my eyes and I've seen how it hurt her and it made me want to not put her through that." William's older brothers also played an important role in his upbringing, both as examples of what not to do, as well as his biggest fans.

William discussed his relationship with his brothers when he stated, "I don't want to go into the whole 'I didn't have a father' thing, but because I didn't have my dad all I ever tried to do was get approval from my brothers in any thing I did. Like if I played, okay I sucked at basketball. I did… I was awful. My brothers would be like 'that's not your thing.' So, I switched to wrestling. I mean anything I did I tried to get their

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approval. I remember one day my brother told me, 'I'm so proud of you bro…' He was

like 'you're in college doing what I wish I could have done…I wish I would have stayed

on track playing football…' He was like, 'you right now are representing our family.' I

mean it felt good to hear my brother say that. It's like that was all I wanted. I didn't

need anything, he didn't have to give me anything, just my brother's approval was

enough." He later stated, "I want to be able to hear my brother say, 'that's my baby

brother. He plays for…' To know that I've gotten to the point to where I've made my

family proud is all I need."

William is extremely humble and measures himself athletically to his brothers'

standard. He stated, "Compared to my brothers, I'm nothing. I'm just a lineman. They

were star players, one of my brothers cracked 3 helmets when he was in high school." In

regards to his own perceptions of his athleticism William stated, "Well really I don't

consider myself as like really talented. I see my teammates around me and what I need to

do and that's what I try to do. But I guess like my junior or senior year in High School, I

was 325 and some body else was like 270 or 280 and I'm still running faster than them

and I'm stronger than them but at the same time…somehow I was better than them and it

shouldn't have been that way. That's when I was like…something's a little different."

The relationship between William and his older brothers is extremely complex.

He spoke of it in two opposing ways. From one perspective he had seen the hurt his

brothers caused his mother and their family, while at the same time he appeared to deeply

desire to emulate them, and in some ways was desperately seeking their approval.

For example, when asked about what happened regarding his brothers' athleticism William discussed his brother being too "cocky" and feeling as if, "this team can do nothing without me." As a result of his attitude, William's brother was kicked off of the football team and the manner in which William conveyed the story, he appeared to agree and support the consequences. However, William also had brothers who engaged in illegal activities; when discussing their reasoning for selling narcotics and essentially hurting his mother, in some ways William appears to have agreed with his brothers' position. He stated his brothers told him, "They were like, look, what we do we did because we had to. We had no choice. We were helping mom out. She didn't know. She was wondering what we were doing, but we made sure we never brought anything to the house. We did what we did to help take care of the family." This relationship highlights the complex issues surrounding the ways in which African American athletes must negotiate multiple identities and spaces successfully in nuanced and multilayered ways that will allow them to hold on to one identity (son, brother, friend) while striving for the other (Student-athlete, public role model, responsible citizen).

William's current grade point average is approximately 2.7, and he appears to have the academic background to achieve even better grades. William discussed having to work extremely hard to do well in school and does not suffer from any learning disabilities. He discussed in great detail some of the issues that plague African American athletes in regards to their relationships with white head coaches, specifically in high school. Like each of the other case study participants, William discussed his lack of trust, specifically in regards to his relationships with past and present coaches, stating " It was

more like I wanted to be able to trust the coaches and then at the same time, you get to a point where you're like because of that situation I can't trust the coach…It kind of holds you back to a certain extent, because you want to be able to believe what your coach says…but at the same time, because of a situation like that you're like, wait a minute, let me sit back, let me analyze it and be rational." Other athletes discussed this relationship as well and the results will be discussed later in the findings.

The last major theme William discussed was in reference to the ways in which he attempted to negotiate identities and many of the challenges he had to face in trying to remain true to who he is as well as whom he was raised to be, specifically in regards to his obligations to his family versus his obligations to himself. As a result of our discussion surrounding William's relationship with his brothers and his collegiate career, I asked William how good he would have to be before he felt he was good enough. He stated: "Honestly, I think that's just one of those things you never will feel. Like that's what drives me. I mean I see offensive linemen in the NFL and here and I'm like I'm nowhere near them… I'm just like there's no way I'll ever get to that level, but you know I'm going to do what I can to get there." The irony in William's statements is that he started in every game he played in for the 2009 football season and never reached the place internally where he considered himself to be as good as those around him.

Frank Miller:

Frank was referred to me by a staff member at Southeastern State University. He volunteered to participate in the study because, as he stated, "I really want to be

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somebody people can look up to. If talking to you can make things better for others, then I want to do it." As Frank first entered the room there was the usual tension that I had become accustomed to, but his willingness to participate eased that tension greatly as we began discussing why I was there and how he would participate. Frank is a 23 year old African American Male student athlete at Sunshine State University. Frank's background and history are extremely complex.

He was first introduced to sports at the age of six when he began playing soccer. He credits the "old heads" from the neighborhood for seeing some talent in him and encouraging him to pursue it. Frank described to me a scene where the entire neighborhood played football stating, "At one point, there was a giant field and we all played football…the whole neighborhood, everybody out for himself! Everybody wanted to score!" For Frank, neighborhood is about family, so to say that the "old heads" influenced him in many ways was like saying his uncles influenced him to play sports. Frank also had lineage to attend with. Both his older brother and his father hold athletic records at Frank's high school and he proudly announced that he set a number of records during his time there as well. "You go into the school and you see [Miller] all over the wall. I hold a few records at another high school too but my family has made its mark on my high school.

Frank was a multi-sport athlete participating in football, boxing, basketball, soccer, baseball and track. He took a different route to college by enrolling in the military first and then starting college. As a result, he is older than his teammates and struggles at times with the role of leader. He stated, "I want to be a leader, but a lot of

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times when I mess up I feel like who am I to try and be a role model. I have made

mistakes and bad decisions in my life. But I can use those mistakes to help teach others.

That's what I want, to be able to go back to my neighborhood as somebody people can

look up to."

Frank has three children and is a native Floridian. He comes from an extremely

bad neighborhood and has a history of gang interactions. While he never stated he was a

member of a gang, he alluded to friendships with gang members and was vague in

discussing the nature of his interactions. Frank contributed substantially to his family's

finances in high school and is not comfortable being in the position of needing to ask for

help. When asked how he earned money in high school while being so active Frank

stated, "I worked, I mean I did what I had to do, I mean cause it's not just about me, I

mean everybody got to eat." Frank has spent some time in and out of the legal system

with minor offenses.

Frank also has a number of academic challenges that make his academic path

considerably more challenging than others. Frank has a learning disability and was

diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. He explained that these

disabilities presented major challenges for him in the classroom. He also stated, "It's

hard sometimes, but I can't give up. I got mouths to feed, people depending on me. Ms.

Keona, God has a plan for me. Do you know I drowned when I was a kid? I was dead

and he brought me back. See this scar? I should have been dead but I'm still here so I

can't give up."

Frank also has a number of emotional challenges he faced. His father recently passed away in 2007 and the circumstances surrounding his father's passing left him extremely distrustful of people in general. Interestingly it was during this discussion that Frank and I began to build some trust and rapport. As he discussed his father's passing, I was able to relate and he began to settle in and open up. Frank's father was ill and had been prescribed a lot of medicine. He was tired and didn't want to take it any more, so whenever Frank asked him if he was taking his medicine, he would respond 'yes'. However, when he passed away, the family learned that he had not been taking his medicine and had he taken it, he would have lived. Frank stated, "I'm [gonna] be honest with you Ms. Keona, I don't trust people at all. It's just not something I do and you could blame it on my upbringing. You gotta think, if I can't trust my own father to be truthful about taking his medicine, who can I trust?" Frank's father's passing was complicated by the fact that Frank was in jail at the time. He had gone home to turn himself in for driving while his license was suspended. He was told he would be out the next morning so he went to see all of his family members before going to the jail. He missed his father and didn't get to see him, but he thought he'd be out the following day and would see him then. However, the old courthouse was being renovated and the cases were backed up extending everyone's stay. As a result, Frank ended up spending the entire weekend, and when he was released he found out his father had passed. The circumstances surrounding Frank's whereabouts when his father passed away compounded his feelings of guilt and aloneness which he internalized stating, "I still haven't cried. I think I will

one day, but I don't know when. I do know that when I do, it's going to be bad…real bad."

Frank's father and mother had been divorced for almost his entire life. However, he and his father remained close up until his death. His father was a former professional wrestler and Frank was extremely proud of him. He often talked highly of his father, even though admittedly his mother had to work two jobs to provide for them financially. Frank's familial relationships are extremely complex, and it is his relationships with each parent individually that have embedded his lack of trust in people. This attitude places greater strain on Frank because, while he may need a great deal of help, he is less likely to ask for it from people he doesn't trust. Frank admittedly loves his family, but his family relationships are tenuous at best. Frank is the youngest of two siblings and a step-sibling. Frank's mother hasn't been the most reliable and his life is littered with examples of him calling her and her not being available for him. He stated:

I called my momma two weeks ago and she just returned my call yesterday. She [gonna] ask me what I need like I had just called her! I was like nothing now, good thing I wasn't stranded on the street. But she always show up during football season…to every game. She's Frank Miller's momma during football season; I can't find her during the off season.

The relationship with his mother is strained and has also had a negative effect on Frank's ability to trust.

As alluded to earlier, Frank has faced some academic challenges, but his grades have improved and he had displayed real commitment to getting his degree before

leaving the university. Frank is very conscious of his role in his community as model for young African American males and he takes it very seriously. However, the weight of his past sometimes leaves him feeling unworthy and not quite good enough. Frank's relationship with his position coach is strained as well. I personally noticed one interaction as the coach burst into the door and berated Frank right in front of me. It was extremely startling and even more interesting as I learned of this coach's role in Frank being dismissed from the team.

Frank has had a number of minor traffic infractions that have cost him dearly, including the time he spent in jail while his father passed away. The evening before his final exam, Frank was pushing his motor scooter on the sidewalk with the motor running as he talked with one of his fraternity brothers and was cited and arrested for operating a motor vehicle on a sidewalk (on campus). According to him, there was a visiting African American officer who was training the university police and perhaps wanted to make an example of Frank. The university officers actually stood up for Frank, but the visiting officer wrote the citation and arrested Frank for operating a motor vehicle on a sidewalk while his driver's license was suspended. He was kept in jail overnight and missed his final exam, causing him to fail a class in which he had previously held a C average. By the time Frank was able to return to school and alert his advisor and coaches it was too late and he was unable to make up his final exam. Frank's life was hard. Some of the challenges were his own creation, but many were beyond his control. The resilience he showed was phenomenal.

