THE LEAGUE OR THE GRIND: A SOCIOLOGICAL

EXAMINATION OF THE POST-COLLIGIATE

EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE

ATHLETES

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

<u>STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM</u>

Sport has become a key social institution in American society (Singer 2002). This institution holds an integral and prominent position as a component of our culture that is connected to the economy, education, family and many other spheres of social life in America. The sports industry has become a multi-billion dollar establishment and is one of the largest industries in the United States (Sage 1998). Accordingly, this institution has generated several areas of interest in the study of society and human behavior. Sociologists and other scholars have noted the many fascinating phenomena that exist in professional and collegiate athletics. A few examples of current topics that have been examined include extensive studies of racism and discrimination in sport, exploitation of athletes, academic difficulties of student-athletes, violence, and media images of athletes. In particular, many scholars have noted that a specific set of issues exists concerning African-American males in the realm of competitive athletics, especially when connected with educational institutions. As a means to upward mobility, educational institutions are thought to prepare students for a future beyond their walls. In terms of African-American student-athletes, there are two opposing perspectives that are employed in regards to

sport's role in the development of the group: 1) athletics may provide educational opportunities to African-Americans from underprivileged backgrounds 2) sports have exploited the majority of African-American athletes (Sellers 2000 from Singer). Although participation in athletics is often considered a golden opportunity for African-Americans, compelling evidence to the contrary has been presented for decades. In fact, serious involvement in athletics has been associated with the hindrance of other areas of development amongst African-Americans, including educational and occupational achievement. Student-athletes, particularly Black student-athletes, have been found to have lower career maturity, an impaired aptitude to devise educational and career plans, and they base their self-esteem and identity on athletics (Kennedy and Dimick 1987; Blann 1985; Baillie and Danish 1992). Career maturity is defined as "the maturity of attitudes and competencies that are critical in realistic career decision-making" (Meeker et al 2000: 126; Crites 1978).

This study seeks to examine the post-collegiate experiences of African-American male athletes from a sociological perspective by emphasizing the societal processes and pressures that make this issue a strictly social phenomenon. This group has been proven to overemphasize sport as a possible career and face an extraordinary set of circumstances concerning the importance of athletics in their lives from early childhood socialization into adulthood. The post-collegiate experience of African-American athletes may mean an end to the athletic role that has encompassed his social identity and expose a lack of career maturity. Oppositely, continuance of athletic competition as a profession may

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reveal that the expectations associated with "going pro" differ from the actualities. Qualitative data will be collected from African-American student-athletes who have moved on to the occupational sector as professional athletes, semi-professional athletes, and those who have left the athletic realm altogether. This data will aid in understanding the social circumstances and process that occur during the inevitable transition out of the role of athlete.

BACKGROUND

Many have cited this generation of African-American males as lost and headed for destruction. Several factors have been linked to this idea, however popular culture and organized sports have been credited as the major contributors to many social problems facing young African-American males. (Gaston 1986). Several decades of research and social commentary have addressed the issue of the impact of popular culture's image of the athlete on the psychic of males. The central theme of the research, and the national debate, has focused on the effect of the images of professional athletes on the aspirations and academic performance of young African American males. Early literature in the sociology of sport suggest that athletic role behavior is reinforced, and socializing agents such as role models and parents influence sports participation (Harris 1994, McPherson 1976). More recent studies show that African American males are socialized into sports deliberately and intensively by many socializing agents including parents and family, peers, and media (Oliver 1980; Harris 1994). Many attribute the elevated sport socialization process of

African-American males as an explanation of their extensive participation in athletics, and identify the consequences as distinct from those who are not socialized toward athletics (Oliver 1980; Harris 1994). Harry Edwards argues that the push toward athletics as seen within Black families is hindering the social and cognitive growth of African-American youth (Lomax 2000). Harris (1994) asserts that due to a lack of black role models outside of sports and entertainment, athletics become an easily distinguishable form of possible achievement for African-American males.   With the mass media constantly deluging society with images which glorify African-American men who are successful by employing avenues connected with sports and pop culture, these two components have placed the African-American male on a "fantasy island lacking the skills necessary to propel himself into the flow of mainstream America" (Gaston 1986:371).

Studies of racism have brought forth a wealth of evidence to support the existence of racial discrimination in athletics. It is impossible to discuss any area of athletics without noting the variable of race. This illustrated in the fact that there continues to be an overrepresentation of Black athletes competing in Division I football and basketball, as well as in the National Football League and the National Basketball Association despite the fact that sports have only been integrated since a little after World War II. Although African-Americans comprise around 12 percent of the population, approximately 77 percent of the N.B.A., 65 percent of the N.F.L., and 15 percent of all Major League players (another 25 are Hispanic, many of Afro-Hispanic descent) are African-Americans (Lapchick,

2000). An illusion that sports are free from racism may be interpreted from these

statistics, however upon closer examination racism is evident. Although there is

an overrepresentation of Black athletes, the decision-making duties found in such

occupations as ownership, leadership, management positions are still largely

occupied by White males. Table I gives the percentages of African-American

administrators and coaches at NCAA Division I universities excluding Historically

Black Universities for 1995-1996 and 2001-2002.

TABLE I
PERCENTAGES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADMINISTRATORS AND
COACHES AT NON-HBCU DIVISION I UNIVERSITES

Position	Percent Black	
	1995-96	2001-02
Director of Athletics	3.7	2.9
Associate Director of Athletics	7.2	6.8
Assistant Director of Athletics	8.0	7.5
Academic Advisor	20.5	24.3
Head Coach Men's Revenue Sports (football and Basketball)	12.1	14.3

Taken from *Race Demographics of NCAA Member Institutions' Athletic Personnel* (NCAA 2003)

As illustrated in table one, African-Americans have not benefited from the same

opportunities in athletics off the field as Whites. This also leaves few role models

for Black student athletes on campus regarding careers related to athletics,

which is many of their first loves. Additionally, in professional athletics, those in

decision-making positions are also largely White males. Black coaches in the

NFL and NBA only make up 17% and 10%, respectively, of the total number of

head coaches in these leagues that are largely composed of African-American

players (Lapchick and Matthews 2001). Additionally, there are only two African-

Americans as CEO in the five major men's professional leagues and 11 African-American general managers in the NFL, NBA, and major league baseball combined (Lapchick and Matthews 2001).

Another area of concern is the historical link between the institutions of sport and education. On August 2, 1952, Harvard and Yale met in the first intercollegiate athletic event, a rowing contest, and began the marriage between the university and athletics (Miller 1987). Today, universities have become dependent upon the commercialization of their sports programs as related to the generation of revenue, recruitment of students, and alumni support. Exceptional athletes are of high monetary value to universities. One of the negative consequences of the interrelationship between the athletic and educational institutions is the exploitation of student-athletes. With the clear emphasis placed upon the physical capabilities of student-athletes, their academic capacities and role as a student are often overlooked. Sack and Stuarowsky (1998) discuss the exploitation of this group stating, "universities are far more concerned with exploiting the athletic talent [of student-athletes] than with nurturing academic potential" (p. 104). Many student athletes, especially African-Americans, do not reap the educational benefits promised by universities illustrated by the poor graduation rates of African-American athletes in revenue generating sports. The need for superior athletes to maintain team performance and produce revenue causes educational institutions to neglect their responsibilities to educate student-athletes.

Additionally, numerous studies have highlighted the lack of academic preparedness of many student-athletes and the differential graduation rates of African-American athletes versus their White counterparts (Lapchick 1996). African-American football players graduate at a rate that is 21 percent lower than that of their white teammates (Siegel 1996). White male basketball players graduate at a rate of 52 percent, while their African-American counterparts graduate at a rate of 38 percent (Lapchick 2000).

An apparent oppositional relationship has formed between athletic and academic achievement, and "over-identification with athletes and the world of physical performances limits the development of black children by discouraging academic achievement in favor of physical-expression" (Hoberman 2000:5). In a study conducted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the American Institute for Research, African-American athletes were found to have higher expectations for a professional sports career (Lapchick 1996). In my own qualitative and quantitative research, African-American student-athletes have extremely high levels of expressed aspirations for careers in professional athletics. This fact carries a direct and indirect consequence on the student-athletes' academic performance. If the student-athlete values his sport as his most viable means of economic success, he will give most of his effort, concentration, and hope to his sport. Quantitative data that I have collected has shown that professional sports aspirations and intensive sports socialization are related to academic difficulties and behavior problems amongst African-American male student athletes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As illustrated, the sports arena has garnered extensive research and illuminated a need for continued examination. As statistics clearly highlight, few collegiate athletes move on to professional sports careers. There is a less than a one percent chance for college athletes to play professional sports, and the average career lasts only three and a half years (Coackley 1998). More specifically, of black athletes in football, basketball or baseball there is only a 1.6 percent chance that they will ever sign a professional sports contract (Edwards 1988). However, a vast majority of African-American student athletes express clear expectations to play professional sports. Arthur Ashe and Harry Edwards maintain that "unrealistic athletic aspirations usually hurt the young African-American male's future chances of success" (Anderson 1990). Additionally, a significant number African-American professional athletes are bankrupt within five years of their retirement from professional sports (Lide 1994). Edwards (1998) contends that over sixty percent of Black athletes who do play professionally will leave the sport financially destitute or in debt and will not have the skill to make their way in the immensely competitive, high-tech American society. Certainly, the over emphasis on professional sports careers, together with the racism, exploitation, and intensive socialization into athletics and the athletic identity will have consequences on the post collegiate experiences of African-American student athletes. A need for the investigation of the post college experience of former student-athletes is clearly substantiated when

reviewing the current literature. Many scholars have suggested that the over emphasis on sports participation has drained Black talent away from other areas and caused many Black males to overlook other more viable means of economic success (Edwards 2000). These hypothesized suggestions may lead to a problematical and confusing road toward economic viability, occupational satisfaction, identity reformation, and role transformation of Black male athletes after college. Sport psychologists have noted the psychological effects and the need for counseling this group throughout their transition out of the role of student-athlete (Stankovich, Meeker and Henderson 2001; Pearson and Petitpas 1990, Parker 1994; Baille and Danish 1992). By focusing on the social forces that interact during this process, this study represents an apparent gap in the sociological literature. Sociological theories concerning socialization and identity development, and the social reproduction theory will guide the development of this study. A thorough review of literature concerning socialization, exploitation and racism in athletics, professional sports aspirations, the athletic identity, and the career maturation and the retirement process of athletes is presented in order to better understand the significance of this study. Quantitative data that I previously collected and analyzed is presented to facilitate a clearer insight into the motivation for conducting such a study. Finally, qualitative data will be collected and analyzed in order to impart a thorough understanding of the various processes interacting throughout this transition. In addition to providing rich narratives concerning the socialization, athletic identity, collegiate experience, professional sports aspirations and the transition out of sports, the data will also

answer two major research questions. Each question is multifaceted and will b3

examined in that manner. The research questions are as follows: 1) are African-

American male student-athletes subjected to and are they aware of the intense

socialization into athletics by family, community, and the media? 2) Is the career

maturity and transition out of sports impeded by professional sports aspirations

and attachment to the athletic identity?

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework in this study will be guided by sociological theories concerning socialization and identity development, and the social reproduction theory will guide the development of this study. By utilizing both identity formation and the social reproduction theory, the micro and macro levels of sociological analysis. This chapter includes a thorough review of these theoretical approaches.

SOCIALIZATION

The socialization process of African-American males has been shown to be intentionally and intensively geared toward athletics and other forms of entertainment. Additionally, it is during the socialization process that this group develops an athletic identity that follows them throughout adulthood. Therefore, it is necessary to gain a theoretical understanding of the socialization process. This process integrates new members into society and understanding the process can aid in explaining several areas of social life. Thus the study of the socialization process is highly popular in interests areas such as gender studies, race and ethnicity, and in this instance the sociology of sport.

The concept of socialization refers to preparing children to perform adult roles and accepting the responsibilities of society. It is the "process in which we learn and internalize the attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms of our culture and

develop a sense of self," and involves "teaching the individual to behave in a manner that is consistent with social expectations and thus facilitates social continuity and predictability" (Thompson and Hickey 1999:98, Snyder and Spreitzer 1978:55). Is also defined as "a complex developmental learning process that teaches the knowledge, values and norms essential to participation in social life" (McPherson et al 1989:347). This process begins at birth and continues throughout our lifetime, providing an essential connection between the individual and society. Through the socialization process, we learn the social roles that we are to play, such as gender roles, racial roles, and athletic roles.

Socialization is carried out by several agents or agencies. Agents of socialization can be defined as "those groups and institutions that both informally and formally take on the task of socialization" (Thompson and Hickey 1999:105). Some examples of socializing agents are families, schools, peers, the media, and the community, all of which serve their own distinct functions in the socialization process (Berns 1997).

A few of the many sociological theories that attempt to explain the socialization process include the social imitation theory, the social learning theory, and the theoretical framework developed by the symbolic interaction tradition. The social imitation developed out of the notion of vicarious learning. The theory maintains that individuals are passive in the socialization process and learn by observing and modeling the behaviors, and perceived values, beliefs, and norms of the socializing agents (McPherson et al, 1989). Models can be parents, siblings, peers, teachers, coaches, television personalities, and/or

fictional characters (McPherson et al, 1989). One is able to learn social behavior, attitudes, and emotions vicariously by observing others perform the behavior and experience its consequences. This idea is useful in this study where student-athletes may observe the overrepresentation of African-American athletes in sports and vicariously learn that sports produces positive consequences, such as a lucrative professional career.

The social learning theory emphasizes the role of others as agents of reinforcement, it focuses on modeling and imitation, and it involves cognitive processes (Howard and Hollander 1997). This theory was derived from Bandura's ideology in that "social learning occurs primarily as a function of observing the behavior of others without the observer immediately imitating the observed responses" (Castine and Roberts 1974:61). McPherson (1976) uses the social learning theory to develop a hypothesis concerning the acquisition of athletic roles in minority group socialization. Castine and Roberts (1974) summarized the McPherson's ideas

> ...there are three elements of the socialization process that converge to socialize minority groups... These elements are as follows: First personal attributes...Second, socializing agents such as significant others, reference groups (includes parents, relations, siblings, peers, teachers, non-family adults), and the mass media; and third, the socializing environment...McPherson states that minority groups do have a differential socialization process and that this process does have a differential pattern and outcome upon the socializee. (P. 61)

THE SELF AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Another important outcome of the socialization process is the development of a self and a social identity. The self and identity have been significant areas of concern for social psychologists for some time and symbolic interactionist have contributed greatly to the

understanding of the self and identity formation. The development of a

self is viewed by sociologist a social process emerging through social

experience and sociologists are concerned with the social contexts in

which the self is developed (Gecas and Burke 1995). Mead (1934)

argued that an individual's conception of self is inseparable from

society and social interaction. Cooley (1902) and other early

interactionist view the self as social in nature and "anchored in

language, communication, and social interaction" (Gecas and Burke

1995: 41).

The self is defined as "a person's conscious recognition that he or she is a

distinct individual who is part of a larger society" (Thompson and Hickey 1999:

102). The self is based in "roles, relationships, and statuses that develop as the

self reflects upon itself as an object" (Adler and Adler 1989: 299). The process of

reflexivity is at the core of the self and human being's ability to think of

themselves as objects is said to distinguish humans from animals (Gecas and

Burke 1995; Mead 1934). A product of this reflexive activity is the development

of a self-concept, which refers to the totality of one's feelings and thoughts about

themselves as an object (Gecas and Burke 1995). Self-concept is composed of

identities, attitudes, beliefs, motives and experiences an is the concept one has

of oneself as a "physical, social, spiritual, or moral being" (Gecas and Burke

1995; Gecas 1982:3). Cooley (1902) refers to the process of developing a sense

of self in the looking-glass self theory in which one's self concept is based on the

how we imagine others to see us and what we imagine their judgments of that

appearance to be. Mead (1934) discusses our development of a self-concept as taking place in a three-stage process of role taking.