During the following semester, Frank went to court and was advised by the presiding judge that he could possibly get a year and a day of prison time for operating a motor vehicle on a sidewalk. Frank could not afford a lawyer and was fearful about the possibility of going to prison, so he went to his head coach, explained the situation, and expressed his intention to leave the team until he was able to get his life in order. He was advised by his head coach that his university was behind him and would continue to support his education. However, a week later, the day after his court date, Frank was called into the athletic director's office and dismissed from the team. He issued a public statement taking full responsibility for his actions and the consequences, and apologized to his friends, family and fans, who, like myself, were shocked. I spoke with Frank a couple weeks later, when he came in and gave me an update on his plans. He had received a lot of support from former coaches, family and friends (including a Florida State Trooper) and as a result did not receive any jail time and was able to enter his name into the supplemental football draft. It was his hope that he would be picked up by a particular team on the West Coast and given an opportunity to compete for a roster spot. He actually ended up signing a two-year contract with the Canadian Football League.

I was also later informed by an interviewee that Frank's position coach played a role in getting him dismissed and sadly, after what I had seen, that information did not surprise me. The most unsettling piece to Frank's story is the cavalier way in which authoritative figures on the university campus play with the lives of black student athletes. Frank had two semesters to complete in order to graduate and he, along with a number of others have been dismissed from the team since the beginning of the 2010

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Spring semester for multiple minute reasons. In fact, in Frank's case, I have been unable

to discern the true reason he was dismissed from the team. According to Frank, it was

because he had missed class and his tutoring sessions on the day of court. However, it

was later mentioned by someone else that it might have been for a positive drug test.

This allegation surprised me, however the official reason for his dismissal was a

'violation of team rules.'

Gary Reynolds:

Gary is a 19 year old, African American male who plays football for Southeastern

State University. Gary is a freshman and was a dual-sport athlete in high school, playing

football and running track. Gary played high school football at Hazelview High School

which was one of the sites used in this research for participant observation. As a result, I

have been able to watch him grow as an athlete for three years. It is also through

interviewing and observing Gary that I gained the greatest insight on high school football

in Florida, high school athlete recruiting and the many power relationships that exist

between players and coaches. It is also in observing and interviewing Gary that I have

learned extensive knowledge regarding high school football and some of the ways it

influences African American male identity development. Gary's parents were separated

at the time of our initial interview and have since reunited. Gary has two siblings, a sister

and a brother, whom he describes himself as being close with. He stated, "My sister has

seizures and she is staying with my mom because her husband is oversees. We are very

close and it is important for family to look out for each other." He also described

extreme closeness with his parents. In fact, Gary visits home weekly and often spends

the night at his parent's home. He spoke of how much he enjoys being at home stating, "I love going home. We always have a good time and everyone is nice to me. There isn't all the stress and worry that I have here. I can just relax and be me." The stress Gary was speaking of was regarding his classes and academics at Sunshine State University. Gary was highly recruited as a football player, receiving over 50 scholarship offers and as a result, there was a great deal of pressure on him to earn playing time as well as maintain his eligibility in the classroom. It was that pressure that almost resulted in Gary becoming ineligible to compete.

Gary faced a number of academic challenges upon enrolling at Sunshine State University. While most freshmen face struggles, Gary's required intensive support in order to ensure the successful completion of his courses. While Gary appeared to fit the stereotype of the ill-prepared athlete admitted to a university solely on the basis of his athletic ability, his work ethic and determination challenged the commonly held belief of the spoiled, over-privileged black athlete. This stereotype portrays the student athlete as being interested only in staying eligible and being willing cheat or go to any lengths to reach that goal. However, Gary's case could not have been further from the truth. Gary describes himself as a devoted Christian and dedicated to doing the right thing. He spent countless hours above and beyond that of any other student athlete meeting with professors, advisors, coaches and tutors in order to secure his success. While Gary had bumps on the road, he fought through them to the best of his abilities and refused to make excuses. However, his collegiate academic career was starting at a disadvantage that was deeply rooted and beyond his control. He did not have the academic pedigree or pre-

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existing knowledge to navigate his courses, and that lack of knowledge was a direct result of an inequitable education system that had failed him in his earlier years. As a result, he was forced to receive "on the ground" training during his freshman year, as he fought to meet the expectations set for him.

One of Gary's major challenges was a direct result of his learning disability. He was referred to the university's disability services upon arrival at Sunshine State and was diagnosed with a severe learning disability. While the learning disability presented great challenges for Gary, it was coupled with a history of academic struggles, resulting in a general dislike of school. He stated:

> I don't know what it is, I just don't like school. But I know I have to finish. I'm not going to be good for anyone else if I don't get my education. I just want to be able to take care of my family. After all that's what a man's supposed to do, provide for his family. I know if that is what I want to do, and God has blessed me with this talent then I need to work hard to make it happen.

This quote describes the quandary Gary faced throughout the fall semester. He knew he needed to be in school, but he didn't actually enjoy being there. This general dislike of school contributed to making the transition from high school to college extremely difficult for him.

As stated earlier, Gary's eligibility for the Spring semester was in jeopardy as a result of his academic performance. He was enrolled in four classes, but was only successfully completing two of them. He was removed from football meetings, which provided him with more time for school work. It was during the suspension of meetings

that Gary began to obtain some success in the classroom. It was also during this time that Gary fully committed himself internally to his collegiate experience. He began to identify himself as a college student and made a conscious decision to give 100 percent in the classroom. Gary had an interesting exchange with another student while working on his homework. He was asking for my help learning how to spell a word and another student in the room said, "That's a shame, a college student that can't spell that word." Without hesitation or embarrassment Gary responded, "But I'm in college though!" The other student looked at him slightly surprised and yet in agreement. That exchange showed the connectedness Gary had begun to feel between both whom he was and who he aspired to be.

For Gary, a major component of that commitment was using the accommodations afforded to him by the University's Disability Services to extend due dates and garner more time to complete assignments. According to Gary's academic record, he does not appear to have the academic background that would support better educational performance. However, Southeastern State University's academic support center was able to provide a great number of additional supports to assist him. It required a huge amount of work on everyone's part. Gary is a great example of a student athlete being failed by the public school system. He stated:

> I thought it was good when my teachers would give me grades I didn't deserve, but I just didn't know. Now I'm here and I want to do the work, but I can't because I don't know how. There's just so much stuff I wish I knew. Answers I wish I could give in class and other people know it but not me. That doesn't feel

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good, it makes me feel dumb, even though I know I'm not…I just wasn't taught.

They didn't do me any favors. If I knew then what I know now, I would have

definitely paid more attention and learned more. When I go out and speak to little

kids I'm going to tell them, they think it's good not to have to do work because of

what they can do on the field, but I am proof that it's not worth it.

Gary is currently on track to earn a 4.0 grade point average this semester. While

admittedly he is in less rigorous classes, his confidence in the classroom has increased,

and as a result, so has his confidence on the football field. His performance on the

football field was directly related to his performance in the classroom, and he

acknowledged this relationship by stating:

It just seems like when things aren't right with school, nothing is right. I just

can't concentrate. You've got all these people counting on you, depending on

you, it's a lot of pressure and I'm only 19!

While many of the other case study participants expressed a desire to break free

from the stereotypes that accompany black athleticism, Gary seemed to be comfortable

being seen as an athlete first. When asked to describe himself, his first response was

"athlete." He appeared to be very comfortable in his own skin and a central component

of who he is, by his own account, is an athlete. When questioned as to why he

considered himself an athlete first, Gary stated, "It's what I'm most known for. It's the

reason why I'm here and it's what I am best at." While his readiness to identify himself

as an athlete could be considered problematic and dangerous, this could be due, in part, to

his youth and his opinions may evolve as he grows and engages in more life experiences.

However in many ways it is that confidence and comfort within his own skin that has laid the foundation for the success on the field that he has seen throughout his life.

Football in Florida and Athletic Capital:

Each of the six case study participants described playing in the National Football League as their ultimate athletic goal. Each sincerely believed if they worked hard and remained eligible academically they'd be able to compete at the "next level." They also each viewed their athleticism as a type of capital that they could convert into educational attainment and ultimately financial rewards. As elite athletes in their respective high schools and counties, each participant expected to receive some rewards for their athleticism. They discussed a Bachelor's degree, networking and peer contacts as some of the rewards their athleticism would provide. However, ultimately, they aspired to participate in the National Football League. While definitely not a sense of entitlement, because each athlete discussed hard work as a necessity for success, each player believed they stood a good chance of achieving their goals if they persevere. Perhaps this belief stems from what this research is considering a superiority complex. In many respects, there appears to be a superiority complex that the athletes interviewed discussed regarding football and football athletes in Florida. For example, Frank stated:

> "Football in Florida, I don't know, I guess because of the weather, you play in the street or wherever. You might hit a mailbox…at one point there was a big field and we all played, the whole neighborhood, and everybody was for himself. It was so funny because everyone wanted to score!"

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According to Geoffrey:

> Football in the state of Florida is real big. Everybody from Florida really wants to
> play football. Either they do it or they're not good enough. Football down here is
> everything. I really don't think other states see football like we see football in
> Florida.

When asked about his perception of non-Floridian football players Geoffrey stated:

> I kind of think that I should have the advantage because I'm from Florida. It's
> kind of like a culture down here. Honestly, I think I have the advantage over that
> person. I think FSU, UF, UM all played a role in defining the superiority of
> Florida football. You grow up seeing like all those schools winning National
> Championships and stuff like that.

According to Bobby:

> Florida is a football state. Everybody loves to watch football in Florida. I mean
> every time fall rolls around in Florida, you see people with the flags on their
> cars…FAMU, Florida State.

In reference to his perceptions of athletes from Florida, Bobby stated:

> They're really good talented athletes…I wanna say they've got a like a swagger
> about them. When they play you can just tell them…We think we are the crème
> of the crop. I'm not even gonna lie. Cocky, or mostly confident. I mean we know
> we're good this is what we do in Florida.

Melvin also had a position on football in Florida stating:

Football in Florida is big. Because I know all the coaches come to Florida to get

the athletes. It's the main state. I feel good. I don't know how to say it without

sounding wrong but it feels good to be able to say I'm a top Florida athlete…I'm

a Florida Boy.

He then went on to discuss some of the stereotypes associated with Floridian football

players:

We are faster, more aggressive, just better athletes. I guess because of all the

competition like the Miami's and Florida States. Kids work hard to be a part of

that. It starts at an early age with all that.

William also responded to this question, simply stating, "That's what we're born and

bred to do…play football."