Identities make up much of the content of the self-concept. One's identity is composed of a self-identity (how one views oneself) and a social identity (how the self is viewed by others). Identity "refers to who or what one is, to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others" which includes "self characterizations individuals make in terms of …various roles, memberships, and categories" (Gecas and Burke 1995: 42). Identity is referred to as the "most public aspect of self" (Gecas and Burke 1995: 42). The self is composed of a variety of identities, and social identities locate one in social space; and is lodged in roles, relationships, and statuses that arise out of self-reflection (Stone 1962). The structural characteristics of "individuals' self-conceptions, behavior, and their social relations with others…have been located in the roles that constitute the self (Adler and Adler 1987). Styker's (1980) identity theory gives attention to social structure and the connection between self, society, and role performance. The self is considered as a hierarchical ordering of identities distinguished by salience and commitment (Stryker 1980). Identity salience has consequences for behavior, in that the likelihood that a particular identity will be selected as the foundation for role performance indicates that particular identity's position in the salience hierarchy (Serpe 1987). Identity salience can be understood as "the relative importance or centrality of a given role for defining one's core identity (Adler and Adler 1987). Stryker suggests that there is a correlation between role-identity and role commitment. Identity hierarchies influence the "resistance of

individuals to change in the face of changing circumstances" (Gecas and Burke 1995:45). In the case of student-athletes, athletic identity has been found to be extremely salient which makes it difficult for athletes to transition out of that role (Peptitas 1978). Additionally, identity salience influences behavioral choices that are made in the face of other available choices in any situation (Gecas and Burke 1995). Student-athletes often choose to emphasize athletic activates over academic activities and choose to pursue athletic careers even when they are not likely to come to fruition. These behavioral choices may also be viewed as a result of the saliency of the athletic identity.

The social imitation theory and the social learning theory offer a basis for understanding the socialization process in which socializing agents influence many African-American boys to overemphasize athletics. As the self emerges during the socialization process, athletes, particularly African-American male athletes develop self-concepts and identities that are based on the athletic role. Identity theory aids in understanding the salience of that role and the manner in which salience affects behavioral choices.

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY

Social reproduction theory is based on the concept that social institutions, such as the institution of education, work to reproduce dominant ideology and its structures of knowledge (Giroux 1983). Proponents of the Social Reproduction Theory argues that the function of schools is to recreate the conditions needed to reproduce the social division of labor and institutions of education are viewed as the agencies of social and cultural reproduction (Giroux 1983). According to

Giroux (1983), schools impart differing classes and social groups with the skills and knowledge necessary to occupy roles existing in the labor force, which are stratified by the variables of class, race, and gender. Pierre Bourdieu, examined reproduction from a cultural standpoint. He discussed the manner in which cultural capital leads to reproduction, which is the basis of his cultural reproduction theory (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Cultural capital refers to the background, skills, and knowledge that are passed down throughout the socialization process from generation to generation. Schools and educational attainment favor the class interests of dominant class by rewarding the cultural capital associated with the dominant class (McLeod 1995). Specifically, "children who read books, visit museums, attend concerts, and go to the theater and cinema acquire a familiarity with the dominant culture that the educational system implicitly requires of its students for academic attainment" (McLeod 1995: 13-14). In my quantitative research, African-American athletes where found to visit museums, read non-athletic related books, or go to the theater at a significantly lower rate than their White teammates. Demonstrating that African-American athletes are less prepared on a cultural level for educational success than other athletes, not to mention the disparities that may exists between African-American male athletes and White males in general.

To better understand social reproduction, other socializing agents must be considered such as the socializing institution of sport (McLeod 1995; Singer 2002). As previously stated the institutions of sport and education have been wedded in American society, creating a situation in which the structural

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components (the NCAA, athletic departments, economy) and individual actors (coaches, teammates, family) work together to reproduce the status quo (Singer 2002). Both education and sports have been and continue to be discriminatory toward African-Americans. By aiding in, catering to, and nurturing the athletic role to the detriment of academic achievement, educational institution reproduce the division of labor. African-Americans concentrating on developing the skills to continue be workers (players) and Whites developing the skills to be managers and owners (coaches, athletic directors, team owners and managers etc.) Harry Edwards refers a dilemma in athletics that he describes as the Triple Tragedy:

> …which is the single-minded pursuit of sports fame and fortune. One, the tragedy of thousands upon thousands of black youths in the obsessive pursuit of sports goals that the overwhelming majority of them will never attain. Two, the tragedy of the personal and cultural underdevelopment that afflicts so many successful and unsuccessful black sports aspirants. Three, the tragedy of cultural and institutional underdevelopment throughout black society as a consequence of the drain in talent potential toward sports and away from other vital areas of occupational and career emphasis such as medicine, law, economics, politics, education, and technical fields. (Harrison 2000:36)

Hall (1993) suggests that successful African-American males have consistently been portrayed as "clowns, buffoons, and gladiators" throughout history. Harrison (2000) argues that African-American males will continue to be pushed toward becoming entertainers, criminals, and athletes by mainstream institutions, including the educational institution. Universities do little to endorse an academic lifestyle amongst student-athletes (Gerdy 1994). A clear emphasis on the athletic abilities of student-athletes at universities and high schools reproduce inequality by producing student-athletes, who are not prepared academically or culturally for the transition into the occupational sector. This is especially true of African-American male athletes who have been shown to have

higher expectations for a "going pro" and have been intensively socialized toward

sports and embracing the athletic identity.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

SOCIALIZATION

African-Americans have been viewed as undergoing a socialization

process that differs from that of white families. In "Black Child Socialization," the

authors discuss a conceptual framework for studying that socialization process.

Wade A. Boykin and Forrest Toms (1985) believe that "it would be a mistake to

conclude that black family socialization can be fully understood simply in terms of

its approximation to mainstream Euro-American ideas" (p.36). Thus, a logical

framework for studying socialization in black families must consider and

characterize the coping strategies as well as the deeply rooted cultural base of

the African-American family (Boykin and Toms 1985). The authors believe

African-American children are socialized through a process in which they acquire

modes, sequences, and styles of behavior through their daily relations with their

parents or other family members. In conclusion, no singular socialization

pathway was found. However, these concerns were thought to best frame a

deliberation of the African-American family socialization process:

> The particular socialization experiences in any one Black family would be
> represented by (1) the extent to which particular domains in which
> mainstream goals and values are promoted o embraced; (2) the particular
> domains in which these goals and values have been promoted or adopted;
> (3) the extent to which Black cultural socialization goals have been overtly
> articulated and promoted; (4) the orientation pattern and the display of
> responses utilized to cope with oppresses minority status; and (5) the extent
> of Black cultural conditioning of children. (P. 47)

In "Family, Socialization Environment, and Identity Development in Black Americans (1988)," the authors examined the families and environments of African-American children as agents of socialization. Self-esteem and identity were examined as indicators to the overall well being of African-Americans. These two indicators were found to be formed through the socialization process. The Black family is seen to posses a heightened significance as a socializing agent because it is where an individual is first introduced to the concepts of racism and discrimination (Jackson et al 1988). The authors conclude that the family relationships and socialization patterns of the African-American family nurture both group and personal identity.

Zena Smith Blau's (1981) extensive study on Black and white children attempts to identify "those aspects of family structure and socialization processes that make for class and color differences in the development of intellectual competence and scholastic aptitude in childhood" (p. 11). Blau interviewed 579 Black mothers and 523 white mothers in three Chicago metropolitan neighborhoods. The achievement test and IQ scores of the fifth and sixth grade children whose mothers were interviewed served as the dependent variables in the study. Several sets of variables were examined in order to determine the origin of the differences in test scores of the Black and white children. For example, religion, religiosity and denomination were as a set of variables considered, and socioeconomic status was also considered.

Much attention was given to the maternal socialization process. The effects of this process on the children's IQ and achievement test scores were compared

between Black and white children. Blau describes three dimensions of

socialization. The first dimension is maternal valuation of education, which stems

from two primary components, aspirations and expectations. The next dimension

of socialization, investment in child, is composed of four areas of behavior, which

are "early interaction with child, exposure to child-rearing experts, early mastery,

and cultural enrichment" (Blau 1981:93). The third dimension of socialization is

the utilization and belief in aversive control. Though multivariate statistics, Blau

found that white mothers who are highly invested in their children usually do not

use aversive discipline.   Conversely, Black mothers use more aversive discipline

to control their children, no matter how high their investment or ambition level.

The study gathered that the optimal achievement of the child was reached

through high investment and low use of aversive discipline, and "these

differences in the socialization strategies of black and white mothers are a

significant source of difference in the scholastic ability of their children" (Blau

1981:118). When examining the sources of variation, interaction between race,

sex, and IQ scores, as well as interactions between race, social structure

socialization variables, and IQ scores appeared to be the most significant

sources of the differences in black and white children's test scores. Each

socialization dimension is independently predicted by the sex of the child for both

races. Ultimately, the study found that "mother's religious and denominational

affiliation also influences strategies of socializing daughters and sons and appear

to be a source of observed difference in test scores of boys and girls" (p. 162).

There exist variations in the direction and extent of sex bias of the mother's

valuation of education between religious groups and within race. In explanation

of why blacks favor the value of female education over males, Blau (1981)

suggests

> That three social factors operate to promote a bias favoring males: (1) a
> historical patriarchal tradition, (2) prevalence of working-class origins, and (3)
> minority group status.. The historical experience of black has been quite
> different from that of any group of whites…unlike whites, American blacks
> have no patriarchal tradition owing to the fact that black males were even
> more assiduously oppressed than females…Consequently, a bias favoring
> more education for females became established in the Negro community
> which…still operates to discourage black males from the educational route
> (Pp. 215-217).

This study shows that African-American males are socialized

toward education in a manner that is not only different than that white males, but

it also differs from black females. African-American males seem to be socialized

toward education less than any other group.

SPORTS SOCIALIZATION

In their book Social Aspects of Sport, Eldon E. Snyder and Elmer

Spreitzer (1978) discuss the socialization into sports. The authors use the term

"natural athlete" to illustrate the idea of sport socialization, "The notion of natural

athlete no doubt applies primarily to people who are boar with physical attributes

such as coordination...however, the refinement of these attributes...as well as the

physiological aspects of play, sport, and athletics have to be acquired" (Synder

and Spreitzer 1978:55). Sport socialization is examined from two perspectives,

the socialization into sports and the socialization through sports. The

socialization into sports is a process associated with agents or agencies that are

influential in attracting children to sports and includes the learning of social,

psychological, and physical skills needed in athletic involvement (Snyder and

Spreitzer 1978). Some of the sports socializing agents cited by the authors are

family, peers, community agents, schools and the mass media. Through the

analysis of several research studies, the authors found that children learn at an

early age the importance of sport in society by the media and parents, and the

consciousness of children, especially males, is progressively molded by the

importance of sport.

Sport socialization was also discussed in <u>The Social Significance of Sport</u>

(1980). The authors cite family as the earliest and most influential socializing

agents into sport participation. Parents, as well as siblings can facilitate the

socialization into sports, as illustrated in McPherson, Curtis and Loy's (1980)

findings:

> The importance of early symbols, beliefs, and practices in the family setting
> Is illustrated by the frequent finding that those who later achieve at the
> highest levels in sport often begin to participate as early as 5 or 6 years of
> age...Moreover, children are more likely to consume and participate if
> parents presently participate in sport or if they did so in the past; if parents
> attend sport events or regularly watch sports on television; if parents have
> expectations or aspirations for their children to achieve in sport; if parents
> actively encourage participation; and if sport is a common topic of
> conversation in the home. (Pp. 41-42)

The authors suggest physical scientist have the ability to describe physical

differences between athletes and nonathletes, but social scientist must answer

why some individuals are involved in particular athletic roles and why some

athletes ascend to elite levels of performance.

Several concepts have been explored when trying to account for the

overwhelming success and participation of African-Americans in athletics. It has

been stated that African-American males are subjected to early socialization,

which encourages them to become athletes, and take on the "dumb jock" image (Winbush 1989). Gary A. Sailes (1991) explores several of the theories that discuss African-American athletic superiority in certain sports in order to find the best manner in which to account for the overrepresentation of African-Americans in the sports world. The first idea is that of a superior body build of African-Americans. One explanation can be named "The Survival of the Fittest Theory." This option is that Africans who survived the treacherous trip to the Americans were the healthiest and the fittest and today's athletes are descendants of these individuals. A second explanation to the proposed physical superiority of African-Americans is that selective breeding of larger, stronger slaves produced the athletic superiority of the descendants of these slaves. Sailes also mentions research that highlights the anatomical differences between Black and whites, which try to explain the participation differences in certain sports by the races. The author contends that the best and most credible explanations of athletic success and overrepresentation of Blacks in certain sports stem from sociological research. Socialization patterns such as a lack of African-American role models, absent facilities, and institutionalized racism, which keeps Black athletes out of some sports, forces them to be overrepresented in other sports (Sailes 1991). In conclusion Sailes (1991) states that there "appears to be extensive evidence to support the contention that variables impacting most on Black athletes current success in basketball, football, baseball, boxing, and track and field emanate from the social and psychological domain" (p. 486).

The importance of role modeling in the socialization of African-American athletes was examined by Roberts and Castine (1974). The study investigated the notion that black athletes are concentrated in certain sports and positions due to a socialization process that includes role modeling of previous successful Black athletes. The data consisted of 249 Black college athletes. The study found that Black athletes indeed have role models who may have been a part of the socialization process that promoted sport socialization. Seventy-one percent of the athletes surveyed admitted to having a role model before entering high school, and out that 71 percent, 95 percent identified that role model as a Black sportsman. None admitted to having a white sportsman as an idol. Fifty-seven percent of those with a Black sportsman idol stated that their idol played their same sport and same position (Castine and Roberts 1974).

The mass media play a significant role in the sport socialization of black children (Coakley 1998; Sailes 1984). The media often sensationalizes "the achievement of elite athletes" and their lives are "romanticized to the point of fantasy" (Sailes 1998: 29). Harry Edwards maintains that the mass media limits "African-American children's access to images of African-American adults working in many high prestige, non-athletic or non-entertainment related occupational fields" (Anderson 1990: 508). Unlike White children, African American children see very few lawyers, doctors, teachers, or scientists in the media and in life. This causes the children to cling to athletes as their role models since that is the successful image that they are presented with regularly (Edwards 1983). In a content analysis of advertisements, Dufur (1998) examined

the overrepresentation of black athletes and the stereotypical images that are presented in magazine advertisements. The study found many stereotypical images of African-American athletes. Fifty-seven percent of black athletes were portrayed as succeeding due to physical abilities such as speed, strength, or size, while only four percent of whites were portrayed in this manner. Oppositely, white athletes success was attributed to character related traits such as leadership, intelligence, or work ethic. Additionally, thirty-six percent of black were portrayed as violent or aggressive. Not only are black children bombarded with athletes as role models of success, but these athletes are often presented in a negative and stereotypical manner.

Role modeling and identification are seen as important to the socialization of children. In a study of urban minority students, researchers found that athletes was the most frequent choice of role model amongst the 1300 African-American students involved in the study (Drummond et al 1999). The study also found that boys were more likely to choose athletes as their role models. A limited number of students selected doctors or lawyers as their role models. Assibey-Mensah (1997) examines role modeling among African-American male youth and its effect on their personal development. The author used a national survey consisting of 4,500 Black males ages 10-18. The most compelling finding was that almost all respondents chose a visible and popular role model. The vast majority of the respondents in all age groups identified athletes or sports figures as their role model. Johnson (1991) found that amongst African-American young men, professional athletes were the most likely of role models. Additionally,

African-American males emulate these role models and seek careers in professional sports (Anderson 1990) This role modeling has been associated with the disproportionate overrepresentation of African-American athletes in football, basketball, and baseball (Sailes 1998, Edwards 1973). Edwards (1988) argues that one of the factors leading to the "single-minded pursuit of sports fame and fortune is… the lack of comparably visible, high-prestige black role models beyond the sports arena" (p. 9).

Othello Harris' (1994) research gives pertinent insight to the socialization into sport amongst African-Americans. The study seeks to uncover whether African-American student-athletes "receive encouragement to participate in sports from the black community or from other socializing agents" (Harris 1994:40). Harris (1994) asserts that due to a lack of black role models outside of sports and entertainment, athletics become an easily distinguishable form of possible achievement for African-American males. While citing other researchers in this area, Harris contends that this concept leads to differing consequences between Blacks and other groups.

Harris' data were collected from 23 summer league basketball teams, and consisted of 175 African-American and white male student-athletes. The researcher wanted to measure perceived social support for playing basketball, where that support comes from, and how it affects the desire to play professional basketball. The results of the study suggests that African-American males receive considerably more support to play basketball, and that encouragement usually comes from a nonparent significant other such as a friend, teacher, or

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coach. Also, among African-Americans only, social support is a good predictor of aspirations of a future professional career.

EXPLOITATION AND RACISM IN SPORTS

Racism and exploitation exist in several areas of college and professional sports. Examples are found in the lack of effort given to improve on the educational success of student-athletes, stacking black athletes at skilled positions as opposed to thinking positions, the absence of African-Americans in decision making and leadership positions at universities and in professional leagues, labor exploitation and even in the salaries and endorsement opportunities of professional athletes. Student-athletes of color are said to face specific difficulties such as social and academic integration and racism (Person and Lenoir 1997; Person 2001).

Universities are highly criticized for exploiting student-athletes. The exploitation of athletes has been found to extend beyond the "sidelines and into the classroom" (Maloney and McCormick 1993: 555). Adler and Adler (1987) express this idea stating:

> Reports by journalist, former athletes, and social scientists note the commercialization of big-time college athletics, where the money and prestige available to universities have turned their athletic programs into business enterprises that emphasize winning at all costs, often neglecting the educational goals of their institutions. The equality of the exchange between college athletes and their educational institutions has therefore been sharply questioned, with many critics leveling charges that universities have exploited their athletes by making excessive demands of them and failing to fulfill their educational promises to them (p.443).

Edwards (1983) argues that when student-athletes attend their respective universities they agree to perform athletically in exchange for an education. While student-athletes do their parts by bringing notoriety and profits to the universities,

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all to often they do not see the benefits of their labor. This is illustrated in the poor graduation rates of African-American student-athletes and the disparity that exists between White and Black student-athletes' academic success. The already low rates of graduation among black student-athletes have even been detected as declining (Weiberg 1995). Ironically, some of the most successful athletic programs have the lowest levels of academic success among African-American student-athletes. For example, at seven of the sixteen universities in the "Sweet Sixteen" of the 2003 NCAA basketball tournament, less than 30 percent of the all African- American players graduated and at two of the universities there were no African-American graduates (Litsky 2003). According to Lapchick, 58 colleges that compete in Division I basketball have not graduated an African-American player in the last six years (Litsky 2003). Additionally, twenty of the top twenty-five top basketball schools graduated less than one-half of their African-American student-athletes ("Vital Signs" 1996). Factually speaking, the majority of African-American student-athletes never graduate from the universities that they represent on the playing field, and of those who graduate, a large proportion graduate in areas that are less marketable for Blacks in majors "riddled with 'keep 'em eligible' less competitive 'jock courses' of dubious educational value and occupational relevance" (Edwards 1988: 138). In a national study, student-athletes felt that athletic departments were more concerned with maintaining their eligibility than promoting the pursuit of a meaningful education (Sailes 1998) The educational attainment of student-athletes is frequently hindered by athletic training and travel; and student athletes

often find it difficult to balance athletics, academics, and social roles. African-American males are seen as particularly vulnerable to the exploitation of universities in which "the false promise of sports continues as colleges reap the rewards" (Farell 1990:28). Since African-American student-athletes often hold high expectations for professional sports careers, it is easier for colleges to get the most out of the athletes physically, leading to a better-conditioned and more prepared team. This, undoubtedly, leads to winning and greater rewards for the university, however, it leads to a lower quality of education and a lower probability of earning a degree for the African-American student-athletes.

The consequences of this "system of athletic exploitation" in revenue producing sports is seen as more severe for black student-athletes due to an underlying pattern of racism in college sports and in society as a whole. Eitzen (2000) presented several problems related to the exploitation of African-American student-athletes which are as follows: lack of preparation for college courses, isolation, a lack of African-Americans in leadership positions in athletic departments, racists coaches and racists stereotypes that are held by professors and members of athletic departments. Educational stereotypes of Black athletes continue to persist, with some white faculty members and students holding lowered expectations concerning the academic potential of African-American student-athletes (Sailes 1998). Low faculty expectations and social alienation contributes to low academic achievement of student-athletes, especially American-American male student-athletes. Adler and Adler (1991) found many athletes in their study that felt antagonism from their professors. Also, African-

American basketball and football players have been found to express feelings of isolation form other students and racial discrimination (AIR 1989). Eitzen (2000) attributes these feelings of isolation to the separate housing and dining facilities, a lack of involvement on campus (social, organizational, and academic), and a lack of black coaches and administrators as role models. Black coaches and administrators at predominantly white universities are necessary due to their unique ability to understand the distinctive experiences of Black student-athletes (Sellers 2000). The noted lack of black coaches, administrators, managers and owners illustrates that the NCAA and its member institutions, as well as professional teams "exploit the talent of Black athletes and deny these same athletes access to a quality education" as well as limiting "employment opportunities of Black athletes after their career ends" (Meggysey 2000: 27). John Thompson, the former Georgetown University head coach stated, "People are able to participate in the cotton field, but not be the foreman or boss… Several kids can play at the universities but not get a job [there]" (Ley, 1998). Blacks do not seem to have the equal opportunities in sports organizations on the amateur or professional levels. In fact, the "scarcity of Blacks is key functionary positions in professional sport" indicates that "discriminatory barriers toward blacks have not been entirely abolished" (Evans 1997: 43).

Further, on the professional level, discrimination exists in the areas of player compensation, fan (customer) preference, and positional segregation (Kahn 1992, 1991). Kuhn (1991) examined salary differences of Black and White professional football players, stating that there are three possible reasons for

salary differences which are as follows: owner prejudice, limited opportunities of

nonwhites outside of football, and customers' preference for player of their own

race. White players were found to make $12, 787 more on average than Black

players, a 4.1% difference. Whites were also found to be disproportionately

represented at quarterback, offensive line, punter, and kicker. An implication of

this segregation is that it can effect salary differentials by race, which was

supported by the data in this study. Additionally fan preference for players their

own race, or fan prejudice, was found to affect player salaries. Racial

discrimination was found to be even greater in basketball. In basketball:

> There is consistent evidence of salary discrimination as well as customer prejudice, and it
> is likely that the two are linked: because of fans' preference for white players, the
> percentage of white players on a team positively affects the team's ticket sales, and white
> players may be consequently be paid more than black players with the same record of
> performance (Kahn 1991: 414).

LABOR EXPLOITATION

Billy Hawkins (1999) concluded that African-American student-athletes are

victims of labor exploitation due to the fact that the universities are the only areas

to "contract their talents" (p. 7). Many agree that there is a definite imbalance

between the labor output and the wages (scholarships); and even the value of

the education that the athletes receive. Student-athletes have extremely dense

schedule, which include missing class in order to travel, thus detracting from the

quality of education that they are offered in turn for the profits that they are

generating. Athletes have less time available for the educational process that

"extends beyond going to class everyday to socializing with research and study

groups, participating with student organizations, and attending campus activities

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apart from athletics" (Hawkins 1999:8). Additionally, student-athletes were found to have decreased levels of motivation to study due to exhaustion from sports participation and have diminished abilities to benefit from institutional assistance such as tutorial programs due to psychological and physical fatigue (Person et al 2001; Daniels 1987).

National Collegiate Athletic Association. One of the central issues concerning African-American athletes is navigating through an exploitive "amateur" system governed by The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (Meggysey 2000). The NCAA has the power to make rules and control the finance of universities and their student-athletes. The NCAA was founded in 1905 and can be described as a private, voluntary association with around 1,000 colleges and universities that participate in athletic competition (NCAA 1995). It was established in order to regulate competition and is based on the ideal that college sports should be amateur (Netzley 1998). Membership can be broken down into three divisions with Division I being the largest, most competitive tier and possessing the big time athletic programs. The NCAA is responsible for sponsoring national championships, rule making, and rule enforcement for its member universities. The large organization has its hand in all areas of intercollegiate athletics such as competition, recruitment, and eligibility which are all outline by guidelines put forth in the constitution and bylaws of the NCAA manual (Netzley 1998). The member institutions have agreed to be bound by the rules and regulations on the NCAA. The problem lies in the NCAA's constant blocking of athletes, who are primarily responsible for generating the revenue,

from sharing in the vast amount of monetary gain through there development and enforcement of amateurism rules.

The NCAA pushes its frame of amateurism and states that "student-athletes should be protected from exploitation by professional and commercial enterprises" (NCAA 1995: 70-71). Amateurism was once defined by whether or not the athletes received pay. After the Amateur Sports Act amateur athletes were outlined as any athletes that meet the eligibility requirements of governing organizations, the NCAA in this instance (NCAA 1994). Court cases attacking the NCAA's framework of amateurism have not been successful. For example the University of Okalahoma lost in a court case against the NCAA, with the court stating that student-athletes should not be paid in order to protect the character and quality of intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA maintains that student-athletes should be considered amateur athletes driven by education and the physical, mental and social benefits that are derived from being student-athletes (Netzley 1998). Additionally, the NCAA contends that universities' educational mission is maintained in their athletic programs. A vocabulary of motives pushing the importance of education as a separating factor between collegiate athletics and professional athletics is illustrated in the following declaration:

> The competitive athletic programs of member institutions are designed to be a vital component of the educational system. A basic purpose of this Association is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and athlete as an integral part of the student-body and, by doing, retain a clear line demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports (NCAA 1994: art 1.3.1).

The fact is that many student athletes do not reap the educational benefits promised by universities is illustrated by the poor graduation rates, 34% for

basketball players and 48% for football players (CAC 2002). The need for superior athletes to maintain team performance and produce revenue causes educational institutions to neglect their responsibilities to educate student-athletes. Stated matter of factly, the NCAA and its member institutions garner considerable profits without sharing the money with student-athletes. The NCAA claims to protect athletes from commercial exploitation. However, athletes wear logos of corporate sponsors at particular NCAA competitions. It appears that commercial exploitation is excused when the NCAA garners revenue and restricts student-athletes under the ideology of amateurism (Netzley 1998). There is a clear contradiction between the NCAA's stated mission of athletics as education and the reality of big time sports as big business.

Since the inception of the NCAA, college sports have grown into a multi-million dollar entertainment industry and the NCAA and athletic programs have indeed garnered massive financial gains (Netzley 1998). Collegiate athletics have become indispensable to college campuses by playing a key role in fund rising, presidential entertaining, and recruitment of students. Many scholars, faculty, coaches, and athletes have noted the disparities between the stated purpose of NCAA and the direction that big time college athletics have taken. The profits generated through athletics are substantial. For example, sixty-seven percent of Division I football programs have profited, on average, 3.9 million dollars and two-thirds of Division I basketball programs profited and average amount of 1.6 million dollars (Netzley 1998). Additionally, the NCAA, individual universities, and conferences negotiate television contracts, which also brings in

considerable profits. Post-season tournament and bowl games also offer huge

profits. For example NCAA bowl game sponsors may distribute close to 70

million dollars per year to participating schools, such as Florida and Nebraska

who each received $12 million for their participation in the 1996 Fiesta Bowl

(Netzley 1998). Another area of profit is licensing agreements that sell jerseys,

hats, etc. Schools profit million of dollars from promotional licensing. The jerseys

often have the playing number of one or more of the teams star athletes,

however the athletes are not entitled to share in any of the profits garnered

through his/her efforts on the field. Under NCAA rules athletes are only entitled to

tuition, fees, room and board, and books while they are primarily responsible for

generating huge profits for their universities and the NCAA. To illustrate how little

trickles down to the student-athletes, at the University of Kentucky, a basketball

scholarship is worth $11,434 while the coach's salary is 1.95 million dollars and

the program profits around $12 million (Fish 1997). Another example is at the

University of Florida where a football scholarship is worth $7,070 per year and

the coach's salary is close to $100,000 per year and the football program makes

$27.9 million. The discrepancies between the universities profits and the athletes

compensation is glaring and is all based on the NCAA's claim of amateurism.

Additionally, the power elite of NCAA profits directly from the revenue generated

by student-athletes. This illustrated in the fact that the president, senior vice

presidents, and chief financial officer all have salaries of close to $300, 000 per

year, with additional benefits of over $90,000 per year (CAC 2002).

John Stieber (1991) contends that the behavior of the NCAA is discriminatory, unethical, and perhaps even illegal. The NCAA forces the universities under its membership to discriminate against student athletes. One of the areas that the author highlights is the employment rule. Student-athletes on athletic scholarships are only allowed to make up to two thousand dollars per academic year. Athletes are restricted from using their athletic ability for pay, they are not allowed to play for summer league teams, compete overseas, give private lessons, or hold any other job related to their athletic skills for pay. In contrast, students who receive academic scholarships can tutor, students receiving music scholarships can give lessons or private concerts, and art students receiving art scholarships can sell their art or give lessons and receive generous compensation to do so. Student-athletes are the only scholarship group who are prevented from receiving wages for work related to their abilities, and the only group prevented from receiving subsidies other than their scholarships.

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS ASPIRATIONS

The overemphasis of professional athletes and professional sports in American culture has seemed to draw many American youth into unrealistic expectations for professional sports careers (Coakley 1998; Leonard 1998; Edwards 2000; and Sailes 1984). The media and other socializing agents depict sports as "a broadly accessible route to black social and economic mobility" (Edwards 2000). Coaches and other school officials often encourage young athletes and their families to believe that there is a high degree of likelihood that

they will have a professional sports career (Grooper 1991). The literature provides a strong foundation demonstrating the disproportionate numbers of African-American male athletes whose career plans include professional athletics. Boone and Walker (1987) found that about 70 percent of inner city youth identify professional sports as their first choice for a future career. A general perception that few opportunities exist through conventional means contributes to the view that sports offer the only realistic opportunity to achieve success in American society (Sailes 1987, 1998; Edwards 1973). Many African-American males do not see education as viable opportunity for them. In fact, according to R. Staples (1987), data have shown that "African-American males have less incentive to acquire education because when compared to White males with same amount of educational investment, African-American males tend to acquire jobs that have lesser personal, social, and economic rewards" (p. 412). Discrimination is perceived to exists and form barriers at almost every segment of the opportunity network in American (Sailes 1998). As a result, "many African-American males feel that they are left with few visible opportunities" and are "forced to look outside mainstream American society for opportunities to succeed" (Sailes 1998: 24; Oliver 1994). Professional sports careers may be one area in which African-American males view the playing field as leveled.

Throughout their entire education, many student-athletes, particularly African-American student-athletes, believe that they will play professional sports despite the overwhelming odds against it. According to Sailes (1998) "too many African-American males are buying into the dream and are betting against the

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odds…there are far too many causalities who bet against the odds and loose" (p. 33). The vast majority of student-athletes will not play professionally (Sleek 1997). The odds of a high school football player or basketball player playing professionally are 6,000 to 1 and 10,000 to 1, respectively (Schoemann 1995). Eitzen (2003) highlights the improbability of dramatic upward mobility through sports stating that the widely held belief concerning sports as a reasonable career choice and that sports are a way out of poverty are merely myths.

While examining the career maturity of student-athletes, Kennedy and Dimick (1987) found that a disproportionate number of football and basketball players expected to have professional sports careers. Out of the 122 football and basketball players questioned, 58 (48 percent) expected to become professional athletes. Black athletes were found to be more unrealistic than their white counterparts. Sixty-six percent of the black athletes expected to play sports professionally as opposed to thirty-nine percent of whites. These findings were gathered at a university that has only had eight football and no basketball players advance to the professional ranks at the time of the study.

In 1989, the Center for the Study of Athletics found that African-American football and basketball players were twice as likely to anticipate professional careers in their sport (Sellers and Kuperminc 1997). This belief begins as early as high school, demonstrated in a Lou Harris poll in November of 1990. The poll found that 59 percent of African-American high school athletes expected playing sports in college, and 43 percent had a belief that they would play professional sports (Snyder 1996). A national study of Division I football and basketball

players found that 52 percent of African American student athletes believed that they would have professional sports careers (Sailes 1994). Additionally the study found that the primary justification for choosing to attend their respective colleges was to better there chances of playing in the NFL or NBA (Sailes 1994).

Harry Edwards theorizes that African-American families push children toward professional sports aspirations, while neglecting other areas of personal and cultural growth (Lomax 2000). Black families are four times more likely to view their child's early involvement in sports as a beginning to a career in professional sports and black families are seven times more likely to push male children into sports (Gropper 1991, Lapchick 1982). Edwards also argues that the African-American "family and community reward athletic achievement among their youth more than any other activity" and "black parents are more likely than white parents to see their children's sports participation as a potential economic mobility vehicle for the entire family" (Anderson 1990: 508; Edwards 1992: 128). Sellers and Kuperminc (1997) stated that a large proportion of African-American male student-athletes may be goal discrepant in regard to their aspiration of playing professional sports. Goal discrepancy occurs when "an individual's expectations are inconsistent with his or her current status with respect to the criteria associated with successful attainment of the individuals goals" (Sellers and Kuperminc 1997:7). With the small percentages of all African-American football players and basketball players becoming professionals, a discrepancy exists between the numbers of African-American players who have professional sports career aspirations and those who actually attain that goal. The authors

contend that this goal discrepancy concerning the career goals of African-American student-athletes may have implications on academic motivation and poor academic performance.Gaston (1986) calls the mastery of sport a rite of passage for African-American males. Gaston (1986) sums up his ideas concerning the media and professional sports aspirations of young Black males:

> The media serve as the vehicle that carries the fantasies consumed by young Black males. Few media items are consumed more completely by the Black male than professional sports....The realities projected by the media make the young Black males dream of becoming a professional athlete seem far more feasible than envisioning himself as a member of a surgical team at a major hospital...Ironically, if the hours spent preparing to get into the NBA or NFL were spent preparing to get into medical school, the odds of the young Black male becoming a M.D. would be significantly greater than of his becoming a professional athlete. (Pp. 376-377)

Arthur Ashe claims that the irrational pursuit of elusive professional careers in sports alters the outlooks of African-American males so that they see no other options and as a result they "neglect their academic pursuits and may end up with neither a sufficient education nor a future" (Anderson 1990: 509). With the high level of importance placed on athletic achievement and a professional sports career, education is devalued and college simply becomes a place to highlight athletic capabilities. Universities become, in a sense, a "minor league system" for basketball and football (Clow 2000: 14).