The coaches and fans interviewed shared the sentiment as well. There is a belief

that football players in Florida are better athletes than anywhere else. This belief can be

seen in many aspects of the athletes and communities. For example, Southeastern State

University's roster has a total of 107 football athletes and only seven are not from the

state of Florida. Coach Raymond explained to me that he would rather have a second tier

recruit from Florida than a first tier recruit from many of the other states. In many ways,

this trend can be seen in the majority of the colleges and universities in Florida. They all

have disproportionate numbers of athletes from the State of Florida. In fact, at one point,

the University of Miami offered scholarship offers to almost 20 athletes from Dade

County alone (Miami). The large numbers of Floridians on the Roster could be due in

part to athletes choosing to stay closer to home. However, there are nationally ranked top

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tier FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision) institutions in the state of Florida who could sign

players from all over the country that opt to fill a disproportionate number of their

scholarships with Floridian athletes. Many programs outside the state of Florida attempt

to recruit students from Florida. However, recruiting in Florida is big business and

access must be granted to speak with players, making high school head coaches the

ultimate gatekeepers for collegiate recruiting.

An example of this can be seen in the recruiting of a top ten university that many

considered to have had the top recruiting class recently. The success of the recruiting

was credited greatly to one coach who, according to a South Eastern Conference Blogger,

"opened up the state of Florida for recruitment." Another example can be seen with

Rutgers University, whose head coach has publicly acknowledged his desire to hire

another coach with ties to the state of Florida to replace the one he lost when he took a

head coaching job in Florida.

Great attention is paid to high school football recruiting in Florida and both Gary

and Melvin spoke extensively about the recruiting process and the role their head coaches

played in orchestrating visits and suggesting meetings. For example, Melvin discussed

an incident where his coach was attempting to get a collegiate job by using Melvin, he

stated:

> Yeah, my coach knew I had already committed to Southeastern State University,
>
> but he wanted me to take a visit anyway to try and help him get a job. I liked my
>
> coach, but I didn't want Southeastern State to think I wasn't sure or I wasn't
>
> serious, so I had to tell him no.

Gary also recounted an experience where his coach told particular collegiate coaches that they didn't have a chance, even though Gary had actually wanted to speak with the recruiting coaches. The prestige of Florida being so heavily recruited plays a major role in the belief that Florida football athletes are in some way better than athletes from other states.

This perception, both within and out of the state of Florida that Floridian football players are faster and by some accounts, better football athletes on the whole plays a large role in the athletes' own perceptions of self and ability. This could be due, in part, to the history of collegiate football dominance in the state. In his book *'Cane Mutiny: How the University of Miami overturned the Football Establishment,* Bruce Feldman describes some of the ways in which the University of Miami changed football through their brash showboating and loud-talking antics. During my interviews, Coach Raymond discussed his perception of Florida State University's effect on the college football landscape:

> I'll never forget what it was like to see all those little and fast black kids go into
> Nebraska and kick their behinds! Those big corn eating linemen couldn't do
> nothing with the quick, speedy Seminoles. I've been a fan ever since and you
> know what, Nebraska and all the other schools had to come and get some of this
> football talent here in Florida just to keep up with the Seminoles and the 'Canes.

Coincidentally, the Miami Hurricanes became the poster child for out of control, oversexed, loud-mouthed black athletes. They were labeled undisciplined and arrogant and these stereotypes were epitomized in the "Catholics vs. Convicts" controversy that

sprung up as a result of the Miami-Notre Dame football rivalry. As discussed earlier, the University of Miami dominated college football in the 1980's and Florida State University dominated college football in the 1990's. Some may even consider the University of Florida's success over the last decade as a continuance of the statewide legacy of collegiate football dominance. This collective history of football excellence has left its mark on the conscience of each of the research participants, athletes, parents, and fans alike. It is that collective conscience that fuels the paradigm of a Florida football superiority complex.

This superiority complex and its effects on African American male behavior is an area that should be researched in greater depth. William discussed his brother's consequences for allowing his sense of entitlement to affect his behavior and performance on the football field resulting in his being dismissed from his high school football team. According to William, his brother's belief in his superior ability on the football field deluded him into believing the team needed him and thus he was untouchable. Perhaps a more critical examination of the effects of perceptions of superiority on African American Athlete behavior could provide greater insight and possibilities for interventions and solutions. At the same time, while it stands to reason that the feelings of superiority and thus entitlement could be detrimental to the overall development of the student-athlete, regardless of ethnicity, this research didn't confirm such findings among the case study members. Each student-athlete discussed an understanding of the need to work hard to achieve their goals. They each understood the odds were against them in regards to achieving a professional career in football and

understood that they needed to have a plan in place that would allow them to support themselves and their families if the professional career in football wasn't achieved. For example, Bobby wanted to take over his parent's cleaning business and Gary would like to be a police officer.

Perhaps a sense of entitlement played a role in Geoffrey's outcomes. However, if that is the case, the data collected didn't show it. A more in-depth examination of African American football athlete perspectives on superiority might provide more clear data. It is also important that popular ideas about athletes not cloud perceptions of athletes beyond what the research has presented. Recent research has highlighted some established stereotypes that have been disproven by the data. For example, the stereotype of the "dumb jock" with relatively little interest in learning or achieving academically at the collegiate level has been contradicted by the data (McCormick & McCormick, 2006). If negative effects of the superiority complex must be documented first and then perhaps interventions can be established, thus more research is needed.

Becoming an Athlete Negotiating Identities:

One of the questions asked of the interviewees was the age that they began to realize they were exceptional at football. When they began to visualize themselves as possible candidates for a professional football career? Each respondent who was asked that question discussed their first interactions with football and how they were introduced. However, it was when they discussed the realization of an exceptional gift or

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talent that caused pause as they began to try and discern when exactly the transition from novice to possible Division 1 talent took place. Frank Miller stated:

> I was young and big and I remember playing on the streets and running everybody over. Everybody around me always said how good I was and I guess I believed them.

Melvin Charles, on the other hand, was an upper-classman in high school before he began to really see his talent:

> My coach didn't pay me any attention until scouts started looking at me. I guess that's when I realized how good I could be.

Geoffrey's realization was less definitive; he stated "Well I was always bigger than everyone else." Geoffrey and I spoke a number of times and a good part of the reason he responded in that way was because he was not confident at all in his place at the university. He felt as if he didn't belong. He often mumbled statements in our interviews that spoke to his inability to conceptualize himself as a part of the program and the university. For example, when asked what he enjoyed doing the most Geoffrey's response was, "I don't know. I guess nothing really." For Geoffrey there was no connectedness between himself and the program. This may have been due, in part to his suspension. However, he did not believe he belonged at Southeastern State, or possibly any university. Sadly enough, he proved himself right and was dismissed from the team in October of 2009.

Gary Reynolds was also in high school when he realized he could potentially be athletically talented enough to go to college and beyond. He stated:

I didn't really know how good I was or how important grades were until my

sophomore and junior year. I started getting letters from schools but my grades

weren't good. Then Coach, my pastor and my mother started telling me how

important it was to get my books with the football so that I could be successful. I

wish I would have known sooner and I wouldn't have wasted so much time."

William had a slightly different path:

Music was always my first love. But then as I got older, like 5th grade and started

getting bigger, people were like you need to play football! It's funny because I've

always been bigger and mom would be like, 'play nice' and that actually came

back to bite me as I got to high school. Coaches were like just kill everybody!

Stop being so nice!

Within each athlete's life there was a place where their self perception transitioned

internally from novice athlete to potential collegiate and professional prospect. It was

during that transition that they began to envision themselves as potentially talented

enough to earn a living and provide for their families through athleticism. In many cases,

that athleticism was not encouraged or supported externally until outside interest was

shown; in regards to academic outcomes, that could be too late. Gary Reynolds is a

prime example. It was not until his athletic potential was recognized that he began to

receive the external support needed to better focus on his education, and as a result, he

spent his entire senior season making up courses. In addition to the extra work he had to

complete, the university still needed to use its admissions exception on him. This has left

a stigma in Gary's mind as well as the mind of his peers, coaches and instructors. He stated:

> It's hard for me 'cause I really don't know because like I said I've never been taught. When assignments are due I'm still in that mindset of not doing them, so young athletes should be taught and not just pushed along...it hurts them in the long run. It messes with your confidence. I can't concentrate on football because I am so worried about school right now…it's stressful."

In Gary's case it was his coaches, parents and pastor who encouraged and supported him as he worked hard to put himself academically in the position to attend college. However, it must also be acknowledged that -- with the exception of his high school position coach, who immediately began working with Gary on his grades upon his arrival at Hazelview High School ---- it was the educational system that allowed Gary to get by without being fully accountable and prepared. It also provided an environment where Gary could matriculate without taking his academic obligations seriously up until and throughout his high school career.

There is also an opposing perspective, in the example of Janice Summers. She was a mother interviewed for this project whose son is considered by his coaches to be an outstanding high school quarterback. Janice has told her son on many occasions that grades and school come first and football means nothing to her. She is extremely visible both in the classroom as well at the football field. Both her son and his coaches are aware that Janice perceives football as always being expendable. So her son works hard to maintain an acceptable grade point average and his coaches support him. They

understand that they will not have their "star" quarterback if his grades do not meet his mother's standards. As a result, her son gets very good grades, although their relationship is strained at times. Football has become a part of who he is and in many ways, Janice devalues that part by telling him it doesn't mean anything to her. She recently told me that they have spoken and she is making a conscious effort to support both his athletics and his academics equally. Her son shared with her that his grades are important to him as well and he wishes she could trust him more in his academics. This is an area she states she is still working on and she recently reported:

> I still don't play about the grades, but as long as he's showing me they mean as much to him as they do to me, I will do all that I can to support him and make sure that he has everything he needs for success on the football field as well."

This approach appears to be constructive, providing both an opportunity for communication and an opportunity for growth and partnership between the student athlete, the parents and the coaches. There are a large number of African American males who aspire to be professional football players and athletes in general. There is a way to nurture the dream through partnership and encouragement that can lead to success both on the football field as well as in life. Data were collected by the president and founder of a mentoring program in Florida, Educate Today, Inc. He asked each of his participants about their definitions of a role model and their future goals and provided the results to this study for comparison (see table 2). Of the 12 middle and high school students surveyed, five (42%) listed professional athlete as their future goal. Also of the 12 respondents, two (17%) listed football players under their definition of a role model.

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While this data sample is small, there is potential within it to develop interventions that can use these aspirations to improve the educational outcomes of the young people affected.