ATHLETIC IDENTITY

Athletic identity can be understood as a social role or an occupational self-image (Pearlin 1983; Astle 1986). Athletic identity is comprised of the cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social obligations associated with identifying with the athletic role (Brewer et al 1993). Athletes competing at high levels have received

elevated levels of social reinforcement for their physical abilities and have much

of their individual conception of identity and "self" based upon athletic

performance (Clow 2000). Exclusive athletic identity is denoted by the inability to

identify and describe ones self-worth outside of athletics and occurs when

athletes assign great importance to the athletic role (Meeker et al 2000).

 The social structure of life of an student-athlete is usually made up of other

student-athletes as they live, work, dine, and travel with one another. Student-

athletes often engage in conversations with one another concerning sports and

often their interaction with nonathletes are also sports centered. The amount of

time that student-athletes spend devoted to athletics requires that the athletic

role of student athletes take precedence over all other roles and identities. The

level of commitment and exclusive devotion that is necessary for athletic

achievement may restrict the exploratory behavior essential to identity

development (Chartrand and Lent 1987; Pearson and Pepitas 1990). Limited

time and energy to devote to identity exploration leads athletes to select an

identity, the athletic identity, that seems to offer the most rewards and

encouragement (Danish et al 1993). It is natural then, that if an individual

dedicates the greatest amount of their time to sport, then the development of a

personal identity outside of sport is stagnated (Petitas and Champagne 1988).

Student-athletes often feel a sense of security embracing the athletic role and are

unwilling to engage in the self-exploration essential to the process of identity

formation. The athletic role is the primary reason that many student-athletes are

able to attend college and the financial support of the university is dependent

upon athletic performance. Thus, student-athletes' "identity is associated highly with their athletic role" and society relates to them "based on their current athletic identity" (Clow 2000:12). The athletic identity takes precedence over social and academic roles and student-athletes often become detached from their academic roles. Additionally, student athletes' identity formation process may be stunted due to limited opportunities for exploration associated with a sense of overprotection, depersonalization, and segregation felt by student-athletes (Tongate and Watson 1978). African-American athletes are extremely susceptible to exclusivity of the athletic identity due to the intense socialization towards sports by family, media, peers, and community that begins at an early age.

Although there are some positive aspects associated with being committed to the athletic role, such as development of a salient self-identity (McPherson 1980), this self-concept is effective mostly in an athletic environment (Selden 1998). Edwards (2000) maintains that the focus on athletics and the athletic role in the Black community is a tragedy in that the "personal and cultural underdevelopment …afflicts so many successful and unsuccessful black sports aspirants" (p.9). Athletes with a strong commitment toward the athletic identity and the athlete role have been found to be less likely to explore career opportunities beyond athletics, succeed academically, and difficultly retiring from athletics (Adler and Adler 1987; Blann 1985; Kennedy and Dimick 1987; Brown et al 1999).

Murphy et al (1996) discuss identity foreclosure as it relates to the athletic identity and career maturity of collegiate student-athletes. Identity foreclosure occurs as a result of individuals making commitment to roles without engaging in exploratory behavior; and may be caused by the environmental demands and expectations or individual choice (Marcia et al 1993; Danish et al 1993). Foreclosure begins early in life for many athletes and the resulting behavior is often reinforced by peers, teachers, parents, and coaches. Minority males in revenue-generating sports have been found to have the greatest incidence of identity foreclosure (Kennedy and Dimick 1987; Scales 1991). Murphy et al (1996) based their research questions on the suggestion that the "physical and psychological demands of intercollegiate athletics, coupled with the restrictiveness of the athletic system may isolate the athletes…restrict their opportunities for exploratory behavior, and promote identity forclosure" (Murphy et al 1996: 240). They were also interested in the positive relationship between athletic identity and identity foreclosure (Good et al 1993). The study included 124 student-athletes at a Division I university. Athletic identity was assessed using a standard instrument, the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, which measures the strength and exclusivity the athletic identity and identification with the athletic role. Varsity athletes were found to have high levels of identity foreclosure. Additionally, identity foreclosure and identifying strongly with athletic identity had negative affects on career maturity.

Athletic identity, identity foreclosure, and career decision-making were examined among 189 collegiate student-athletes in "Psychosocial Identity and

Career Control in College Student-Athletes" (Brown et al 1999). The authors found that student-athletes spend a tremendous amount of time devoted to competitive sport, which causes conflict in managing the roles of student and athlete. A significant relationship between athletic identity an identity foreclosure were not found, however, strong identification with the athletic identity was found to partially supported. Additionally, the more time that student athletes devote to sport, the lower the self-efficacy for career decision making.

Adler and Adler (1987) examined athletic and academic roles under the theoretical framework of identity theory in order to assess the salience of athletic identity. The data consisted of four years of participant observation of a basketball team at a university with "big-time" athletics. The authors found that the basketball players had significant others predetermined by the athletic environment, consisting of teammates, coaches, trainers, and athletic administrators. The athletes related mostly to teammates and dormmates (usually other athletes). Role conflicts between the athletic, academic, and social roles were most often resolved by rearranging, reducing, or even dropping the academic role. Many of the athletes came to college with salient academic identity and academic roles, however this often changed during the course of their college careers. Several conditions were associated with this phenomenon: "(1) an overwhelmingly demanding athletic role and powerful role-set members; (2) a peer subculture that emphasized both athletics and recreation while devaluing academics; (3) a series of frustrations and failures in the academic realm" (Adler and Adler 1987: 452). The academic role was not reinforced which

lead to the diminished identity salience of the academic identity. This study

offered support toward the concept of "role commitment as a determinant of role

identity salience (p. 452). The athletes were found to have deeply-rooted athletic

roles and a primary self-identification as athletes. Additionally the athletic identity

encompassed and dominated all other roles in most situations.

Athletic identity has been associated with difficulty coping with retirement

from sport and was assessed as a factor related to adjustment to retirement in

"Coping with Retirement from Sport: The Influence of Athletic Identity" (Grove et

al 1997). The authors examined the previously researched connection between

identity constructs and athlete behavior, retirement behavior, and the planning of

post athletic career opportunities (Baillie and Danish 1992; Brewer et al 1993).

Those who have a strong commitment to the athletic role have been found to

have less preparedness for postsport careers (Gordon 1995). The study

consisted of survey data from 48 retired athletes. This study also utilized the

Athletic Identity Measurement Sale to assess athletic identity. Through bivariate

correlation, a strong and exclusive athletic identity was associated with career

transition difficulties, the degree of psychological adjustment necessary, the time

needed for the adjustment, and increased dependence on denial after retirement.

The "glorified self," a form of self-identity, arises "when individuals become

the focus of intense interpersonal and media attention, leading to their achieving

celebrity" and is caused "in part by the treatment of individuals' selves as objects

by others" (Adler and Adler 1989: 229). Adler and Adler (1989) suggest that the

glorified self adds a new concept in the study of the self. This self is a public

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persona that differs from the athlete's private personas. The ethnographic data collected during a five year period on a college basketball team is utilized to discuss the manner in which the glorified self is created and its effects on the athletes. The athletes' impressions of themselves changed through face-to-face interaction with teammates and others on campus. Student-athletes were faced with large numbers of people who wanted to be around them and "treated them with awe and respect" (p. 301). Media portrayals also added to the glory experience of student-athletes. Many felt that they had to live up to the roles that the media had created. The "glorified self" influenced the behavior of the athletes and transformed their identities and self-conceptions, thus becoming a master status. The dominant nature of the athletic role over social and academic roles added to the increasing commitment to this role as a master status. Additionally, the athletes distanced themselves from the other roles and loss the desire and capacity to view the world through them. As time progressed with the athletic self as master status, the athletes faced growing difficulties conceiving of themselves through any other identity.

CAREER MATURITY AND TRANSTIONS OUT OF SPORT

Colligate athletes have been found to have delayed career development, low levels of career maturity, and a stunted ability to make career decisions, including choosing a major and an occupation (Kennedy and Dimick 1987; Blann 1985; Remer et al 1978; Sowa and Gressard 1983; Murphy et al 1996). Career maturity is defined as "the maturity of attitudes and competencies that are critical in realistic career decision-making" (Meeker et al 2000: 126; Crites 1978). Career

immaturity may theoretically be related to personal conflict, unclear professional goals, academic problems, and a lack of decision-making skills (Herr et al 1993). The career decision making process involves understanding career alternatives, assessing the desirability of the alternatives, determining impediments, and deciding on a course of action (Herr et al 1993). Athletes have been found to have more difficulty than nonathletes throughout the process of career development and many do not have the necessary occupational experience or job skills to enter the world of work. This may be due to the intense physical and emotional commitment given toward athletics throughout their college careers, time and schedule constraints, lack of role models outside of sports, and a lack of work and life experiences due to athletic involvement (Selden 1998). Students who are not athletes have the freedom to explore courses and majors, spend time on internships, drop and add courses with changing needs and focus on finding a career that suits their abilities. Student-athletes work under numerous constraints such as the inability to change majors or drop courses due to eligibility requirements or choose majors that may offer courses during times set aside for sports participation (i.e. architecture or sciences with afternoon labs). For these reasons and to remain eligibility, student athletes often chose more pragmatic educational goals (Cornelius 1995). Additionally, student-athletes are asked to spend the summers participating in "voluntary" workouts which make interning over the summer months impossible as well. In some instances student-athletes never realize the freedom to choose an occupation and tend to choose majors that they are unprepared for (Adler and Adler 1987). Furthermore,

as they concentrate on possible careers in athletics, student-athletes become detached from academics and commit to athletic career choices before taking other options into consideration (Boone and Walker 1987; Good et al 1993). Thus, majors and subsequent careers are often chosen by default. Even athletes who play professionally will have to face career transitions early in life, especially since most play less than five years and leave the sport in debt. Thus, this dilemma is wide-ranging and applies to most former student-athletes.

This problem is particularly troubling for African-American student-athletes due to the elevated levels of expressed professional sports aspirations, poor academic performance, low graduation rates, and exclusive identification with the athletic role found among the group. Edwards (1992, 2000) asserts that personal and social development of athletes is stunted by the demands of athletics. Athletic participation impairs the abilities of Black athletes to "compete or to make their way as responsible, productive adults in broader society (Edwards 1992: 128). African-American athletes are unemployed more often, earn less than their nonathletic peers, switch jobs more often, and are less satisfied with the jobs that they hold (Edwards 1983).

The relationship between collegiate athletic participation and developmental task achievement was examined in "Athletic Participation: Its Relationship to Student Development " (Sowa and Gressard 1983). The study consisted of seventy-five randomly selected varsity athletes and seventy-five nonathletes at a major university in the South. The participants were administered the Student Developmental Task Inventory (Winston et al 1979),

which was developed to measure three major areas of development. The researchers found significant differences between athletes and nonathletes concerning educational plans, career plans, and mature relationships with peers. Sowa and Gressard (1983) conclude that the focus on athletic activity while in college may "inhibit the exploration of other skills and limit future planning," which presents future difficulties "even for students who do not consider careers in athletics" (p.238).

Blann (1985) examined the relationship between competing in collegiate athletics and the ability to devise mature educational and career plans. The study compared both high-level (Division I) and low-level (Division III) athletes to their nonathlete peers. The study found that both high and low level competitors did not give sufficient attention to their career and educational plans. The male athletes at both levels scored lower than their nonathlete peers on indicators of career maturity. These results were not found in women, which indicates that participating in collegiate athletics is more detrimental to career maturity for males.

Career maturity was also measured in "Career Maturity and Professional Sports Expectations of College Football and Basketball Players" (Kennedy and Dimick 1987). The study was designed to test the findings in the literature concerning the idea that college athletes mature slower than their nonathlete peers in terms of some educational and career related developmental stages. Eighty male students and 122 male basketball and football players were asked to complete the Career Maturity Inventory, which was developed to measure

attitudinal maturity and competency in career decision making (Crites 1978). The study found that nonathletes scored significantly higher than athletes on the measures of career maturity at all university grade levels. Athletes scored on the equivalent of a ninth grade level in regards to career maturity. The study also found that many of the athletes had unrealistic expectations concerning professional sports expectations. The authors suggest that the "most highly valued aspect of the college experience---the initiation and development of viable vocational plans" was neglected by student-athletes (p.296).

Smallman and Sowa (1996) examined the preparedness of male student-athletes to make career-related decisions. Revenue and nonrevenue sports participants and Caucasian and minority athletes were compared regarding career maturity. The study took place at a Division I university and the participants were administered the Career Maturity Inventory. The study found that student-athletes were less career mature than their nonathlete peers, and that Minority student-athletes may require special attention in one area of career development. Minority athletes were found to have significantly lower knowledge of their preferred occupations than Caucasians.

In Selden's (1998) dissertation, the low levels of career maturity were seen as "alarming" among the student-athletes participating in his University of Georgia study. The subjects scored low on all measured dimensions of career maturity measured with the Career Maturity Inventory. The athletes also had low levels of occupational self-knowledge and career planfulness. An interesting finding was that the sample had relatively high levels of academic achievement in

comparison to the low levels of career maturity. This suggests that the foremost issue may be time devoted to career development rather than academic deficiencies. Brown (1993) also found that athletes have significantly lower scores in areas of career maturity, career decision-making, world of work information, and knowledge of preferred occupational group.

Career development of athletes and nonathletes was examined by Martens and Cox (2000) in order to determine if differences existed. The study took place at a Midwestern university and consisted of 131 varsity athletes and 95 nonathletes. The My Vocational Situation standardized instrument (Holland et al 1990) was the instrument used to measure levels of career development, and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (Brewer et al 1993) and the Sports Commitment Scale (Scanlan et at 1993) were used to measure athletic identity and sports commitment of student athletes. The results yielded significant differences between athletes and nonathletes on measures of career development. The authors cautiously conclude that athletes have less of perceived need for occupational information.

The results of these studies indicate that student-athletes progress at a slower pace than nonathletes concerning career development. Minority student-athletes and athletes participating in revenue-generating sports may be the most at risk. Some major issues contributing to this phenomenon have been identified. Student-athletes operate under strict time constraints. This group has been found to participate in athletic activity at the equivalent of a full workweek, excluding academic responsibilities and actives are often year round (Selden 1998). This

leaves little time to explore career options or utilize university resources (career centers etc.) Additionally, the lives of student-athletes are highly structured with many decisions made by others such as coaches, academic coordinators, athletic directors, or trainers (Martens and Cox 2000). This leaves little opportunity for student-athletes to exercises decision-making skills. Together these issues result in a lack of occupational information, lack of time spent considering career issues, and impeded decision-making abilities, all leading to stunted career development.

Retirement from Sport

The transition from competitive athlete to nonathlete is inevitable. Whether the transition occurs after high school, after college, or after a professional sports career, the retirement from competitive sports is likely to occur at a relatively young age. Baillie and Danish (1992) suggest that the "process of adjustment to the event of retirement may be an especially difficult and disruptive process due to the age, income, and ego involvement of the individual athlete"(p.77); and the loss of the role of athlete is significantly stressful for elite, Olympic, or professional athlete.

As demonstrated in the literature reviewed above, student-athletes have faced exploitation, attachment to the athletic identity, and stunted career development. These factors suggest that athletic retirement poses a definite set of problems. Many athletes have been found to be ill-prepared to handle life after sports and experience significant personal disruption upon retirement (Botterill

1982; Ogilvie and Howe 1982; Werthner and Orlick 1986; Wooten 1993). The problems may be compacted by the fact that retirement is most often involuntary and results from deselection, injury, or age. Kleiber et al (1987) found significantly lower levels of life satisfaction among athletes whose retirement was due to injury. Deselection is the most common source of athletic retirement. This illustrated in the fact that each year there are approximately 1.5 million high school students participating in athletics, fourteen thousand college seniors, and only 210 professional sports rookies (Meeker et al 2000). Deselection refers to the "selection process that occurs at every level of competitive sports" which "disregards those who do not meet necessary performance criteria" (Taylor and Ogilvie 1998: 433). This process may be difficult for an athlete who has invested much of his time in college preparing and training to be subsequently deemed "not good enough" to advance to the next level. Meeker et al (2000) outline several factors contributing to the difficulty adjusting to life without sports which are as follows: 1) the enormous time commitment devoted to sports, 2) limited work experience, 3) travel, 4) diet and exercise requirements, and 5) social responsibilities. Athletes are exiting a highly structure, highly pervasive lifestyle that has influenced most every aspect of their lives for many years.