Each athlete also discussed the ways in which they attempt to negotiate the various identities and spaces that they must co-exist in. For example, Melvin discussed the difficulties he faced in sustaining a relationship with his father. His father is a drug dealer and gang member and Melvin must take great risks to spend time with him. He recounted:

It's like I love my dad but I can't really spend any time with him because if anything happened I'd lose everything! And him and my cousins are like, 'man, why don't you come see me' but I really don't want to because of the problems it could cause… One time I was visiting my cousin in Gainesville and we had been riding around all day and he asked if I wanted to ride with him somewhere. I just said no because I had to get back to school. Man, by the time I got on 75 my grandmother called me and told me my cousin had just been arrested! The cops had been following him all day!! Imagine what would have happened if I had been in the car with him! So, I love my family but it's hard sometimes trying to do it all.

Frank also discussed his competing roles when he stated:

It's like I want to be a role model and I try but sometimes I just don't feel worthy, you know what I mean? These kids are looking up to me, but really why should they? Because I run fast? Because I've got my name up on the walls? It's hard

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because I want to be who they see me as but I also don't want to let them down.

When I go home, it's like I'm a celebrity…and for me, that don't always feel

good. Everybody's got their idea of who [Frank] is but they really have no idea.

Keona: Well who are you?

I'm just a man. Trying to do right and live right and take care of my kids. I'm just

a man.

These quotes exhibit the competing roles some African American athletes must navigate

if they are to maintain their personal, academic and athletic relationships which are

essential in achieving their goals. In Melvin's case, he has to choose between spending

time with his family and protecting his athletic and academic aspirations. Frank's

dilemma is two-fold and slightly different. He has friends from his past, current and

former gang members whom he considers to be family who continue to play a role in his

life. They are proud of him and he would never turn his back on them. That commitment

to his past relationships has played a role in some of the challenges Frank has faced as a

young adult. Also at issue for Frank is the fact that he is contending with himself

internally as he attempts to define who he is and who he desires to be. He wants to be a

role model, but he doesn't want to be forced into a role based solely on his ability to run

fast or jump high. He also expressed a feeling of unworthiness. In that he believes he is

not worthy of being considered a role model because of his history.

Racism's role in creating an African American niche in football

The history of race and sport has been filled with examples of systemic exclusion, followed by limited inclusion founded on stereotypical ideals that have celebrated while concurrently denigrating African American bodies. African American participation is highest in the two events that create the greatest revenue among American sports. Those sports are basketball and football. They are also the two sports that are the most heavily laden with rules and moral guidelines. It is only in the National Football League that a player's performance can be devalued because of choices his mother made six years earlier as evidenced in the prior example discussing the NFL Draft day commentary. In the example, the player was considered by many to be the best draft prospect, however, six years prior his mother had been plagued with drug addiction and as a result his draft stock dropped and it was publicly acknowledged that his mother's drug history played a role. More recently in the 2010 draft, a top football prospect was asked during a pre-draft interview with a high ranking team official if his mother had been a prostitute. This question was leaked to the press and received great criticism. However, it highlights the invasive lengths many of the owners and teams go through to police "character" on the football field; a field of play that accepts brutality as a rule, while at the same time penalizing individuality and self expression. The legacy of racism in American sport, and for the purposes of this research football in particular, has created a system fueled by African American labor, but that continues to be hostile toward total African American inclusion. The Eugenics movement and other theories of an African American genetic disposition toward superior athleticism fuel many of the stereotypes that negatively affect

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black athletes today. It is within this system that African American male athletes must negotiate varying and often contradictory spaces, at the same time being both cheered and jeered on and off the field of play. It is within this framework that the research participants were asked to reflect on the ways in which racism both created and perpetuated a perceived niche for African Americans in football.

While American football and sport in general, are systemically embedded in racism and inequitable access, it has simultaneously created a niche for African American male athletes who generally speaking, have had a great deal of success. Approximately 70 percent of NFL players are African American (Entine, 1999) while less than one percent of the owners are. The football field is a public space where black bodies are both cheered and feared, all at the same time. Where sport has leveled the playing field in some ways, old ways of thinking about race and athleticism persist and continue to negatively impact young African American males. This racism often can be seen in the classroom, as African American athletes are stereotyped before they are given a chance to prove themselves. Why are there so few African American quarterbacks in the National Football League? Is it because quarterback is a position that, by all accounts, requires the most intelligence on the field? How does the lack of African American quarterbacks in the NFL perpetuate images of blackness and intelligence? Why are there so few African American owners in the National Football League? The league has recently passed rules to increase diversity among the head coaching positions, but inequity continues to persist in the management offices. Competing paradigms about African American athleticism

need to be confronted at all levels of the sport if the goal is for sport to truly lead the way in leveling the proverbial playing field.

Across the board, all of the athletes interviewed believed football was their niche. They were the top football talent at their high schools and that athleticism provided an opportunity for them to pursue their goal of playing in the National Football League while aspiring to attain a college degree. They also all believed that racism played a very real role in American football. They each clearly understood football as a business starting at the high school level. They each believed they existed in multiple spaces-- one where they were wanted for their athletic ability and the other which consisted of a bombardment of negative stereotypes that followed them from the playing field into the classroom. They each shared examples of what they perceived as racism they faced within the football field of play and the results of those experiences on their current worldviews. For example, William discussed his issues with his white high school coach stating:

> He was prejudiced and he treated his white athletes better than he treated the black athletes. There were two separate penalties given for the same thing. Like when he made me sit out of a game because I had to miss a practice for a church choir convention. I told him a year in advance and he said okay, but he must have forgotten and he went off the week of the game. It wouldn't have been so bad had a white kid not missed more days and was allowed to play on Friday.

When asked if the relationship with his high school coach has affected how he interacts with his current coaches, William stated, "I'm not gonna lie, it does, but I am trying to work on it and not judge all coaches because of that one…but I am keeping my eyes open."

William also played a question and answer game with me when responding to the question about race and sport. The conversation went as follows:

William: "When you watch football 95% of the time what race is the quarterback?"

Keona: "White"

W: What is the Offensive Line?"

K: White"

W: What race is the Defensive Line?"

K: "Black"

W. "What race are the Outside linebackers?"

K: (I drew a blank on this one)

He offered a hint stating, "Ray Lewis?"

K: "Oh, Black?"

W. Yes, now Middle linebackers are generally…White…Safeties?"

K: "Black?"

W: "It's almost as if—Punter?"

K.: "White"

W: "So it's just like certain positions, it's almost as if they're guaranteed. Take the Express Story with Jim Brown and Syracuse back in the day when a black running back came in they had a lot to prove they were paving the way for us."

While William used many of the same stereotypes to make his point, his question and answer game only worked because those same stereotypes and systemic barriers to total African American inclusion have persisted for so long. Jim Brown toppled many barriers for African Americans both in collegiate football as well as professional, but there are still many more barriers to go. Also while toppling those barriers he solidified his public persona as an angry, hyper-sexed black male athlete. It is hypocrisy in its purest form and it directly affects the black athlete. It's the type of hypocrisy that doesn't start at the professional level, it starts in little leagues and it persists beyond professional careers. It might also shed new light on the trust issues many of the case study participants discussed. The feelings that they were being judged more harshly than their white counterparts filtered into every area of the interviews. It was that perception of inequity that sparked varying responses from the case study participants, most of which culminating in a lack of trust between themselves and their coaches and advisors. Melvin discussed an experience with his high school coach stating:

> My high school coach didn't even like me until I started getting recruited. Then
> he tried to get me to go on visits to [a specific] university because he was trying to
> get a job there. I didn't go because I had already committed to Sunshine State
> University, but he knew that and didn't even care. He still tried to get me to go,

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but I didn't because I didn't want to make Southeastern State University think I wasn't true to my word… It's hard to trust a coach when they only care about you if you are good but I guess that's a part of the game.

Ironically while Frank believed that racism existed in football, he expressed hesitation in ascribing that trait on the field. For example, he stated:

Honestly, you don't think about it when you're on the team. But if you step outside of the team, it kind of do. You look at who's playing like in soccer you hardly see whites or blacks so when you see an all black team, like on a team from Africa or somewhere you're just like, 'whoa!' People have their ideas already off the field.

However he later described his belief that but for his talent, he wouldn't be given the time of day by his coach. He stated:

My coach don't like me at all. He talks to me like a dog and I can't stand him. Nobody can. If it wasn't for football I wouldn't even be here… every week he calls my mom and tells her they are going to use me and how I'm going to be a big part of the offense, my mom buys her ticket and comes up for the game and I get three snaps. She keeps making me mad believing him! I keep telling her not to bother coming but she does anyway. He's got all these good running backs but he won't use them. I guess he just have his favorites. I just need to get my degree.

Frank never said he believed his coach was racist or mistreating him because of race

explicitly, however he did speak to the disparate response he perceived black players as

receiving from coaches as opposed to white players:

> It's like when a black player makes a good play in practice the coaches kind of
>
> treat it like its no big deal, kind of the way it's supposed to be. But let a white
>
> player make a big play! Man, they go crazy! I guess it's pride, I don't know.

Both of these statements also speak to the level of mistrust Frank has between himself

and his coach. He didn't actually believe they cared about him as a person and as a

result, he kept them at arm's length. Trust was a major issue with the athletes

participating in the study. While it would be impossible for Frank to prove to anyone that

race played a role in his mistreatment without videotaped evidence of his coach using

racial slurs, the purpose of this research was not to assert that the coaching staff was

racist. Race plays a role in the way different people from varying backgrounds relate to

each other, specifically on the athletic field of play where manhood is contested and

ultimately reinforced in ways that are foreign to outsiders. A better understanding of

individual backgrounds can help coaches build stronger relationships with African

American athletes that could translate into both athletic and academic success.

Frank's relationship with his coach was negatively affected by the mutual lack of

respect that they clearly held for each other. Frank had good relationships with other

coaches. It was simply his relationship with that particular coach that for whatever

reason, fostered his feelings of inequity and mistrust. The belief that his coach treated

him "like a dog" may explain why there is a mutual lack of respect between both the

coach and the student-athlete. I witnessed one interaction between the two and Frank's

depiction of the way the coach spoke with him was accurate. The coach was so brazen as

to speak to Frank rudely while I was sitting across from him at the table. I watched him

enter the room and verbally assault Frank for not calling him, when everyone knew

Frank's cell phone had been disconnected for weeks. He noticed me in the room and

toned down his language a little, however, the damage was done. This was also surprising

because my previous interactions with the coach had always been calm and in many ways

reserved. That particular coach did not like Frank and there is no way to truly ascertain

why. Frank's perception was that he and other African Americans at his position were

treated inequitably because they were black. Add to the lack of mutual respect the fact

that the coach has supreme power over Frank's athletic future. One must ask why, would

a student in Frank's position, choose to stay at the university if the NFL was a possible

option.

Bobby Dennis also discussed Race and sports stating:

> A lot of people think all black people are fast and just that they are just made for
>
> sports…which is not true at all. I see it a lot. I mean it goes on everywhere. I've
>
> seen great talented quarterbacks get put down. Don't know why. I don't know if
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> it's because coaches like to see a white guy play quarterback because he's
>
> supposed to be the leader of the offense and team. I feel like if that person is
>
> talented and smart and has leadership it doesn't matter what color he is, he should
>
> be able to lead the team.

Bobby also discussed many of the negative, racist stereotypes that he believed persisted regarding African American athletes and his response to them. He stated:

> There are a lot of negative stuff you hear about black athletes. 'All black football players are dumb,' 'All black people are big and ugly,' When I was younger it used to bother me a lot, now I block it out. I don't pay attention to it, it's a sign of weakness.

Bobby has an extremely positive outlook on life. While it may appear as if he is choosing to ignore the racism around him, throughout the interviews he showed a propensity toward a "glass half full" philosophy. It is probably that worldview that necessitates his need to avoid any negative interactions. However, clearly he acknowledged a relationship between race and sport and like each of the case study participants, how he chooses to deal with it will continue to be his prerogative.

One of the supplemental interviewees, a sociologist who has worked extensively with former professional athletes as they have attempted to make the financial adjustment from professional athlete to former professional athlete, discussed the theory of the "cool pose" (Majors, 2001) and its role in the self sabotage that some young African American athletes engage in at the collegiate level as a response to institutionalized racism. He stated:

> Often times African American males are afraid to return to the 'hood' a failure and choose not to confront questions like, 'am I good enough'. As long as they don't have to answer that question, then they can remain 'cool' and maintain their

status on the streets as the guy who was good enough to go pro. If they try and

fail, then they lose that status within the community they assume they will be

returning to.

Former Athlete Responses to Perceptions of Racism in Sport and an African American

Niche:

Of the four former athletes interviewed, only one stated that he didn't believe there was

racism in sport: "I don't think race matters in sport. It's all about how hard you work and

the guy who works the hardest wins the game."

However, when asked if it mattered to him if his coach was white or black, his response

was:

> Well, I'm going to say yes. You just trust a black coach more than you can trust a
>
> white coach. I guess because it feels like he understands you or something. I
>
> definitely would prefer to play for a black coach than a white coach.

While there was a clear inclination towards playing for someone with a shared ethnicity

and background, the interviewee failed to understand [or acknowledge] how racism could

impact the field of play. Another former athlete who was interviewed was in his mid

50's. He was a former standout high school athlete who never earned his high school

diploma and never had the opportunity to play at the collegiate level. When asked about

racism in sport he responded:

Hell yeah! The white man controls everything to do with football! Black athletes get what they give them and you know if they paying them millions then they making billions! The black athlete got to sit there and be quiet. They can't make no waves or they will get fired! Look at Michael Vick. How many white people do two years in prison for dog fighting? Or that other kid, what's his name…Burress! He going to prison for shooting himself! That Roethlisberger was accused of rape and ain't nobody trying to suspend him until after the trial. They don't even talk about that! You know why? Cause he white, that's why!"

Coach Responses to Perceptions of Racism in Sport and an African American Niche:

The coaches were very forthright about their experiences with racism in sport both as players and as coaches. Coach Gregg, a 38 year old Afro-Cuban male discussed his experience with race and sport as a student athlete at a different FBS school in Florida:

Yes, race plays a role in sports. When you look at the people in the stands and you look at the majority of the players on the playing field, it is often confusing to say the least. The majority of the people who can afford the tickets are white and the majority of the players are African American. The problem with that from personal experience is the double standard. For example, a teacher made a comment to me saying, "at least you got in off of athletics." He assumed I got into school because I was an athlete with no independent knowledge of my grade point average. He made that assumption because I was black. On the one hand

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you have a great opportunity for black athletes, but it's not a free ride. There is a

very real cost to that 'free education' they are always talking about.

Coach Raymond discussed race and sport through the perception of his perceived role as

a cultural intermediary between the African American players and their white coaches.

He felt as if white coaches, in a position of power, have the responsibility to not

perpetuate negative and racist stereotypes if their goal is to coach, educate and mentor

African American Athletes. He stated:

> So many of these coaches don't know these players. They see a talented athlete
>
> and they start yelling and screaming and attempting to manipulate the kid when
>
> what the kid really needs is someone to really love him. Nine times out of ten that
>
> kid hears yelling and screaming at home and has learned how to tune it out. So
>
> the coach thinks he's motivating the kid when all he is really doing is pissing the
>
> kid off to the point that he won't even play for him anymore. You can't
>
> manipulate these kids, you have to genuinely care for them or else they will know.
>
> Too many of these white coaches don't understand because they haven't been
>
> where these kids have been. They come in with their messed up ideas about who
>
> these kids are and what they are about and they end up losing them.

Parental Responses to Perceptions of Racism in Sport and an African American Niche

All of the parents pointed out examples of racism as they perceived it in regards to their children on the football field. One example given by Janice Summers recalled an experience with referees in a game her son played in:

> It was a game on the northside, and you know how prejudiced they are up there. Anyway, the little white boy called my son a nigger right in front of the ref! And he was loud we all heard it! And you know our fans are ghetto so some parents were yelling at the ref, 'you aren't going to do anything?' The ref just looked at us and turned his back! See they want our little black boys to play for them and against them because they know our boys are good, but to them we'll always be a nigger.

Do Athletes perceive their athleticism as a viable form of capital that can be bartered or traded for social mobility?

Without variance, all of the participants in this study believed that athleticism in and of itself is a viable form of capital that can be bartered or traded for social mobility. Where they each differ is in the ways in which they see that conversion taking place. For example, Mrs. Summers views football as a way to pay for college. Her desire is that her son becomes an engineer regardless of the attention his athleticism is receiving. She stated, "I don't care anything about football, education is first in my house. I am educated his father is educated and he will be well educated. I just need football to foot the bill." Jim Talbot also agrees that education is the most important thing for his son;

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however, he (Talbot) was an outstanding high school athlete and is filled with pride when he sees his son playing football at his alma mater, stating, "Education is the most important thing…but sports are still pretty important. I mean important to the whole well being of my son." In contrast, Catherine Charles had no expectations for her son of converting his athleticism into capital stating, "I never expected him to go to a four year college. I actually pushed the military, but he can't go until he passes the ACT." These responses highlight the role parental perspective can have on the educational outcomes of African American male athletes. Mrs. Summers and Mr. Talbot's sons are successful on the football field as well as in the classroom, while Ms. Charles' son failed to achieve success in the classroom, directly affecting his ability to continue playing football and succeed on the field.

Parent perceptions play a major role in student perceptions of access to social mobility and educational resources. Those parents who expect more from their children in the classroom see better educational outcomes than those who do not. While this information is not new, it deserves recording.

Race, Sport and African American Athlete Aspirations

Of all the current and former athletes interviewed for this study, not one failed to discuss the history of race and sport and the role athletes who came before them played in their being able to play football now. They acknowledged the exclusion they each had felt at times while playing sports and discussed candidly their resolve to rise above the past and take advantage of the opportunities provided to them now. Both William and

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Gary shared a connection with the Ernie Davis story. Ernie Davis was a running back from the Syracuse University and he was also the first African American to win the Heisman Trophy. A few years back his life was made into a book and movie. He died at a very young age and never had the chance to actually play professional football, even though he was drafted and signed to play alongside Jim Brown. His story of struggle and perseverance resonated with the students because they believed they could identify with his struggle and they hoped to emulate his perseverance. William had been given the movie and was very familiar with the stories of both Ernie Davis and Jim Brown. Gary had been given the book by his high school Spanish teacher. Gary believed the book helped him better understand and acknowledged the price athletes who came before him paid that prepared the way for the opportunity he now possesses.

Unequivocally each case study participant aspired to play professional football. Surprisingly, they also each verbalized an understanding of the challenges they will face as they attempt to achieve their goal. Gary's experience as a freshman shed a good deal of light on this topic. He was highly recruited with over 70 scholarship offers; the highest rated recruit in Southeastern State University's history. However, by the third week of classes he was seriously questioning whether he made the right choice in attempting to attend college at all. Not only was he struggling academically, he was struggling on the football field as well. While his athletic potential was unparalleled at Southeastern State University, he was competing against older, stronger and more knowledgeable football athletes at the same position and unfortunately, he represented no competition. This realization that all freshmen football players face forced Gary to begin

to consider alternative career options. He sat out his freshman year and began to focus more heavily on his schoolwork and has begun to see some success academically. As a result, like his peers, Gary hopes to play professional football in the National Football League and athletically, he's got as good a chance as anyone, providing he remains injury free and manages to reach his potential. However, also like his peers, he understands very clearly that there will be obstacles and he is beginning to understand who he is separate from what he does and if he doesn't play in the NFL, he can still attain success.

African American male athletes present a unique population that warrants study by researchers. This research has provided candid answers to questions regarding perceptions of race and sports, career and goal aspirations and perceptions of identity. In each case, African American athlete perceptions are rooted in their individual backgrounds and histories. Each student athlete desired to succeed, however some were not equipped with the skills to navigate the system in which that success could be found. African American athletes attempt to convert their athletic capital into tangible outcomes that will provide access to what they perceive to be a better way of life. It is up to the individual universities to ensure that the African American student-athletes have the resources needed to develop the skills to achieve their goals, both on and off the playing field.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

"Must I strive toward colorlessness? But seriously and without snobbery, think of what the world would lose if that should happen. America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it remain so."

Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, 1952

In this dissertation, I set out to examine African American perceptions of success and the ways in which African American male athletes negotiate public spaces. African American athletes are required to exist and succeed within a minimum of three public spaces while continuing to develop internally as men in this country. These spaces include at home among family and friends, at school or in the classroom and on the field of play, specifically the football field. Essentially, African American athletes are being asked to be everything to everyone often times to the exclusion of being able to be true to their own selves.

This research also examined African-American athletes' goals and aspirations as defined by individuals. One of the purposes for this discussion was to better ascertain student-athlete intentions and goals and through in-depth interviews gain an understanding of the interventions that may be instituted that could increase African American male athletic and academic achievement. Within the same context, athletic capital was also examined, which included the ways in which African American male athletes converted their athleticism into economic, social and/or cultural capital.