Athletic retirement has been referred to as social death in that the assumption among athletes is "life" is dependent upon continued involvement in the sport or close and direct association with the game (Lerch 1984). Additionally, it has been suggested that sports retirement causes social isolation and rejection from the former in-group (Rosenberg 1982). Kubler-Ross' stages of

death and dying have also been applied to sports retirement (Lerch 1984).

Greendorfer and Kleiber (1982) outlined three potential results of sports

retirement, which included downward mobility, loss of status, drug/alcohol

dependency, and emotional difficulties. In a more extensive study, Kleiber and

Greendorfer (1983) examined former Big Ten basketball and football players.

The study found that many had a sense of loss over their departure from athletics

due to a loss of identity, friends, or missed opportunities.

The social psychological process of involuntary and unexpected exit from

sports was examined by Blinde and Stratta (1992). The research sought to

identify the factors that make the process of exiting from sport problematic. The

authors used qualitative research methods including in-depth interviews with

twenty athletes who had been cut from a team or whose sport was eliminated by

the athletic department. The transition out of competitive athletics, or role exit,

was handled as a process rather than an event. The study found that the process

was characterized by "a great degree of disruption and trauma for most

athletes…a majority of the athletes indicated their feelings often paralleled those

of death and dying" (Blinde and Stratta 1992: 5). For this reasons the

researchers used thanatological framework and applied the Kubler-Ross death

and dying stages. The athletes expressed feelings of shock and denial, anger,

bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance. Depression seemed to be the

most prolonged stage among the athletes, with some feeling suicidal. Some of

the factors that lead to trauma during this process were feelings of unfinished

business, loss of the sport role, and the environment of the athlete upon termination.

Professional football places extreme psychological and physical demands upon its athletes. The transition from professional football and its effects on former players and their families was examined in "Career Development After Professional Football" (Shahnasarian 1992). Shahnasarian (1992) fond that 66 percent of players who had retired since 1970 characterized their transitions as emotionally and personally problematic. Some of the most prevalent problems reported were financial difficulties, divorce, substance abuse, and career development problems. The players admitted that retirement was the first time they had envisioned careers outside of football. Self-identity issues added to the stress brought about by this transition. Parker (1994) also examined the transition out of football, however, she interviewed former Division I-A collegiate football players. The researcher found that thanatological theories did not apply in all cases of her study, however like past studies, the athletes were found to spend a great deal of time reflecting on the past or 'unfinished business.' Most of the time in many of the interviews was spent reflecting on the past and perceived injustices rather than current life situations. The athletes also expressed a lack of control. They felt at the mercy of people and things over which they had no control, and that their hard work did not matter. This was similar to Werthner and Orlick's (1986) study that found that most of the former Olympic athletes in their study felt that they had very little control over their lives during their competitive years.

Wooten (1994) discussed the feelings of permissiveness, entitlement, and dependence that the sports identity and status causes among athletes. Accordingly, student-athletes have difficulty transitioning out of sports when the preferential treatment that occurs on campuses is lost. The athletes' loose identity and status, and their decision-making ability may have been hindered while participating in collegiate athletics. Perna et al (1999) examined life satisfaction among male athletes and nonathletes after the termination of their collegiate careers. The authors found that there was not a significant difference between athletes and nonathletes life satisfaction, however race was a factor. African-American athletes and nonathletes reported significantly lower life satisfaction regardless of injury status or occupational planning. Also, athletes who had vocational plans reported higher degrees of life satisfaction after their college careers.

SUMMARY

As illustrated in the literature, there are several factors that affect the processes that occur as student-athletes transition out of that role. Racism and exploitation has likely affected the collegiate experiences of African-American student-athletes. Former student-athletes have been found to be past oriented and reflect often on collegiate experiences, the degree to which they have been affected by these issues will likely influence the manner in which those reflections influence their current situations. Athletes, especially African-American athletes, have been intensively socialized into sports and the athletic role. Consistent with

the theoretical framework of identity formation, studies have found that the athletic identity is extremely salient. Finally, the literature reviewed indicates that former athletes have a lower level of career development and difficulty transitioning out of sports. All of these factors outlined in the literature, together with the related quantitative findings that are presented in Chapter four highlight the significance and need for this study.

CHAPTER IV

BACKGROUND: RELATED QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

As discussed in much of the literature, African-American males tend to overemphasize the likelihood of playing sports on the professional level. The following findings reflect an examination of the extend to which this phenomena exists amongst a group of Division I football players and the extent to which this belief affected academic achievement and behavior. These findings are extremely relevant to the current study in that they provide a direction and foundation for the present line of inquiry. This research examines several of the factors related to career and goal aspirations of the college athlete. The research is a case study of one Division I football team and utilizes quantitative data. The research compares the aspirations of a group of African American student athletes to their White counterparts in a close examination of differential aspirations and attitudes of the two groups. This case study investigates the extent to which a selected group of student-athletes believe that they will become successful professional athletes; and searches for other factors that correlate with the strength of this belief. This study identified environmental characteristics,

and elements of the socialization process that encourage participation in sports, and also encourage the belief in "going-Pro". Some of the social and behavioral problems that may accompany those aspirations are also examined.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The sample for the study includes all members of the football team who competed in the 2000 season at a predominantly white, Division I institution. Points of comparisons amongst players include race, playing position, home town size and university classification. A structured survey was administered at a team meeting. The meeting was convened by the head coach and took place during pre-season football camp. All surveys were completed and returned during the meeting. The number of respondents is limited by the size of the team, which is the typical team size for a Division I school.

TABLE II
CHARACTERISTCS OF THE SAMPLE

Ns (with percentages)

Characteristics	Black	White/Other
Classification		
Freshman	16 (32)	10 (20.4)
Sophomore	8 (16)	15 (30.6)
Junior	12 (24)	12 (25)
Senior	14 (28)	12 (25)
Size of Hometown		
Large Urban	24 (47)	8 (16.3)
Urban	19 (37.3)	27 (55.1)
Small town/rural	8 (15.7)	14 (28.6)
Scholarship Status		
Scholarship	46 (94)	28 (57)
Walk-on	3 (6)	21 (43)
Grade Point Average		
1.5-1.99	1 (2)	0 (0)
2.0-2.49	20 (44)	13 (33)
2.5-2.99	15 (33)	14 (33)
3.0-3.49	8 (17)	8 (18)
3.5-4.0	2 (4)	7 (16)
Total	51(51)	49 (49)

Table II shows selected characteristics of the sample. The racial/ethnic composition of the sample is 51 percent African-American/Black, 44 percent Caucasian/White, 2 percent Native-American, 1 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian-American football players. The smaller groups are collapsed into White/other (referred to as White) for the purposes of this study. The majority of the respondents are returning student-athletes. Thirty two percent (32%) of the blacks are classified as freshmen, and 20.4% of white group were classified as freshmen. Grade point averages reported by the players are fairly similar across racial categories with averages for Whites slightly higher. Most of the African-American players fall within range of 2.00 to 2.9 (77%) as compared to 66% of other team members. These averages are similar to those found in the general student body. For the Fall Semester of 2000, the average GPA for white student was 2.95 and for Black students it was 2.55 (University Office of Institutional Research, 2000).

THE VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENT

The dependent variables in the study are as follows: (1) The strength of the belief that the individual will play professional football, (2) the strength of the belief in athletics as the best avenue to economic success for players in general, and (3) the strength of the belief in athletics as the best way to economic success for African-American males in particular. The research also includes measures of academic performance and indicators of behavioral problems. The independent variables include measures of parental support and encouragement,

type of interaction between the parent and child, and exposure to educational and/or athletic ideas and events. All of these measures are taken as relevant in tapping important aspects of socialization. Relevant socialization experiences studied in this research include: (1) social support, (2) types of encouragement, (3) exposure to certain activities and ideas, (4) interaction between parents and the individual, and (5) the perception of attitudes, values, and norms learned by the individual through their parents.

The research instrument for all variables was developed by the researcher. Sets of items are combined to form scales and indices. The indices tap dimension socialization, professional sports aspirations, academic success, and social/behavioral adaptation. The indices were tested for reliability and validity. Factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal-consistency were applied to all questionnaire items. The test found the indices to be both reliable and consistent.

Figure 1: Content of Index Scores

Education Socialization Index 16 items (alpha =.89)	Consists of items concerning education centered socialization activities that the respondent and his parent(s) engaged in together
Sport Socialization Index 8 items (alpha =.90)	Consists of items concerning sport socialization activities that the respondent and his parent(s) engaged in together
Parental Athletic Support Index 8 items (alpha =.81)	Consists of items concerning parental support and encouragement toward athletic achievement
Parental Academic Support Index 5 items (alpha = .70)	Consists of items concerning parental support and encouragement toward academic achievement
Parent Support for Sport (sport2) 1 item (1 – 5)	Degree of parental encouragement for respondent to obtain an athletic scholarship

The Education Socialization Index Score and the Academic Support Index Score, represent the pre-college socialization experiences of the respondent related to education. The Sport Socialization Index Score and the Athletic Support Index Score represent the pre-college socialization experiences of the respondents related to sport.

The instrument also includes questions that are designed to measure related demographics and other characteristics. These include: parent's marital status, and parent's job or occupation. The hometown size is used as an indicator rural versus urban background. Finally, an open-ended question asked respondents to describe their conception of a successful future and to discuss their plan to attain that goal.

FINDINGS

Table III shows the mean scores on 3 Likert-type questions regarding the belief in sports and success. The three items are presented to emphasize the strength of the expectations for a career in professional sports. The first item asks the player if he expects to have a career in professional athletics, with five being the highest expectation and one the lowest expectation.

TABLE III
MEANS ON PROFESSIONAL SPORTS ASPIRATIONS AND BELIEFS

Items	Black	White/other	Difference
1. Expects to have a career in professional sports.	4.52	3.28	1.24*
2. Believes professional sports are the best way to be economically successful	3.08	2.37	0.71*
3. Believes professional sports are the best way for Black men to be economically successful.	2.92	2.56	0.36

* significant to the α =.05 level

The mean score for African Americans is 4.52 and for the category of White/other 3.38. Black players tend to have a much stronger belief in their future as a professional athlete than the other players. While these Black athletes tend to believe in their personal future as a professional athlete, they were less inclined to endorse sports as the best means to success for men in general. This is true of both racial groups. The more interesting finding is the extent to which White players believe that sports are the best way for black males to become economically successful almost to the same extent as do the black players. The item that shows the largest mean difference in the opinions of the two groups is the item regarding the expectation of "Going Pro". This difference is highlighted in the frequency distribution.

TABLE IV
RESPONSE PERCENTAGES ON ITEMS CONCERNING PROFESSIONAL SPORTS
ASPIRATIONS AND BELIEFS

Items	Black	White
1. Expects to have a career in professional athletics.		
Strongly disagree	0	10
Disagree	2	22
Agree somewhat	14	27
Agree	14	10
Strongly agree	70	31
	100%	100%
2. Believes professional sports are the best way to economically successful.		
Strongly disagree	16	35
Disagree	18	25
Agree somewhat	30	22
Agree	12	6
Strongly agree	22	12
	100%	100%
3. Believes professional sports are the best way for Black men to be economically successful.		
Strongly disagree	32	35
Disagree	12	15
Agree somewhat	16	23
Agree	12	12
Strongly agree	28	15
	100%	100%

Table IV shows the distribution of the responses on the same three questions. The most extraordinary difference between White and Black players comes in the first item. Black players have some expectation of career in professional athletics at a rate of 84%, with 70% endorsing the strongest certainty in a professional sports career. On the other hand, only 41% of White players expect to have professional sports career, with 31% endorsing with the strongest certainty. Amongst Black players, 36% believe that professional sports is the best way to make money, while only 18% of whites believe this. Likewise, 40% of Blacks believe that professional athletics is the best route to economic success for Black men, with 27% of whites agreeing with this statement.

TABLE V

CORRELATIONS AMONG SOCIALIZATION VARIABLES WITH PROFESSIONAL SPORTS OUTLOOK

	Expects pro career	Pro as Economic Success	Pro as Economic Success for BlK Men
Expects Pro Career	----	.40*	.46*
Pro as Economic Success	----	----	.55*
Education Socialization	.15	.28*	.21
Been ineligible to compete	.12	.22	.26*
Spends time studying	-.33*	-.31*	-.26
Been questioned by police	.02	.28*	.18
Behavioral Adjustment	-.08	-.31*	-.15
Classification	.08	.40*	.41*
Sport Socialization	.20	.05	-.02
Athletic Support	.22	.05	-.02
Academic Support	.16	.11	.25
Parent Sport2	.24	.15	-.02
G.P.A.	-.26	-.21	-.25

TABLE V Continued

	Expects pro career	Pro as Economic Success	Pro as Economic Success for BlK Men
Expects Pro Career	----	.53*	-.01
Pro as Economic Success	----	----	.32*
Education Socialization	-.14	.14	.41*
Been ineligible	0	0	0
Read assigned readings	-.16	.01	.03
Been questioned by police	.15	.20	.41*
Behavioral Adjustment	-.35*	-.35*	-.46*
Classification	-.15	.25	.44*
Sport Socialization	.17	.25	.13
Athletic Support	.18	.33*	.31
Academic Support	-.22	.04	.05
Parent Sport2	.01	.07	.10
G.P.A.	-.26	-.21	-.25

$P < .05$

Table V shows Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for index scores, selected variables, and professional sports aspirations and beliefs. The index scores are as defined in Figure 1 presented earlier. The strongest relationships are observed amongst the original three items concerning expectations and professional sports. For African-American respondents, a strong positive relationship exists between the belief in a professional sports career for oneself and the belief in professional sports as the best means to economic success (.40). For the same group, there is a strong association between expectation of a career in sports and the belief in professional sports as the best means to economic success for Black men (.46). For White players, an

even stronger association exists between the same set of items. The expectation of a professional career for oneself correlates positively with the belief in professional sports as the best way to economic success (.53). For blacks, the expectation of "Going Pro" show a significant negative correlation (-.33) with time spent studying. These findings lend support to previous research cited in the review of relevant literature.

Table V also shows correlation coefficients amongst the selected index scores, selected variables related to behavior, and the three items on sports expectations. For black respondents, a significant positive relationship exists between emphasis on education in their socialization and their belief in professional sports as the best way to economic success in general (.28). In fact, the data indicate the beliefs about the route to success are more related to socialization than is the expectation for a career in sports. The higher the Black respondent's score on the Education Socialization Index, the stronger is his belief in athletics as the best means to economic success. There is a weak positive relationship between expectations for a professional sports career and the Sport Socialization Index (.20) and the Athletic Support Index (.22). Amongst white players, there is a positive relationship between Education Socialization and belief in professional sports as the best means to economic success for black men. This correlation indicates that as white respondents' score on the Education Socialization increases, their belief in professional sports as the best bet for black men increases.

These findings indicate that the belief in the viability of sports as a career transcends even the expectation of a career in sports for the individual.   The findings also indicate that most other variables are more closely related to the belief in the sports as best route to success than in the actual expectation of a career in sports for the individual. This is also true for whites when asked about career options for black men.

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS OUTLOOK, ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, AND BEHAVIOR

The forthcoming data analysis examines the inter-relationships amongst measures academic performance, behavior, and professional sports outlook. Table VI shows the correlations amongst indicators of behavioral adaptation, academic performance, and the three professional sports outlook variables.

When examining the correlations related to expectations of a professional career, only two factors show significant correlations for the black players. These are the extent to which they read assigned class material (-.33) and the frequency of visiting sport-related websites (.35). The priorities indicated in this finding are clear : a sport takes precedent over academics.   For the white players, expectations for a career in sports show significant correlations with having received a formal reprimand (.39), probation (.28), behavioral adjustment (-.35), and time spent on athletics (.35). This finding would tend to suggest that those classified in the category of white are more likely to have bad behavior when they have high expectations of a career in sports. Among Black respondents and white responds, there is a positive relationship (.23 and .28

respectively) between suspension from the team for violating team policies and the belief that professional sports is the best means to economic success. Again, the belief in sports as a means to success appears to have more significance in relationship to other variables when examining black players. For both racial groups, the higher the classification, the stronger the belief that a career in professional sports is imminent. This is especially true for black males. This would tend to suggest that the college experience does not diminish this.