In regards to the perceived African American niche in football, three themes were

discovered that directly encouraged or maintained the students' perceptions of superiority. The first was the systemic racism in sport that is based on a pseudo-science that ascribes an innate advantage to African American athletes. It is the commonly held belief that African Americans have a genetic advantage in athletics. The persistence of this belief undergirds the stereotypes and gives a sense of legitimacy to those who choose to believe African American males are different physiologically in a meaningful way. The next theme encompassed the stereotypes that are reinforced by print and television media that depict the black athlete as aggressive, animalistic and innately inclined to physical activities as opposed to intellectual endeavors. The third theme that may provide some insight into the perceived African American niche in football is the enculturation of black males into the sport culture at very young ages. For example, the case study participants on average began playing organized sport between the ages of six and eight years old. William discussed his love of music and how he was influenced to play football simply because of his size. Each of these themes may provide some insight into the perceived African American niche in sport and football specifically.

This research also examined the academic and professional aspirations of African American male athletes. Ultimately, each case study participant desired to obtain a career in the National Football League. While they all had back up plans, they believed if they worked hard, they had as good a chance as anyone else to achieve their goals. In regards to their academic goals, they each expressed a desire to earn a Bachelor's Degree before they left Southeastern State. However, there appeared to be a disconnection between the desire and the application. For example, four of the six case study

participants reported being diagnosed with a learning disability, however, only two were using accommodations at the time of the interviews. They had not been adequately prepared for the rigor of the collegiate courses they were enrolled in and by not taking advantage of the accommodations; the likelihood of success was greatly lessened.

The student-athletes were asked to define success. This task proved daunting in that they were unable to offer an operational definition. "Makin' it to the league" was cited most often as their individual definition of success. The question becomes, "What happens if you don't make it to the league, are you a failure?" This question is important and so more research is needed that can address the ways in which internal perceptions of success can be developed and operationalized for African American male athletes.

One of the more interesting discussions provoked by this research revolve around the idea of the ways in which African American male athletes negotiate multiple identities in public spaces. Throughout this project the case study participants discussed the exorbitant amounts of stress they face in attempting to meet the expectations of those around them. These expectations come from their families and friends, as well as from coaches and professors, on whose opinions the student-athletes' entire future rests. Gary discussed his inability to perform on the field when he struggles in the classroom. Although he was the highest rated recruit in the university's history, his inability to meet expectations in the classroom negatively affected his play on the field, in spite of the systemic issues that placed him in that very predicament. His desire to be all that those around him expected of him nearly crushed him and at one point, he contemplated leaving the university. Frank and Melvin also discussed internal and external pressures

involved in negotiating who they are, as well as who they aspire to be. African American male athletes are individuals first, and the inability of institutions to treat them as such, negatively affects their connection with that institution, as well as their academic and athletic success overall.

Lastly, this research examined the role of the community and educational institutions in the overall success and failure of African American male athletes. Essentially, parents and coaches are in the position to affect the most influence over student-athlete success. Parental response to academic expectations plays an important role in academic success. Coincidentally, a lack of parental input on academic expectations can have detrimental effects as well. Coaches also play an important role in the academic success of African American male student athletes. Often times, coaches are the gatekeepers and in some instances, African American coaches can act as cultural mediators and can assist in filling the gap that can be left by less involved parents and disinterested head and position coaches. This research discovered that parenting and coaching partnerships can have the greatest impact on African American male athlete academic success.

A major factor in mentoring African American student-athletes is in how relationships are built and trust gained. This phenomenon manifested itself throughout the interviews and solidified itself as a major theme and barrier toward academic success. Also important throughout the research was the role of the community in sport enculturation. African-American football players in Florida begin participating in organized football at very early ages. It is within the context of Little League and

neighborhood football leagues that young black males are first introduced to the social

context of sport and the societal norms and rules that make up the culture. This

conclusion will also address athleticism, stereotyping and identity construction. How

African American football players identify themselves in relation to their athleticism and

the prevailing stereotypes that permeate their world was a key element in better

understanding how they perceive themselves, negotiate spaces and aspire to success.

Lastly, this research will address the implications of the findings and possible

interventions for increasing African American student-athlete success.

Professional Football Aspirations

This study found that while all of the case study participants aspired to a career in

the National Football League, none was under the illusion that such a career was

inevitable or a foregone conclusion. They each understood that hard work would be

required to achieve their goals and also that college was the only route. As such,

academic success was a key component to achieving their aspirations and leading

successful lives. To pretend that academic success is the goal is unfortunately no more

truthful than the notion that the NCAA is anti-commercialism. Melvin Charles discussed

the irony when he stated, "I identify as an athlete first but it's supposed to be student first.

"Student-Athlete," but I see athlete first because that is what got me here." This is not

only ironic but also consequential, especially when considering Bourdieu's (1986)

concepts of cultural capital and cultural reproduction. Jay MacLeod discussed the role of

education in maintaining the hegemonic relationship among varying socio-economic

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classes when he stated, "By embodying class interests and ideologies, schools reward the cultural capital of the dominant classes and systematically devalue that of the lower classes" (MacLeod, 1995: 13). Henry Giroux also contributed to a better understanding of the role of education in class maintenance, in stating, "Students whose families have a tenuous connection to forms of cultural capital highly valued by the dominant society are at a decided disadvantage" (Giroux, 1983: 88). These statements ring true in relation to the educational experiences of the case study participants. Those student-athletes who attended less affluent, lower performing high schools began their collegiate careers at a major disadvantage, while being asked to meet exorbitant expectations. Gary, Geoffrey and Frank each discussed great frustration as they attempted to meet expectations that exceeded their preparation and ability. Like the case study participants, student athletes, often coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds, find themselves a part of a multi-billion dollar industry with strict amateurism rules that mandate their exclusion from the financial profits. Their only hope for earning a small piece of the financial rewards from the industry whose profits are built from the student-athletes' blood, sweat and tears, is to garner a spot on a professional team. They make this choice and both overtly and covertly aspire to reach this goal while at the same time being barraged by negative stereotypes and images that accompany being black and an athlete.

Athletic Capital

Each of the athletes interviewed described college football as a business and likened their athleticism to an asset, commodity or capital. As such, the term athletic

capital was used to describe the social, economic and educational value placed on the individual football player's athleticism. While each athlete perceived his athleticism to be a type of commodity or asset, not all of the athletes bartered that asset in such a way as to ensure some success. Within this phenomenon is one of the most perplexing trends seen among many African American athletes. This topic was discussed by a number of the supplemental interviewees, with most of them stating a desire to discern a solution. One interviewee, who holds a PhD in Sociology, supplied a possible answer. He referred back to his work with entrepreneurs and considered this problem to be a gap in knowledge for the African American athlete. He spoke of how an entrepreneur makes business decisions that to outsiders appear to be irrational and illogical. He gave the example of Bill Gates. He described Gates as a trailblazer, yet to outsiders he may have originally appeared foolish. Gates invested everything he had into a business that was not tested nor proven lucrative. He believed it was Gates' body of knowledge regarding his business venture that gave him the courage and determination to pursue his vision. People outsider of his circle of friends did not have that knowledge and to them Gates' decision to leave a secure job to start a business in a new field appeared foolish. However, Bill Gates new a number things about his business venture that outsiders didn't know. Quitting a secure job to start his business was the next logical step for him and the rewards surpassed the risks because he had knowledge that the people outside of his circle did not have. Essentially there was a gap in the body of knowledge Gates had as opposed to everyone else. If one were to apply this "knowledge gap" concept to the African American athletes interviewed for this project, there appears to be a logical fit.

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Geoffrey had all of the physical tools and athleticism to compete on the football field. Geoffrey also had the academic tools to remain eligible and even graduate, as evidenced by his academic performance when he was initially suspended. Geoffrey had managed to remain academically eligible while he was suspended and working toward the reinstatement of his football scholarship. However, what Geoffrey did not have was the vision to see himself successful in college or beyond. There was a gap in the body of knowledge possessed by Geoffrey James, compared to that of his advisors, coaches, family and mentors. Whereas outsiders could see his potential, Geoffrey could not, and eventually squandered multiple opportunities to better focus himself, get on the right track and succeed. I spoke with Geoffrey the morning of the day he was dismissed from the team. As always, we spoke about his decision making, and he assured me he knew what to do and said he was doing it. We then began to speak about his future goals. On previous meetings he had been very vague about any future goals and I was pleased with his openness and candor as he spoke about what he enjoyed and what he hoped to accomplish. It felt as if he was finally beginning to see himself successful at Southeastern State University. When I returned the next day and learned of his dismissal I was very disappointed. I spent a good amount of time trying to discern where I had missed something. However, it wasn't until a later conversation with Frank Miller that I began to better understand exactly what transpired and could better see the connection between Geoffrey's outcome and the "knowledge gap" concept. Frank told me that the other football players knew Geoffrey was on the wrong path. He had already been suspended and was continuing the same behavior. Frank said he spoke with him two

weeks prior to his dismissal, one on one and "man to man" as Frank phrased it. He said:

> Ms. Keona, I just sat him down, just me and him, man to man and told him 'you
> can't keep doin' what you been doin' and that's real. I know I made some stupid
> mistakes and it ain't worth it. You need to see that! It is goin' to catch up with
> you.' I just spoke to him just like that and he just looked at me with that same
> look and I just left him alone with it.

Frank had been suspended for part of the season for an error in judgment he made at the same time as Geoffrey's initial infraction. They both paid a price, but Frank took that lesson and used it to motivate him to make better choices. For Frank, the next logical step was to get focused and on the right track for success. He could not understand why Geoffrey did not see his circumstances in a similar way. One question that needs to be addressed here and examined in future research is how to fill that gap with the knowledge that will assist in propelling African American male athletes toward academic success? Perhaps more intensive counseling for those athletes would suffice as a first step towards preparing them academically, athletically, socially and emotionally for their role as student-athlete at FBS (formerly Division I) educational institutions. My research showed that simply lecturing a player about his potential will not suffice. This is due, in part, to the reality that some African American football players come from homes and environments where they routinely receive harsh verbal chastisement. They received this criticism to such a great extent that they have actually learned how to tune it out, and they often write off the person doing the criticizing as being just like the others. As a result of this, even well-meaning teachers, advisors and mentors can find themselves placed into

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the same category and ignored.

Student Athletes and Trust:

Each athlete who participated in this study acknowledged facing challenges to trusting others and building trust with both peers and adults. As such, when counseling or mentoring African American Athletes, there must be a period of time where motives are discerned before any real level of trust or rapport can be developed. The athlete is trying to discern, "Is this person just pushing me so that they look good?" They may also be asking themselves, "Is this person just pushing me so that I can play football for them?" The real question is, "Does this person really care about me?" Many of these athletes have serious trust issues and all of those things need to be taken into account when mentoring and monitoring young black athletes. A deeper level of trust and rapport is essential in counseling, advising or mentoring African American male athletes, and while it takes time to develop that trust, my experience working with at-risk student athletes has proven its value.