TABLE VI

CORRELATIONS AMONG BEHVIORAL ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE VARIABLES WITH PROFESSIONAL SPORTS OUTLOOK

	BLACK		
	Expects pro career	Pro as Economic Success	Pro as Economic Success for BlK Men
suspension from team	-.05	.23	.11
received formal reprimand	-.09	.20	.20
Been questioned by police	.02	.28*	.18
Been ineligible	.12	.22	.26
Been on academic probation	-.02	.05	.06
Read assigned readings	-.33*	-.31*	-.26
attend extracurricular activities	-.25	.08	.08
Visit sports websites	.35*	.14	.32*
Academic Performance	-.07	-.02	-.08
Behavioral Adjustment	-.08	-.31*	-.15
Academic Time	-.11	.07	-.01
Athletic Time	.12	.01	.07
Classification	.08	.40*	.41*
G.P.A.	.16	.04	-.17
ACT Score	-.21	-.16	-.15

TABLE VI CONTINUED

	WHITE		
	Expects pro career	Pro as Economic Success	Pro as Economic Success for BlK Men
suspension from team	.18	.28*	.25
received formal reprimand	.39*	.38*	.25
Been questioned by police	.15	.20	.41*
Been ineligible	0	0	0
Been on academic probation	.28*	.43*	.23
Read assigned readings	-.16	.01	.03
attend extracurricular activities	.01	.17	-.03
visit sports websites	.04	.22	.21
Academic Performance	-.17	-.40*	-.07
Behavioral Adjustment	-.35*	-.35*	-.46*
Academic Time	.04	.20	.09
Athletic Time	.35*	.20	-.01
Classification	-.15	.25	.44*
G.P.A.	-.26	-.21	-.25
ACT Score	-.10	-.20	-.03

$p<.05$

A positive relationship exists for between having received a formal reprimand from coaches with the belief in professional sports as the best means to economic success for Black men (.20 for Black respondents and .25 for white respondents). The likelihood that a respondent has been questioned by the police is positively correlated with the belief in professional sports as the route to economic success in general and for black men specifically. The relationship is stronger for whites than for blacks. Blacks show a negative relationship (-.35) between behavioral adjustment and the belief that professional sports are the best route to becoming economically successful. This indicates that as behavioral adjustment increases (less incidences of behavioral problems), as the belief in professional sports as a means to economic success decreases. For

white players, there are negative correlations between the behavioral adjustment scale score and all three sports outlook variables.

There is no significant relationship between academic probation, academic performance, and any of the three professional sports outlook variables for Black respondents. On the other hand, white players show a positive relationship between academic probation and all three sports outlook variable. White players tend to show a negative relationship between G.P.A. and all three professional sports outlook variables, something that Black players do not show. This indicates that as white player's G.P.A. increases, their professional sports aspirations and beliefs decreases, or vice versa.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

These findings were consistent with predictions concerning the effect of socialization emphasis, academic performance, and behavior as they relate to professional sports aspirations and beliefs. African-Americans were found to have strong aspirations for a professional sports career at a rate that was at least twice that of their white teammates (84 percent for whites and 41 percent for Blacks). Responses from African-American football players show that these players hold expectations to become a professional football player at an even higher rate than that found in the literature. In this study, 84 percent of Black respondents believed that they would have a career in professional sports as opposed to 66 percent and 44 percent cited in past studies (Hoberman 2000; Snyder 1996; Sellers and Kuperminc 1997, respectively). African-Americans

also believe in professional sports as the best means to obtaining economic success at a significantly higher rate than whites. Additionally, white/other respondents also believe in professional sports as the best route to obtaining economic success for African-American males at a significantly higher rate than they believe in professional sports as a source to economic success for themselves.

These beliefs were found to be related to the socialization process. Among Black respondents, as education centered socialization increases so does the belief in professional sports as a means to economic success. This draws upon the idea that Black parents may be pushing their sons towards academic achievement as it relates to sports eligibility. Sport socialization and parental support for athletics also affect Black respondents expectations for a professional sports career. The more sports oriented the socialization process of black respondents, the stronger their belief in the probability of a professional sports career. Additionally, black players who received parental encouragement to obtain an athletic scholarship were more likely to hold expectations of "Going Pro".

Interesting relationships were found amongst variables related to black player's professional sports outlook and academic performance and behavior. African-American men who have strong professional sports aspirations and beliefs concerning economic success through sports are more likely to have been placed on academic probation and suspension, to have been arrested, and questioned by the police for criminal involvement. As the occurrence of team

suspension and reprimand from coaches increases, so does the belief that professional sports is the best route to economic success. Indicating that players who have been suspended and reprimanded for bad behavior are more likely to believe that professional sports is the best route to economic success. For both white and black players, as their belief in sports as the best means to economic success for black men specifically (or for men in general) increases, so does the likelihood that they have been questioned by the police for criminal involvement. Finally, as the belief in sports as economic success decreases, so do the incidences of black players displaying behavioral problems.

Black players who have been on academic probation are more likely to believe in sports as the best route to economic success and have expectations for a professional sports career. Most of the black players who have been place on academic probation hold strong beliefs that they will become professional athletes. Black players also read more class assignments as their expectations for a professional sports career decreases and their belief in professional sports as the best means to economic success decreases.

Finally for African-American players, as their university classification increases, so do their belief in professional athletics as the best route to economic success for black men. Similarly, as the university classification of White players increases, so does their belief that professional sports is the best way for Black men to become successful economically. This indicates that the longer the student-athlete is on campus, whether he is Black or White, the more reinforced is this belief that professional sports is the best route for African-

American men to choose if they are to be successful economically. This creates an environment for a Back football player in which most of his peers believe that professional sports are the best route toward economic success for him, and this belief grows stronger the longer the player is on campus. This creates an environment in which the belief that football is the only chance to be successful is reinforced and accepted. The belief is further bolster by the socialization process prior to attending college. It would appear that most influences instill in the minds of the young African-American athlete that they are indeed "Going Pro". This is especially disturbing considering that at this particular university, because since 1997 only about two players per year have moved on to the professional level. Given the continued strength of the belief in the face of evidence that the likelihood of a professional sports career is quite low, one can only conclude that the previously cited theoretical explanations proposed by Hoberman and Edwards, Harrison and others is supported by this research. The intensity of socialization into sports is one that includes the convergence of school, peers, and family.

This study elucidated several crucial ideas relevant to the current research proposal. First, this study found that not only is the ideology in the literature concerning Black males and sports careers supported, these aspirations are associated with poor academic performance and behavioral problems. The post collegiate experience of African-American males who hold these types professional sports aspirations may become even more difficult due to the fact that "not having educational skills to fall back on makes the situation worse"

(Sailes 1998:33). Additionally, the socialization process of African-American

male student-athletes was found to be largely geared toward athletics over

academics. This process was furthered while in college as peers supported the

professional sports aspirations of African-American athletes. The post collegiate

experience will be affected by this intense and intentional socialization towards

sports in the areas of the loss of athletic identity and the resocialization out of

sports. This study is the basis for the interview questions and the basic direction

of the current research.

CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research refers to any kind of research that yields findings that are not the result of statistical procedures or other quantification methods (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Qualitative research includes data in the form of words, sentences, and paragraphs instead of numbers and gives insights into meanings and processes (Neuman 1997). Qualitative research aids in understanding and interpreting meaning where quantitative research aims to explain, predict, and identify causal relationships. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research emphasizes qualities, processes, and meanings that are not measured in terms of "quantity, amount, intensity or frequency" (p.8). Additionally, qualitative methods seek to uncover the socially constructed nature of reality and answer questions concerning the manner in which social experience is created and assigned meaning (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

The methods employed in qualitative research may be able to give intricate details that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods (Straus and Corbin 1990). It has been suggested that the quantitative methods that have previously been utilized in studies of the transition process that former collegiate athletes undergo may not have adequately grasped the fundamental nature of

the phenomenon (Blinde and Stratta 1991). Qualitative methods may be most useful in capturing the essence of the transition as a process rather than an event. In fact, recent qualitative studies have found trauma and stress related to the transition process that goes beyond what is found in the sport retirement literature quantitatively concerning student-athletes (Parker 1994).

This study is a reflection of the value of utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in social research. The quantitative results from a case study of Division I football players (presented in chapter 4) indicated that a disproportionate amount of African-American football players planned to have professional sports careers, and those aspirations were related to decreased academic performances and increased behavioral problems. The statistics uncovered in the study lead the researcher to ask several questions concerning the affect that these findings may have on the future success of former student-athletes. I have chosen to employ qualitative research in this current study for several important reasons: 1) the questions arising out of the quantitative findings would best be answered by uncovering the meanings and understanding the processes that interact to create such a phenomenon; 2) qualitative methods allows for the assessing of "unquantifiable facts" (Berg 2001); 3) qualitative methodology is the most efficient manner in which the transition experience can be understood as a process rather than an event. Quantitative data has uncovered the problematic nature of intensive socialization and professional sports aspirations on student-athletes, thus giving direction for future research; qualitative data will give the athletes a voice and these issues meaning. "One

might use qualitative data to illustrate or clarify quantitatively derived finding" (Stauss and Corbin 1990: 19).

SAMPLING

It has been stated that one of the major differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods is the sampling procedures utilized (Patton 1990). In qualitative methods there are no concrete rules like those that exist in quantitative methods (Patton 1990). Whereas in quantitative methods, relatively large and randomly selected samples are necessary for statistical analysis, qualitative research focuses comprehensively on smaller samples. The four types of sampling that may be utilized in the field or in qualitative research are quota samples, snowball samples, deviant cases, and purposive samples. In this case, the researcher utilized both purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling includes selecting a sample that the researcher believes will yield the most "comprehensive understanding of your study" (Babbie 1995: 287). Snowballing occurs when a few relevant subjects are identified and the sample expands through referrals. For the purpose of this research, former student-athletes from Division I Universities who are African-American and male were identified and asked to participate. Due to the past research on student-athletes and personal connections as a former student-athlete, referrals drawn from these connections aided in identifying additional participants and gaining the trust of those respondents. Interviews were conducted with both athletes who now play in professional leagues, and those who have retired from sports. Interviewing

professional athletes may create similar difficulties as studying elites. Hartz

suggests (1993) that studying elites is difficult because they have boundaries

between themselves and other members of society. Additionally, studying elites

(who are defined as people in positions of both formal and informal power) is

difficult because they are rare and unlikely to participate (Neuman 1997).

Professional athletes are very protective of their privacy due to the media's

hunger for information related to their personal and professional lives. For this

reason, it is essential that a guide or inside connection 'vouch' for the researcher.

Several contacts were used as guides and inside connections. Neumann (1997)

maintains that "social contacts and connections are essential for gaining access

and establishing trust" and the "researchers personal background….is an

important resource" when studying elites (p.338). Both the connections and

background of the researcher that have been established as participant in the

athletic world, a tutor and mentor in the athletic department, a sister to a

professional athlete, along with other personal contacs aided in gaining access to

relevant subjects and earning their trust.

INTERVIEWING

This research utilized in-depth interviews as the data collection technique.

According to Kvale (1991) interviewing may be the most effective and powerful

method for obtaining a true understanding of another person's experience. The

most valuable means of gathering information about a person is through face-to-

face interaction. Interviewing has been explained as "one of the most common

and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings"
(Fontana and Frey 2000: 645). As asserted by Berg (1995), interviewing is a
particularly effective data collection method for particular types of research
questions and for addressing certain forms of assumptions. In this case, the past
findings and literature highlights a need to garner rich and meaningful information
about motives, thoughts, feelings and attitudes which will be uncovered most
accurately and effectively thorough in-depth interviewing of former student-
athletes.

There are several advantages of interview studies which include the
following: 1) flexibility, which allows the interviewer to probe for more specific
answers and elaboration; 2) nonverbal behavior can be observed and assessed;
and 3) spontaneous answers can be recorded, the respondent doesn't have time
to think about 'right' or 'wrong' answers (Bailey 1978). There are three major
interview structures (Babbie 1995; Denzin 1978; Gorden 1987; Nieswiadomy
1993). The three major categories of interviewing techniques have been
identified as standardized, unstandardized, and semi standardized or structured,
unstructured, or semi structured (Berg 1995; Fontanna and Frey 2000). These
categories are distinguished by the level of flexibility in questioning that the
researcher desires. The standardized or structured is the least flexible of the
three and uses predistinguished questions or "formally structured schedule of
interview questions" (Berg 1995: 31). The unstandardized or unstructured
interview will have no questions written prior to the interview and are informal.
This type of interview is typical of field research and participant observation. The

interviewer must "develop, adapt and generate questions…appropriate to the given situation and the central purpose of the investigation" (Berg 1995: 32). The method of interviewing in investigating the transition process of former student-athletes is semi standardized or semi structured interviews. Semi structured interviews allow some flexibility in order to garner unanticipated responses and deep investigation of subjective areas of the respondents mind, however, the researcher is still certain to address relevant questions and topics (Baily 1978). Semi structured interviews consist of some predetermined questions and topics that are asked of each respondent in an organized and consistent manner; yet the interviewer is allowed the freedom to digress (Berg 1995). Specifically, "the interviewers are permitted (in fact expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardized questions" (Berg 1995: 33).

Some considerations that a researcher involved in semi structured interviewing are similar to those of structured interviewing. The standardized or preestablished questions must be devised in familiar words to those that are being interviewed in order to approach the world from the respondents' perspective. Another skill that is necessary is probing. Probes are used to encourage the respondent to answer more fully and to elaborate on relevant points. Bailey (1978) suggests several neutral probes such as repeating the question and answer, indicating understanding and interest, utilizing silence and pausing, and asking a neutral question. Questions specific probes can also be used to exhaust all possible responses.

The predetermined questions and topics that have been established as essential to this investigation from past findings and a thorough review of the literature are outlined in an interview guide or interview schedule. The interview guide or schedule should provide the best opportunity to reap complete and accurate communication of ideas from both the researcher and the respondent (Cannel and Kahn 1968). Themes from the literature, findings from the related quantitative study, and guidance obtained from theory allowed for the development of an effective interview schedule with several predetermined topics. As suggested by Berg (1995), essential questions will be addressed under each broad subject area, probing questions are unstructured and will occur throughout the interview, and the interview will begin with a throwaway question, describe yourself in ten words or less, to establish rapport. I also asked the respondents a few demographic questions, such as age and marital status. The interviews were audio taped with permission of the respondents and transcribed for data analysis. The interview guide with predetermined topics and subject areas also allowed for ease of coding and the data analysis. The interview guide is included in Appendix A.

CODING AND DATA ANALYSIS

The interview guide also aided in organizing the data for analysis and coding. The questions provided large of categories of responses. Out of those categories, themes emerged. By interviewing twenty African-American male athletes who have competed in a revenue-generating sport at major universities

all over the country, many of the themes found in the literature as well as new ideas emerged. The interviews ranged from one hour to five hours, with average interview lasting around two and a half hours, and were transcribed and analyzed by the researcher.

During transcription and coding, several themes emerged under five major categories. The major categories under which these themes emerged are as follows: 1) socialization into athletics 2) the role of sports in the African-American community 3) salience of the athletic identity 4) collegiate experience 5) professional sports aspirations and experiences in professional sports 6) career maturity and 7) retirement and the transition out of the role of athlete. These themes will be presented in the form of rich narratives. Key words were identified under each category to find common themes amoung the responses. For example, under the category of sports in the African-American community several athletes discussed sports as a 'way out.' From those key words the theme of sports as a golden opportunity in the African-American community emerged.

The data in this study is composed of direct quotes articulated by the respondents that will be tied into the theoretical framework and themes found in the literature. Additionally, several themes that are not emphasized in the current literature emerged and are presented. Figure II shows the major categories and the themes that were found under those categories.

Figure II: Major Categories and Themes

<div align="right">Associated Themes</div>

Socialization:	Family
	Role models
	Community/Neighborhood
	Mass Media
Role Sports in the African-American Community:	Golden Opportunity/Way out
	Overly Emphasized
	Distraction from Other worthy Goals
	Means of Development
Salience of the Athletic Identity:	Athletics in Self Definition
	Athletics in Others Definition of Oneself
Collegiate Experience:	Treatment
	Educational Development
	Racism
	View of Big-Time College Athletics
Professional Sports Aspirations and Experiences:	Aspirations
	View of unrealistic nature of Pro sports aspirations
	Post-Collegiate Sports Experiences
Career Maturity:	Preparation during College
	Post-Collegiate experiences
Retirement and Transition out of Sports:	Transitions

CHAPTER VI

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This study examined the post-collegiate experiences of African-American male athletes from a sociological perspective by emphasizing societal processes and pressures influencing this group. Members of this group have been proven to overemphasize sport as a possible career and face an extraordinary set of circumstances concerning the importance of athletics in their lives from early childhood socialization into adulthood. Following is a presentation of the data in the form of rich narratives and direct quotes, guided by the major categories and associated themes.

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The athletes interviewed ranged from ages 22 to 47. All participants were African-American and had exhausted their eligibility at major Division I institutions. They were either playing sports professionally, holding jobs in other professions, training for possible sports careers, or unemployed. Table seven shows relevant background and demographic information about the participants.

Pseudonyms were assigned in order to insure the confidentiality of the

respondents and to allow for continuity of information throughout the study.

TABLE VII
PARTICIPANT BACKGROND INFORMATION

Participant	Sport	Age began playing sports	Age	Parents marital status	Occupation	Years in Pro Sports	Degree
Adam	Football	7	27	married	Arena League Football	6 in *AFL I	Computer science
Brad	Football	6	23	Single-mother	NFL Football	1 in **NFL	Hotel and Restaurant
Calvin	Football	10	22	Married	Unemployed	0	Hotel and Restaurant
Devin	Football	8	25	Single-mother	Unemployed	3 in NFL	Business Adm.
Eddy	Basketball	5	34	Single-mother	Business sales Manager	0	Criminal Justice
Fred	Football	10	23	Married, father deceased	Agility Trainer	6 months in NFL	Business
Gavin	Football	5	22	Married	Unemployed	0	Education
Hubert	Football	14	26	Married, father deceased	Mortgage Broker	1 ***NFLE; 1.5 in NFL	Journalism
Ivan	Football	6	34	Married	Manager	1inCFL, 1 in NFLE, 7in AFL I	Exercise and Sport Science
Jack	Basketball	8	31	Single-mother	Advertising and Sales	0	None
Kevin	Football	14	27	Single-grandmother	AFL football	4 in NFL, 1 in AFL	None
Lenny	Football	12	31	married	Firefighter	3 in NFL, 1 in**** CFL	Sociology
Matt	Football	4	27	Single-mother	Mortgage loan officer	1 in AFL	Fine Arts
Nate	football	12	26	married	College Football Coach	2 in NFLE	Sports Administration
Oliver	football	4	26	married	Police Officer	0	Sociology
Perry	football	9	36	Single-mother	Firefighter	Less than 1 in NFL	Social Work
Quinton	basketball	10	45	married	Firefighter/ Entrepreneur	Harlem Globtrotters, Europe	#M/D
Richard	football	10	47	Single-mother	Firefighter	2 in NFL	Sociology
Steve	football	8	33	married	Fire rescuer	0	Accounting
Tevin	football	8	33	Single-mother	Firefighter	5 in NFL/NFLE	Criminal Justice

* Arena Football League **National Football League ***National Football League Europe
**** Canadian Football League
#Missing Data

As shown above, half of the respondents grew up two parent homes, with two of the respondent losing their fathers at a young age. Sixteen of the twenty participants began playing organized sports seriously at ten years of age or younger. Most had some professional sports experience, whether in the semi-professional leagues such as Arena Football or the Canadian League, developmental leagues such as National Football League-Europe or professional leagues such as the National Football League. Although not feature on Table VI, many respondents have siblings who have played collegiate and professional athletics and five had parents who had played sports in college. Contrary to national statistics and problems outlined in the literature only two of the twenty participants did not hold degrees. Additionally, many of the former student-athletes have careers. This may seem to discredit the literature concerning the poor career maturation of student-athletes, but upon deeper analysis this is not so.

SOCIALIZATION

It is during the socialization process that many of the athletes developed their salient athletic identities, professional sports aspiration, and learn the importance of sports in the African-American community. Additionally, the socialization process of African-American males has been shown to be intentionally and intensively geared toward athletics and other forms of

entertainment. Many of the respondents expressed ideas that evidence the early, intentional, and intensive socialization into sports.

In the social imitation theory, individuals are seen as passive in the socialization process and learn by observing and modeling the behaviors, and perceived values, beliefs, and norms of the socializing agents such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers, coaches, television personalities, and/or fictional characters (McPherson et al, 1989). The respondents in this study observed the overrepresentation of African-American athletes in sports and vicariously learn that sports produces positive consequences and opens opportunities that were otherwise blocked, such as college scholarships and million dollar earning potential. Additionally, the social learning theory can be used to understand the acquisition of athletic roles in minority group socialization. Three elements of the socialization process are thought to converge to socialize minority groups toward athletics. Those three elements are personal attributes, socializing agents, and the socializing environment. The following presentation of findings under the category of socialization is organized around four major themes that emerged during the course of interviewing. Those themes are family, role models, community/neighborhood, and the mass media.

Family. Sports sociologist note that family, including parents and siblings, is the earliest and most influential socializing agent into sports participation. Several

respondents expressed clear emphasis on athletics in both their immediate

family, as well as in their extended family. Adam, a 27 year old Arena League

football player, had parents that played sports in college, as well as two brothers

who also received college scholarships in football. Socialization into sports by his

parents is evidenced as he described his parent's role in his athletic

development. As with many of the parents, sports was seen as an opportunity for

college scholarships,

> I mean as far as I can remember, every game or meet whatever it is they
> were there. Of course they played sports so they understand the
> importance of that… Um, I think that they probably, I mean it was real
> important to them. Both of them played sports in college and so you know
> they understood that that could pay my way through school so of course,
> sports, they a big thing in my family.

Eddy, whose brother played professional baseball and sister was an All-

American in college track and field, expressed his parent's expectations for

sports participation which also involved viewing sports as an opportunity to

attend college,

> ….Ah…it was just always understood that we were gonna play sports, I
> mean, we looked forward to it, they (parents) looked forward to it. It
> wasn't that they pushed us, it's that it was what we did…. Yeah, we
> definitely knew we had to go to college and sports was the easiest way for
> us. We knew that we had to have the degree and sports was the obvious
> way for us to do that.

Ivan also discussed his parents' ideas concerning sports as means to pay

for a college education,

> Yeah, I mean they saw it as an opportunity, because to get scholarships and uh, they saw my talents as an opportunity to get a scholarship.

Steve's father played collegiate basketball and was very involved in his son's athletic development. He worked with Steve on a daily basis to sharpen his athletic skills,

> My dad played college basketball, so he had already fueled that fire inside me so he was um, he did a lot of one on ones. Ya know, I mean he….was at every game so ya know he'd tell me what I did wrong and what I need to improve… but he was actually the dad slash coach… you know how people are living out their dreams through their kids and I pretty much felt that he was more or less trying to do that…

When asked if his father pushed him so hard because he saw sports as an opportunity for future success he answered that his Dad definitely saw sports as a way to pay for his college education. Calvin expressed similar emphasis on athletics by his father who spent a tremendous amount of time geared toward athletics with his sons. This respondent also had an older brother who was a standout in Division I football. He discussed his father's tutorial role in his athletic development,

> And you know, like after games whatever we did wrong, my dad would go over it with us at the house. Ya know, we just watch games together and kinda watch our position and see what we could learn and try to put it into our play and see if we could use it to best benefit us.

Calvin also discussed sports in his extended family,

> …my family, we really grew up playing sports so that's like one way that we, uh, start conversations just talk about sports and ya know compare different players. Talk about our dreams that everybody have with the sports and how they wanna make it to the NFL and how they wanna have they family live with them and have big houses and big cars, things like that.

His cousin, Fred, a 23 year old physical trainer who is hoping to play in the NFL, expressed a similar sentiment concerning the importance of sports in their family,

> coming up in my family, we grew up as competitors, they always made us get together to play the games. We always played out to my Grandma house on Sunday after church, we did everything, we played football in the front yard…. That type of competitive nature has always been in our family.

He also discussed ideas concerning sports as an opportunity for a college scholarship or possible career in his immediate family,

> …it was like, well my kid is a good athlete and as a result of him being a good athlete he is liable to get a scholarship… Yeah, I mean, cuz my middle brother went to (a major university) so we went through the same recruiting process, we went on four or five visits so I mean, after he did it, it was understood that Fred is gone do it too. It motivated me to do the same thing, I'm gone get recruited …..but he really set a pace for me as far as going to play ball.

His brother, Hubert, expressed the type of pressure that this sports oriented family has placed on him as he moved through each stage of athletic development. He also realized that his success has set a pattern or standard in his family concerning sports achievement, producing a sense of strain:

> I felt the pressure from my family as well because when I started to be successful in high school and college recruiters started coming out to see

me um the pressure came from my family too because there was a standard set by our family or whatever but as a result of society standards. So if we was successful then it was given that we was going to college, if we was going to college, it was given that we was going to the pros. So that standard was set really by my family as well as society, but it was set by my family by society.

Oliver expressed feeling pressured by his extended family to 'make it' in sports. Both his parents played sports in college, so his immediate family was "sport oriented," however most of the pressure came from cousins, aunts and uncles,

From family members stating well you gotta make it, and mad if you didn't make it. From certain forms or fashion its like they're hoping that you do make it for your personal gain and your personal accomplishments, but however they know the lavish lifestyle I guess that comes along with that or uh ya know one day sign a big contract where the family would be taken care of so.. and that's not particularly coming from inside of my household, but ya know coming from other cousins, and uncles and things of that nature…

Kevin expressed his grandmother's, who was his primary care-giver, and his aunt's hands on role as advisors in his sports career decision making as well as the expressed importance of sports in his family life,

Oh yeah my grandmother and my aunt, they were always at my games and they were the ones who made my decision to attend OSU when I had numerous colleges coming to my home and just recruiting me…. It's really important to me to a certain extent and it's important to my family.

While most respondents did not express that they were forced or pushed into playing sports, all but two of the respondents received parental support for athletics. This support includes attending games and practices, encouraging

sports as an opportunity for success, and being involved in sports decision making. As found in my previous studies, this type of support can be detrimental to their academic success as well as lead to an unrealistic expectation to play on the professional level (Beamon 2004, 2005).

Role Modeling. Significant in the socialization process is role modeling. As discussed in the social learning theory, modeling and observing the behavior of others is essential in the acquisition of roles during the socialization process. Several studies examined in the literature discuss the tendency for African-American males to have African-American athletes as their role models (Drummond et al 1999, Assibey-Mensah 1997, Johnson 1991, Anderson 1990). This type of modeling and lack of African-American role models beyond sports has been correlated with the overrepresentation of African-American males in several sports, as well as leading to the obsessive pursuit of sports fame (Sailes 1998, Edwards 1988). When asked to identify a role model outside of their mother and father, fourteen of the twenty respondents identified sports figures as role models. The six other respondents either did not identify a role model or identified another family member such as cousins, uncles, or grandfathers. Several respondents identified professional athletes that they knew only through the media as their role models. For example, several named Dallas Cowboys as their role models, as Ivan and Tevin stated:

> Uh, I would say Roger Starbach, um, Drew Pearson and other Dallas Cowboys

> My role models growing up were mainly sports figures, uh I grew up watching the old Dallas Cowboys, Tony Dorsett, Drew Pearson, and Everson Walls and those guys, ya know uh my first idol being Tony Dorsett number 33 for the Dallas cowboys.

Others named famous athletes such as Ronnie Lott, Everson Walls, Michael Jordan, Dr. J, or Magic Johnson, but more significantly, many of the respondents had athletic role models who were family members or grew up in the same neighborhood. For these respondents, sports as a means to success becomes even more salient and tangible, as their role models are people that they know. This also supports the idea of family and neighborhood as socializing agents for African-American young men into athletics. For example, Adam identified his role model as a high school student that lived on his block,

> The guy that lived down the street…. At the time I was in elementary, or middle school and he was the big high school basketball player so he had the women and he was always in the newspaper.

Others named family members both siblings and extended family members such as uncles and cousins. Calvin stated that he looked up to his brother, but also named other professional athletes as his role models:

> My oldest brother, I would give him props he was, uh, a pretty good athlete. Growing up all my life until now, I never really did get really my own recognition. I was always known as my brother's younger brother. …And ya know, I like Warren Sapp, Magic Johnson ya know players like

that. Ya know I was young with the braids, so every body wanted to be like Warren Sapp.

Matt also identified his older brother as his primary role model,

Probably my brother, A***, my brother that's a year older than me is probably sports wise, ya know I always wanted to do what he done or be like he was cuz he was always the best at everything so…..

Fred identified his uncle as a role model in his very athletic family and

credits him for getting the he, his brothers, and cousins involved in sports:

It was my Uncle William, he went to (a major university) and then he got recruited and he went to uh, probably he should have played in the NFL but he didn't, but a lot of that, he really started us out playing sports like that at our grandma's house.

Gavin and Eddy modeled cousins that played sports:

Um, my cousin that played professional football, and um my cousin really.

Uh, my older cousin, ya know when I was an adolescent it was my older cousin. He played basketball in high school, played football…. He was a big role model.

Eddy also had coaches as role models. It was clear when talking to him that his

coaches had influenced him and took the role of a father figure after the divorce

oh his parents. Although these role models were not sports figures, they are

sports related models who encourage athletic achievement.

At that time my coaches didn't play as important roles as they would have later on when I was fifteen through twenty-two. Yeah, my dad left when I was fourteen so at that point, yeah my male role model, my father figure was my coaches from then on.

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Several other athletes identified coaches as their role models. Many mention race as significant, with African-American coaches being constructive, positive, and influential in their lives. This goes along with the contemporary debate concerning the need for more African-Americans in leadership positions. Eddy elaborates on this idea,

> For me one of the amazing things that I had, black men that were my coaches from when I was fifteen, at junior high, high school, at the Academy the coach was black and when I went to (college) the coach was black. All of those men were just as concerned about me off the court as they were on the court, which is rare. I think that was unique to some of the stories I hear out there. My very last year in college, ya know, coincidence or not, I had a different coach, a white coach for the first time in my basketball career and ya know for the first time I was on the other side of my coaches good grace sort of.

Community/Neighborhood. Several references were made to community and neighborhoods that were significant to socialization into athletics. Many of the respondents lived in predominately African-American neighborhoods and went to neighborhood schools that were widely known for producing successful athletes. As an agent of socialization, community or neighborhood has affected many individuals in this study by placing them with peers that have the same aspirations for professional sports careers and allowing them to vicariously model successful athletes that they grew up with. Eddy discusses his neighborhood,

> My next door neighbor was the first black quarterback at (a major university), and we played sports depending on what season it was. We had probably 12 guys in the same age range and we played every sport, every day, and you were gonna play a sport, you were gonna go to college, and that's what you were gonna do, you were gonna go pro, ya know….. I

> mean, in any neighborhood where something is, for one you gotta think about Texas, you gotta think about football. I knew how to run a five-n-out when I was five years old and when you are playing football in Texas ya know Odessa Permian, Carter Cowboys, you talking about what everyone does in Texas.

The effect of this type of intense socialization toward athletics is easily noted as he goes on to discuss his views about his professional sports aspirations. When asked why he was so sure that he would play professional sports he makes another strong reference to his neighborhood,

> Its one thing to see people on TV but like when you walk outside and you can see people that are doing something, that affects your life a whole lot more. Especially when I was growing up. You knew Everson Walls at church, cornerback for the cowboys, you knew Dan Kane next door, SMU quarterback, you knew my cousin Austral played pro football. I mean yeah that was an opportunity to get out to make something, to go to college to play pro, cuz ya know….It was not something that was a question when I was growing up. I mean this was real, a real opportunity. I mean, you looked around the neighborhood and these were people who have made it you can talk to them and touch them. I couldn't say that I could look around my neighborhood and see ya know any wealthy people that had done anything else.

Many of the respondents who grew up in these sport oriented neighborhoods grew up playing sports together on neighborhood little league teams. They ran nationally competitive track together in the summers, played Pop Warner football on nationally ranked teams in the fall, and played baseball together in the spring. Matt and Eddy both make reference to the fact that the question was never whether you would play professionally, but what sport you

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would play. Matt discusses his desire to play professionally that began at a very

young age:

> Whether it be football, baseball, ya know running track, or whatever. Every since elementary school, ya know even when teachers ask what do see yourself I mean it's always been in the pros somewhere. Every since then, I never could really see myself really doing anything else.

Coaches at the neighborhood schools are as notable as college coaches, and held in high esteem for their success on the field as well sending several athletes to Division I Universities on athletics scholarships. Four other respondents who are several years younger, grew up in the same neighborhood as Eddy, and discuss sports in the neighborhood schools. Matt recounts the atmosphere at one of these schools,

> Ya know, we had a coach in high school that was putting nineteen, twenty people in college every year so it was kinda a given as far as that (getting a scholarship) but… Well I mean coming from my school it was, it was, and being in Texas a football state, basically and coming from (his high school), that's (going pro) what everybody expected you to do, especially if you the star on that team.