The Role of Community in Sport Enculturation

In the state of Florida, athleticism and football played very important roles in the socialization and development of the young men interviewed for this research. Each of the case study participants was introduced to the sport at an early age and held the belief that football athletes in Florida are better than football athletes elsewhere in the country. They felt validated in that idea and their belief was in many ways, at one time, supported

by the data. The NFL is filled with players who played high school or collegiate football within the state of Florida with Dade County being considered a top region for collegiate football recruiting. In many Florida neighborhoods, young black males are more likely to personally know a collegiate or professional football player than they are to know a black judge or professor. This type of close proximity to athletic success skews the perceptions of African American males within Florida towards an athletic superiority complex that in their minds appears rational and fact based.

These ideas are also reinforced by the family and peers of those athletes exhibiting the most athletic talent on the football field. It is the family and close peers of the most talented athletes who are in the best position to influence the African American male athlete beyond the football field and into the classroom. It is within that influence that the shift must first take place. As in the case of Mrs. Summers, the more emphasis a parent puts on schoolwork, the more likely a coach will be to support and reinforce the athlete's focus and support in the classroom. The coach will have the understanding that the child will not be able to participate if their grades are not at the level expected and will have a greater incentive to encourage the student to spend the time needed working on their studies. It becomes a true partnership and, as in the case of Mrs. Summers, a successful partnership as well. This is not to say parents carry the full responsibility for their child's performance in the classroom. Teachers, administrators, and school districts around the country share in the responsibility of ensuring African American male academic success. However, each component (schools, parents, coaches, etc.) plays a role.

On the opposing side, one must be careful not to diminish or stifle a child's dream in an attempt to encourage a stronger commitment to academics. It is often through dreams that young people learn valuable lessons about life, success, failure, perseverance and triumph. While the chances of an African American male becoming a professional football player are small, they are no less likely than the chances of becoming the editor of the Harvard Law Review, or the President of the United States. However, how many adults would look a young child, face to face and tell them to give up, it will never happen, the chances are too slim? It is possible to encourage young people and African American males in particular, to strive for their goals and dreams in a way that would provide for success as they grow and develop and as those dreams are allowed to flourish and transition into other areas.

Athleticism, Stereotyping and Identity Construction

As referenced above, the case study participants' athleticism and experiences on the football field played a definite role in the way the athletes identified themselves and wanted to be perceived by others. It is their hope that the success they have found on the football field will translate into success in life. The internal identification they have developed is often challenged in their everyday experiences both in athletics and academics. For example, their manhood is often challenged as a direct reflection of how aggressive and violent they can be on the football field. While in the classroom, their intelligence is attacked simply as a result of their position on the football team. An example of this can be seen in the margin of one of the student athlete's Composition II

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classes where in response to the student writing, "metaphorically speaking" in his paper, the professor responded, "Define metaphor?" Ignoring the fact that the concepts of metaphors and similes are taught in elementary school and should not be a stretch to expect a college student to understand what it means. African American male athletes face stereotypes in both arenas as they attempt to carve out an individual identity that is authentic and true to who they are, independent of what they do. This task is often difficult and requires time and a program that understands the many nuances that accompany identity construction as young black athletes' transition from boys to men.

All too often, black athletes are judged through stereotypes and negative images associated with African American male athleticism as opposed to the attributes they are actually attempting to present. Subsequently, equally often, this stereotyping takes place in educational institutions. Each study participant discussed facing those stereotypes in settings where their individuality should have been supported. One student recounted a professor asking him what grade he wanted to have given to him and his response to the professor was, "I want what I earned…an A." Another student recalled a professor lecturing "all the football players" about cheating, irrespective of whether or not they were actually cheating. This type of treatment is offensive and it reinforces the idea that African American student-athletes are athletes first and students by the skin of their teeth. One of the coaches and former collegiate athletes interviewed discussed a similar experience where the professor blatantly stated the student was only at the institution because he was an athlete. This phenomenon reinforces the idea of being loved on Saturday and despised Sunday through Friday. The same people who cheer them on at

the football games view them with disdain in the classroom, irrespective of their intelligence, work ethic or intentions. Their treatment is often based solely on preconceived ideas of what it means to be a black athlete.

One major reason such stereotypes persist is because of the negative images of black male athletes that abound both in television and print media. Images of the African American athlete as animalistic, undisciplined, hypersexed and criminal by nature persist in the media to this day. An example of this can be seen in the debate over the Lebron James/Gisele Bundchin Vogue cover photo of 2008. In the photo, Lebron James is hunched over, with his mouth open bearing all of his teeth as if he were screaming and grabbing Gisele to his side. Lebron is African American and Gisele is a blonde haired Brazilian woman and their photo evoked the stereotypical image of the black buck lusting after the white virginal woman. While most likely not intentional, the imagery sparked a serious debate. In the article, "Lebron James' 'Vogue' Cover Called Racially Insensitive," in *USA Today* (3/24/3008) the image is discussed as being likened to "King Kong and Fay Wray." One of the article interviewees, Samir Husni, believed the picture was deliberately chosen in an attempt to be provocative. He argued that a magazine the caliber of *Vogue* would not randomly pick a cover photo. His assertion was that cover photos are severely scrutinized and while there were certainly other shots available, that one was chosen. The Lebron James Vogue cover is one example; however, the above article gave examples of other black athletes depicted as evil or criminal on the cover of national magazines. These types of images, even if received as jokes, reinforce ideas of criminality and deviance among black athletes that directly affect the current status of

black student athletes at educational institutions of higher learning. While the level of outrage that followed the James/Bundchin cover demonstrated a serious cultural interrogation of the stereotype represented, I submit that until those in power seriously interrogate the stereotypes, change will be slow in occurring. Husni's point was clear in identifying the scrutiny that is involved in choosing a cover photo. Until the people with the authority to make that level of decision critically interrogate the stereotypes, little change will be made.

Implications:

"The concept of 'identity' has undergone a paradigmatic shift in recent decades" (Sokefeld 1999:417). This shift has moved identity from its psychological roots in the term "sameness" to an understanding of one's sameness in relation to "others" with the collective sameness. Essentially who we are is only understandable in relation to who we identify with. As a result, identities can shift. "Sports help to define the moral and political community. They are vehicles of identity providing people with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves and others, whether latitudinally or hierarchically" (MacClancy 1996:2). Within the arena of sport, some people are not only able to establish social identities, but sport can also work as a means to create a new social identity for the individual participating within that particular sport. There is flexibility within constructing identities because identities are not independent constructs, they are plural correlated constructs. This means a person can possess multiple identities within the context of his or her everyday life.

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While sport can provide the opportunity to construct new social identities, hegemonic discourses surrounding ethnicity and imagery contest the development of many of those identities. While some may be able to transition in and out of social identities, for people of color, specifically African-American males, this is not always the case. In the sporting arena, examples have been given that present evidence of African-American male athletes' inability to transcend labels ascribed to them. Benson (2000), gave examples of one African-American athlete's response to low expectations while confirming the aforementioned assertion. He stated, "I would have done a whole lot better if it weren't for coming in and having a group of people say, 'This is the minimum you need to do,' and holding your hand here, and holding your hand there…They were already expecting me not to do well, so why would I want to do more?" (Benson 2000:229)

This research has provided a wealth of knowledge that can be used in the mentoring and counseling of African American male athletes. Specifically in regards to guiding African American career aspirations and goal-setting. College athletes represent a unique subset of college students (Twale & Korn, 2009). African American student-athletes represent yet another unique subset. While many of the challenges black student-athletes face mirror those of all student-athletes, they also face a number of challenges that are not as prevalent among non-African American collegiate student-athletes. This information needs to be taken into consideration when planning academic support and interventions for African American male athletes. For example, there are socio-cultural factors that present barriers for building rapport and establishing mutual trust between

coaches, advisors, mentors and African American student-athletes. This rapport is essential because it provides a foundation that must be built upon if the student athlete is to accept the guidance of their advisors, counselors, coaches and mentors. While an advisor may have the best intentions if there is no trust, their advice will more than likely go unheeded. A successful approach to counseling African American male athletes begins with the establishment of rapport.

This research also highlighted the emotional challenges associated with the negotiation of multiple identities and the toll that stereotypes reinforced by institutions of higher education have on the athletic, academic and emotional development of African American male athletes. While individual counselors may not be able to change the behavior of their institution's faculty and staff, they can assess their biases and beliefs. They can incorporate a culturally relative perspective that acknowledges that while they may not agree or even understand the student's background, they can respect them and not judge them prematurely based on preconceived ideas about work ethic, criminality and intelligence.

This research also exposed the toll that an inequitable education exacts on the academic, social and athletic challenges some African American student-athletes face. In many cases, students-athletes are pushed through their high school classes with little or no preparation for the level of rigor they will face at the collegiate level. As discussed earlier, the pressure and weight of underperforming in the classroom can have a negative effect on athletic performance. As such, it behooves athletic departments to invest the time and energy in developing student athletes beyond the playing field. In most cases,

the greatest barrier is getting the student-athlete to believe he can actually accomplish his goals and get the work done. They have to understand that although it may be difficult and extremely challenging, the support systems are in place to assist them as they attempt to succeed academically. This is not an endorsement of the 'pull yourself up by your own bootstrap' paradigm, rather it is an acknowledgement that if a student is given the proper support, emotionally, academically and athletically, they can learn and succeed.

Individual institutions that provide scholarships for student-athletes must bear a sizeable portion of the load in addressing African-American athletes' academic and social challenges. The college or university enters into an agreement when they admit student-athletes into their school. They have committed themselves to the overall development of both the student and the athlete, and these descriptors must represent more than simply a convenient label. Each case study participant expressed their belief that the label athlete was more important to the institution than the label student. Their experiences in the classrooms and around campus have supported that belief. If student-athletes are to be held to a higher standard, then colleges and universities need to meet that standard and provide an environment conducive to the development of both the student and the athlete. Each student athlete discussed their experiences of being labeled and mistreated by professors because of their status as a student-athlete. Colleges and universities need to take an aggressive approach to training and educating faculty on diversity issues as well as instituting a chain of command and protocols that can be followed if a student perceives they have been discriminated against.

Another barrier to success is the schedule student athletes must adhere to. Parham (1993) discussed the many stressors that student-athletes faced. He listed, beyond academic pressures, student-athletes have to face pressures related to their success or lack thereof on the field of play, social pressures and in the case of African American student athletes, additional prejudices beyond those faced by their white counterparts. Perhaps one intervention alternative could be an amended schedule for freshman making the transition from high school to college. The additional time would aid in their academic and athletic development. Specifically in regards to freshmen, perhaps a schedule that provided less time in meetings and more time for study hall, group sessions and counseling would prove beneficial.

One possible policy implication might include retention programs starting at the high school level that can instill, and in some instances, re-instill ideas about personal, intrinsic expectations among African-American males. Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, and Zine (1997), completed a study that critically examined academically disengaged black students. They proposed the following:

1.   Faculty and staff need to make the effort to notice when a student first exhibits disengagement;

2.   Colleges need more sensitive and diverse faculty and staff;

3.   Advisors need to facilitate the process of joint decision making about academic and other matters;

4.   Teachers need to develop styles that encourage thoughtful class participation;

5.   Students should be monitored closely during the process of their re-engagement with school;

6.   The students themselves must change their attitudes and level of effort.

Faculty encouragement and a strong sense of identity and purpose help African-American students negotiate the struggles within their academic lives (Dei et al., 1997).

Also, as stated before, there is a need for anthropologists to study the role of sport in the African-American community. Student perceptions of sport experiences at the high school level could be very informative in discerning what sport represents to them, specifically in regards to social and cultural capital. A better understanding of what a child truly means when they state, "I want to be a professional football player," can go a long way in learning what the child's true goals are and in planning interventions to help that child reach his or her true goal. The only way to discern what it is about football that is so appealing to young African-American males in Florida, is to ask them. As of yet, this has not been done. Sport can be very influential and a possible opportunity to engage students in the education process through an activity they enjoy. Culture is fluid, and the culture of sport mirrors that fluidity. As such history has shown that stereotypes associated with sports can and do change. For example, Major League Baseball has long been considered to have a strong African American presence since the days of Jackie Robinson's integration into the major leagues and the subsequent disbanding of the Negro League. However, this perception has shifted and the numbers support it. In a report released in 2009, the percentage of African American players in Major League

Baseball 2008 was only 10.2 %, which was the first increase in five years (Associated Press Report, 2009).

While cultural stereotypes can be fluid, the implications of allowing young African-American male athletes to be framed as unintelligent, hyper-sexed, and criminally deviant could possibly result in detrimental effects on an entire generation of young men. While not all blame can be placed at the feet of the colleges or universities, there is a certain level of responsibility on the part of the university to fulfill the obligations they agreed to when they offered the athlete a scholarship for his athletic participation. Young men are recruited under the hope that they will play a sport, and in return receive an education. However what they are receiving is the old "bait and switch" tactic. Colleges and universities are profiting millions of dollars and African-American athletes are being funneled into courses that have nothing to do with their career choices and dreams. It should come as no surprise that so many, if given the opportunity, opt to take their chances with the draft.

While it is easy to turn a blind eye to the plight of the student-athlete, a large part of the ability to ignore what clearly is an inequitable relationship is due, in part, to the framing of African-American athletes as spoiled and unintelligent with muscles everywhere except where it counts. What is missing in the discourse surrounding African-American athletes is a collective and shared knowledge of the fact that many of them have trained at their craft for over 10 years by the time they reach college. The hegemonic framing of black athleticism would have people believe that the athletic talents and abilities shown on the many playing fields are all natural talent and without

any work required. Each of the athletes who participated in this study has faced that belief and took great issue with it. It is another misrepresentation of the truth and one that is extremely damaging to African-American males who face that stereotype both in the classroom as well as in life.

Those stereotypes negatively affect student athletes who work hard at the high school level and even harder at the collegiate level. For example, at the collegiate level, they are required to take a full load of classes, attend mandatory practices, sometimes twice a day, attend mandatory study hall and travel almost every other weekend during the football season. What the athletes interviewed found most frustrating was the way in which spectators loved watching the spectacle on Saturdays while persisting in the refusal to acknowledge the hard work and intelligence required for an African-American student-athlete to make it to Saturday every week. All too often if an African-American player makes a mistake or error in judgment and publicly falls, the framing of that error seems to remind everyone that the athlete really didn't deserve to be there in the first place. The incident is often framed as the athlete having had his chance and blowing it. A large part of that framing is due to the fact that many spectators do not believe the athlete deserved the success he had achieved and the "fall" was inevitable. This belief is evidenced by many sports blogs surrounding the subject of African American athletes. A failure to critically examine how African-American athleticism is framed will result in the failure to truly respect each individual as equal and implement resources and strategies that can improve African American male student-athlete success.

If an examination of what schools like Hazelview High have done successfully is undertaken, perhaps data will be collected that can be used to send more African-American males to college. Instead of educators and adults attempting to tell young African-American male athletes what they will not be able to do, perhaps adult role models should approach the students from the perspective of what they can do. Yes, it is true, the chances of playing professional football are slim, and very few are privileged to that end. However going to college can be an option for many African-American males if the resources are in place to support them as they matriculate through high school. If football is a key that can open the door to college and keeps students in school, perhaps educators should consider using it as opposed to working against what could be very positive outcomes.

In the example of Hazelview High School's football team, eight out of eight high school seniors received scholarship offers to attend colleges or universities with football programs. The coaches attended Division II and III recruitment fairs across the state in order to give each senior a chance to be seen and recruited. This type of commitment paid off for the student-athletes at Hazelview High School. Is football the answer to African-American male underachievement in the classroom? My research is not arguing that. Did 11 players from a Dade County High School's varsity football team get offered scholarships to attend a college or university? Yes they did -- in fact, eight signed letters of intent to the University of Miami, an FBS institution. While it is evident that not all high school football players will sign Division I football scholarships, many of them can look forward to attending college if they are successfully monitored and supported as

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they complete their high school coursework. There were dozens of Historically Black Colleges/Universities, and Division IAA, II and III schools who were more than open to signing some of the lesser-known athletes at Hazelview High School. But most importantly, it was the commitment of the coaches at Hazelview High, who refused to give up until each of their seniors had a place to go, that really set that program apart from others in the region. There were a few students who, up until their senior year, had not even considered attending college. One in particular was a special education student pursuing a special diploma, who had missed 180 days of school during his first two years of high school. After joining the varsity football team, with the support of his coaches and school administrators, he was able to re-focus his attention on his education and graduate. In the spring of 2009 he signed a letter of intent to attend a top Junior College and participate in their football program as a scholarship athlete. Will he play in the NFL? There's no way of knowing that right now. Will he have a better chance at a successful and productive life? I think we can agree the answer to that question is unequivocal. He now has an opportunity to earn an Associate's degree with the some of the best academic resources and support available. This opportunity will provide him his best chance for success without regard to a professional athletic future. To use the vernacular, "he has a shot," and often times, that is all they need.

Football is the most popular sport in the state of Florida, not just at the college level where we see sold-out stadiums seating over 80,000 fans, but also at the high school level where attendance in the 2006 championships totaled 56,435 (FHSAA 2008). Historically, football has taken more from young African-American males than it has

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given back. However, this is a trend that can change if challenged. This dissertation has

briefly discussed the massive amount of revenues produced by football, very little of

which is filtered back into the communities that have provided the bulk of the labor used

to produce the wealth. This issue is not about player salaries or city funded stadiums. It

is about fairness and the hopes and dreams of children who have given all that they could

to a sport that has given relatively little back in return. This inequitable hegemonic

relationship between the African American male athlete and the sporting industry should

not persist and does not have to. Perhaps future research could examine the micro-level

programs and initiatives, put in place by the NFL or NBA, that attempt to counter the

effects of the inequitable relationships between national leagues and the individual

communities their employees (athletes) come from. While many current or former

professional athletes establish youth programs and non-profits that work in the

communities they grew up in, the majority of the team level community engagement

centers around donations and gifts of time to other agencies like the United Way, The

Boys and Girls Clubs and various charities. These programs should be examined for

utility and efficacy.

Individual high schools are also a place where systemic change can take place.

An interview with a high school head coach from a neighboring County revealed the

heavy animosity many teachers had toward both the football staff and players of that

particular team. One student reported to his coach that a teacher told him it did not

matter if the team won the game, stating it was not as if he was playing for a college. The

coach recalled the disappointment in the student's face. It was especially surprising

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because the football program at that particular school had a losing tradition and at the first sign of success a great deal of resentment was directed towards the players and the coaching staff by the school's faculty, both male and female. Instead of a school that was positioned to nurture all its students, that school, in particular, was unable to do so solely as a result of prejudices and biases by the staff toward the student-athletes.

High school football can be a wonderful opportunity to funnel more students to colleges and universities by exposing them to the option of college at an earlier point in their high school careers and by supporting them academically throughout their high school matriculation. But it is the individual schools and teachers who must play a vital role in identifying and supporting those students who may be in need of the additional oversight and male-to-male mentoring relationships. Perhaps, future research could examine high school climate and culture specifically as it relates to sport participation. This type of research could provide data that could be compared to student academic success and college enrollment and perhaps discern measurable outcomes regarding strategies that could nurture a positive relationship between sport participation and academic success.

Lastly, it should not be surprising that African-American boys, who see other members of their communities finding success on the playing field, would aspire to the same goal. Overtown is one of the most notoriously "bad" neighborhoods in Miami, Florida. However, Chad Johnson, Terry Cousins, and Samari Rolle are just a few examples of NFL players who were raised in that community. Often times these athlete role models are more visible and accessible within the African American communities

than are other African-American professionals, who may have chosen to leave Overtown with the hope of never looking back. This is not an attempt to indict African-Americans who choose to move to more affluent neighborhoods upon attaining a certain level of success. This discussion can however illuminate why so many young African-American males in Florida may feel they have an equal, if not better chance at becoming a professional athlete than they do at becoming an academic professional, especially considering the earlier academic statistics discussed in reference to African American males. Obviously, more visibility of African-American professionals within the community would go a long way in helping young people expand their ideas of success and the paths to achieving it. However, funneling large numbers of African American professionals into those communities alone will not sufficiently address the issue. More research needs to be conducted that examines identity construction and the ways in which African American males identify themselves, as well as the ways those personal ideas of "self" in relation to "other" shape perceptions of achievement and success.

It is also important that we challenge the idea that judges, doctors and lawyers are the only role models worth praising. The most important mentors and role models are the ones that are visible and active in the lives of those they are attempting to guide, be they garbage men, athletes or bus drivers. Perhaps more emphasis should be placed on community-based mentorship. Instead of seeking out the obscure doctor or lawyer to speak once a year to the students on designated days such as the "Great American Teach-In." Perhaps it would be more beneficial to hire a substitute to cover a teacher's class so that he/she could go and speak to another class allowing more students the opportunity to

know a mentor in their community. This type of program would provide a visible, active

mentor that the student would have access to daily. Essentially, it is through the

schooling system in partnership with athletics, clubs and a community based mentoring

program that a bridge can be developed between African-American males, colleges and

universities, and academic and social success.

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