Oliver grew up in the same neighborhood and discusses sports at the same high school. He had an injury and did not play his entire senior season and a large portion of his junior season. However, he still received a full scholarship to a major Division I university. When asked how he managed this feat, he credited all the great athletes that the high school had produced and his coaches influence with universities. Getting a scholarship he said was "Well, ya

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know…the high school that I went to I was kinda systematic, we all got scholarships." This type of neighborhood environment puts extreme pressure on athletes to succeed and to continue playing. Ivan discussed the pressure that they felt,

> A lot of people (in my neighborhood) expected me to go to the NFL so I did feel a lot of pressure.

Matt, who had been a high school and college stand-out, had always been told by coaches, family, and peers that he would definitely play professionally. This was reinforced by his observation of several athletes from his high school moving on to the professional ranks. He discusses the pressure that he felt,

> And to be the star on a high school football team that ya know, you're expected to at least go to the pros or get a shot at the pros….it was just a given that I'd have a shot at least at making the pros. And I knew that so I felt pressured to succeed at that. Once everybody keep telling you all your life ya know 'you gone make it to the pros' or 'what team you wanna play for' you kinda start believing that.

It does not seem to matter if the area is urban or rural. Tevin, did not grow up in the urban areas that the other respondents discussed, but in a rural area in the same state. The area was also predominately African-American, but was hundreds of miles from any large city. He discussed feeling the same pressure to play and succeed at athletics that was endemic in his community, "playing sports in a small country town was like a ritual, you almost had to." Hubert also grew up in a smaller city in another state. The attitudes in his community also centered

around sports and entertainment as viable avenues to success, "from where I grew up…sports or entertainment had to be my vehicle to get out of (the state)."

The encouragement to participate in athletics given by members of these predominately African-American communities is discussed by many of the respondents. Harris (1994) identifies the black community as a socializing agent pushing young African-American males to aspire toward athletic goals. Additionally, he found that encouragement often comes from a non parent member of the community such as teachers and coaches, which is referenced by several respondents. Also in these sport oriented communities, professional sports aspirations are not only encouraged but accepted and reinforced by peers and coaches. This results in pressure to pursue athletics and to be successful.

Media. The media is one of the strongest agents of socialization in contemporary society, which serves as way for vicarious learning and modeling behavior. For African-American children, the media plays an especially significant role in the sports socialization process due to the lack of visible role models outside of athletics and entertainment in the media, as well as in life. Accordingly, most of the respondents named sports figures as their role models, and some referenced a lack of successful people in their neighborhoods outside of athletes and rappers. The media supplied African-American children with sensationalized images of African-American athletes, and feeds the frenzy of professional

athletics as the most viable means toward economic success. Richard discussed

the romanticized images of professional athletes that are portrayed in the media

> …because every time you look around you know everybody you see on
> TV or all the so-called heroes are athletes. And you know, you have these
> shows and their showing off their you know fifteen thousand square foot
> mansion you know the five or six cars in the driveway and all that kinda
> stuff.

Many of the respondents noted this idea and credited the overemphasis

professional athletics in the African-American community to the mass media.

Hubert discussed African-American males as going through brainwashing and

conditioning towards athletic and entertainment related success throughout his

three hour interview. Here he discusses the media's role in that conditioning,

> That's all we see on TV is black males being athletes or rappers or
> entertainers. So I think as a result, we condition ourselves to just be
> that….. But that's from television. When I grew up the only successful
> black people we saw on TV. was the Cosby's, a doctor and a lawyer.
> Everybody else, I saw rappers and singers, ya know you saw a preacher or
> whatever…

When asked why he was so certain of his that he would play football

professionally, Kevin also made reference to the media's portrayal of African-

American athletes. He stated "TV. Television. Ya know TV make you think that,

ya know, that it's so easy that you can make it." Tevin blames the media's

sensationalized depiction of the lifestyles of professional athletes for African-

Americans overemphasis on athletic achievement,

You cut on the TV all you see is hip hop, sports, I think the media is to blame for it, I don't think we, our parents don't push it you know kids wanna grow up and be like Kobe, Shaq, Michael Jordan ya now. It's just everywhere, ya know, you see these guys on commercials with they big shoe contracts and endorsement deals and commercials ya know, it's just in your face. So I don't think we as a black community encourage it, the kids see all this, the big money ya know, the lifestyles, the cars, the bling, the clubs, the women, the drinking and stuff ya know and they think they wanna attain, to achieve that….the kids see it as a means to an end, get in sports to get those things.

Summary. Sport sociologist have noted the major sports socializing agents as family, peers, schools, community and the mass media (Snyder and Spreitzer 1978). In the case of the respondents of this study, most of these agents have been instrumental to their overemphasis on athletics. The respondents have families that have both passively and overtly pushed toward athletics, as well as peer groups and neighborhoods that reinforce media stereotypes. All of these factors influence their attitudes toward education, aspirations and goals for the future, as well as the salience of the athletic identity. In my previous quantitative study, a group of African-American male collegiate student-athletes were found to have socialization processes that emphasized athletics significantly more than academics (Beamon and Bell 2005). This qualitative data provides further explanation of previous findings, by not only confirming them, but elaborating on how ubiquitous athletics is in the lives this group.

THE ROLE SPORTS IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

There two opposing perspectives of concerning sport participation in the African-American community. The first perspective is that sports are a 'golden opportunity, 'or a way out of less desirable economic and social situations. Sports, from this perspective become a manner to circumvent the many perceived and existent barriers to success for African-American males. The opposing view is that the overemphasis on sports amongst African-American males is, in fact, one of those barriers that prevent the social and economic mobility of the group. From this perspective, African-American men are mesmerized by the lure of sports fame and fortune, while being distracted form other occupations that hold far greater promise for economic mobility and escalation of social status. Respondents in this study hold both of these divergent views concerning the role of athletics in the African-American community. The themes emerging under this category are the idea that sports are a golden opportunity/way out, sports are overly emphasized in the African-American community, sports are a distraction from other worthy goals for African-American youth, and sports are a means to developing skills and character.

Golden Opportunity/ Way Out. Several respondents discussed sports as a "way out" or a way to keep young African-American males out of the dangers of their

communities. Adam' view of sports as a "golden opportunity" included both of

these perspectives,

> I mean, it's a good thing of course. More because depending on where you
> are from, sports can lower the crime rate by far in some places. I mean it's
> a lot of things that sports can do. I'm just speaking of things of where I'm
> from, around my area sports was keeping kids off the streets… I mean if
> you look at some of the rough parts of any city, the people are black….,
> and so when you are around one of those types of atmospheres then its
> only two things that you really can be. I mean its either, I mean its more
> that you can be, but I guess there's, well one of the main ways you see
> yourself getting out is through sports or ya know rap or something or
> entertaining somehow. I guess the easiest way is through sports.

Matt discusses sports in a similar fashion, but adds the pro-social values learned

from athletic participation,

> Sports has affects in every part of your life, teamwork, ya know, its
> teaching you how to be positive, make a positive out of a negative
> situations and how you have to work to be where you wanna be. Even in
> job interviews I pull that up as the interviews go on. So ya know I think it
> has a very positive affect on kids that was raised in sports.

Others, like Devin who stated "I think everybody sees it as a way out," view

sports as the best, if not the only, manner in which to attend college and achieve

success. Fred emphasized the athletic scholarships as one of the beneficial

results of African-American men in athletics. When asked what he felt the role of

sports in the African-American community he gave the following response,

> It's a way to get out of whatever type of position you in…. it definitely is
> a way to get ahead. It definitely is a way to pay, if you cannot afford to
> pay for a four year college to uh get your college paid for and to get help
> while you doing it so that's a great thing. So yeah we emphasize sports,
> but we have good reason of doing it.

Many other respondents held this view of sports as a vehicle for getting

themselves and their families out of their current situations and attending college.

Brad also held this belief

> Growing up like, sports was kinda used for guys, it was a way to get out of
> our neighborhood. Or a way to ya know take care of our family. But I
> always kinda knew that sports would be a good ticket if I wasn't
> academically able to go to college. So, it's a pretty good tool that's used in
> the black neighborhood and I don't really see nothing wrong with.

Nate and Oliver echoed this sentiment,

> Every body feels that that's their way of getting out. Ya know what I'm
> saying. Or that's their easy way to get out. They'll say hey all I gotta do is
> go play and I'll get out of my situation or I'll get my parents out of my
> situation ya know things of that nature.

> In the community that I grew up in, the way to get out, it was stressed take
> your God given talents as an athlete and use them as tools to get out.

The perspective was shared and expressed by Eddy who considered nothing

wrong with overemphasizing sports in the African-American community because

he felt it was one of the few real opportunities that African-Americans possess,

> Well, yes, I think we overemphasize it but I think that if you look around
> at opportunity in the black neighborhood, uh that's an opportunity…in
> some neighborhoods, in some ethnicities in some places, where whole
> families are CPAs. They go to college and get their CPAs and inherit their
> family's clients. For us, our success has been sports, military, clergy.
> Become a preacher, join the military so you can get a good job or get a
> college scholarship so you can try to go pro or and become a coach later.

Likewise Kevin views sports as an opportunity in a situation where there are few and unequal opportunities for African-Americans,

> Yes of course, I mean, I mean a huge opportunity because there's not too many (opportunities). I used football as an opportunity to go to college…, I know my family didn't have that type of money to pay for ya know school and attending college like that for four or five years so I looked at football as an opportunity to get a free education and get my school paid for.

Kevin goes on to discuss why he supports the continued endorsement of sports for African-Americans,

> Athletics is such a gateway to getting yourself out of poverty. Being able to go and take care of your family, not having to break your back working dead end jobs that ain't going nowhere. I'm telling you athletics is a gateway in the black community that can take you places and let you meet people that you had no idea that you would ever meet. I will always support.

Overly Emphasized. Conversely, many respondents perceived athletics as emphasized excessively in the African-American community. Those with this view, noted that sports are a detrimental to the development of African-Americans in other areas. Hubert noted that importance of citizenship and entrepreneurship are secondary to athletic achievement,

> We overemphasize the role of sports and then we underemphasize just being a citizen, being a businessman. Like I'm just now starting to come into my own and um as a businessman. I'm starting to see myself as being able to be successful in business and um just like any other races successful in business.

Jack stated that he had recently had this discussion with a group of African-American men, and adds to this idea by stating that sports had hindered his development,

> …its kinda funny you bring that up, we been talking about this ….its a lot of things that I've touched on a lot of things that I've run across in everyday life and its like if I'd just paid a little bit more attention to that I'd be that much better off. As far as the piano goes, I might be able to play this song right here, but I didn't pursue it as hard as I pursued sports and because sports was what every body around me thought was popular. It wasn't popular to play in the band or be in the drama club or be able to draw or do something other than sports, sports is just all you were good at….

He goes on to discuss the importance of athletics success amongst African-Americans as opposed to the importance of academic success,

> …you get more credit for getting seventeen points per game than you do for getting a 3.8 on your report card in any black community. If I had won a national championship people would still talk about me, you getting your doctorate, they'll forget that next week.

Lenny also stressed that African-Americans overemphasize sports, and he tries to dissuade the coming generation from continuing this manner of thinking,

> I really, truly believe we do overemphasize sports in our community, and every time I get a chance to talk to athletes I often tell them that they should, that sports is secondary or even third to a lot of things… its not really something we really have to spend a lot of time trying to do and that we should focus more on education and other areas that we need to develop in out life and, and make uh perfect in our lives other than sports. I really do think that we overemphasize sports.

Oliver, a police officer in an inner-city area, takes the same stand and tries to influence the young African-American males that he comes into contact with on the job,

> …even on my job now where I have kids that are bad or whatever and I try to talk to 'em I ask them what are you gone be, its either I'ma play football or basketball or either I'ma be a rapper and so when you try to point out to 'em its okay to get an education and be smart. I don't think that in the black community now, I don't think that it's really emphasized on education. It's just more glorified from what we see most black young people being and that's a rapper or that's a sports entertainer of some fashion. Education is not really ya know just not the goal and the focus.

Steve views this push toward athletics as damaging to the psyche of young African-American males,

> ….I mean growing up I mean in town where people where…they pushed, they made them play sports, made um get out there….its detrimental toward a lot of the kids….as far as their psyche, and like me I played college football so they put me up on a pedestal.

Distraction. While the respondents were divided on whether sports was a golden opportunity or overly emphasized in the African-American community, most agreed that sports can be a distraction from other worthy goals. Even respondents who praised sports as a 'way out' agreed that they are a distraction. For example, Matt felt that sports are beneficial to the African-American community in that they built values and provided a 'way out.' However when asked if athletics could distract African-American children from succeeding in other avenues, he draws upon his own experience concerning his art skills,

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> Um… I mean if you put too much emphasis on just one particular talent that you may have then your other talents may fall to the side a little bit, but I mean like I said I couldn't see it any other way. People knew I could draw and had artistic talent, creative talent I just, I just couldn't see that. I started out playing sports since four, I can't even remember anything else at four years old, but I know I played sports at four….

Nate, who also saw sports as positive in the community statement reverberates the sentiment that sports can be a distraction to success in other areas, including academics,

> I think it can due to the times. Ya know, as many millionaires there are walking the face of the earth due to sports, then that's what black kids see right now, they see, ya know, the successes that they're having actually not reading, actually not writing a paper, actually not doing math work, things of that nature, just going out on the field and play, it can be a distraction.

Many other respondents took a strong stance viewing sports as a diverting much needed time and attention to developing other social, academic, and cultural aspects of personal growth. Calvin felt that excessive amounts of time go into pursuing athletic achievement to the detriment of academic attainment,

> I think it could to the fact that you might spend all your time wanting to go to the NFL and so you miss out on your academic side. The NFL is not guarantee so you need a plan B, in case the NFL or whatever sport don't work for you. I think at times it could distract you, getting caught up in the hype.

Hubert continues to see this overemphasis of sports as a problem that is promoted in the media and in society in general,

Yes it does. For the simple fact that no one else mentions other things, and if you mention other things, then your not frown upon, kinda like you're looked at weird, kinda like you're not with the program or something. So I think maybe if society can help be mentors young black males to see themselves as more…

Jack agrees that other paths toward success are not available in most African-American communities,

I do think so, I do I can understand how a lot of us end up in sport because its not, those other avenues aren't provided. I was fortunate enough to be in the gifted and talented program, where I was introduced to some of those things, but certain areas they just don't have that, that's they really have.

Like Matt, Lenny views athletics as limiting his own success by stifling other talents. He felt that only his athletic talents were cultivated and had other areas been sharpened he could have been very successful utilizing those skills,

Ah most definitely because it limits your mind because you're not, you're not developing other areas that you probably, I mean I believe I could have been an excellent architect because I still do some designing for myself. So I feel like if I didn't have sports in my life, I could have sharpened that area. So it definitely limits especially when you get to a level where you say 'well I can really see where this could be promising to me and it can be beneficial to me.' It kinda over takes your mindset and that's the only thing you really think about really. Yeah it can really lessen your abilities in other areas.

Quinton also discusses sports as hindering the development of other useful skills,

…we talk about this all the time. I mean, our kids, the only skill that a lot of them develop are athletic skills and uh we're not developing any kind

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of craftsman skills or anything like that that'll give us a job when we're thirty, thirty-five, forty years old.

Tevin shares this belief, and gives a detailed response concerning sports as a distraction,

> …A lot of kids now a days, I wanna play basketball, ya know, and they put all their energy, all their efforts into playing basketball and in reality, professional sports is very very difficult ya know. Only a small percentage actually makes it, ya know so in that since it is holding us back ya know because especially in the inner cities and the urban communities those kids that's all they see, that's all they think, that's all they dream about so they put all their eggs in one basket so when it doesn't work out for them as far as playing professional sports, they are distraught, they're destroyed. They have nothing to fall back….that's when parents come into play ya know , you gotta say ya know playing professional sports is nice, but what if you don't make it, you know what I'm saying, you gotta have that education to fall back on.

Means of development. A few respondents appreciated athletics as a conduit to developing skills and building character that would actually propel them into success in any area of life. These respondents viewed sports as instilling pro-social values in its participants that can be converted for use in other avenues. Eddy stated that it was simply a myth that sports distracts children and believed that successful athletes are often successful all-around,

> I don't think it does, it think that that's a myth from the outside looking in saying that. I think that student-athletes are like Greek warriors of yesterday. People who can succeed will succeed all the way across the board. Which kinda seg ways into what I do for my company today. I think I started preparing for this playing team sports.

Gavin share this view,

No I think it's just helped them out to keep their head focused, ya know keep their head on their shoulders, keep them out of trouble and stuff. I don't think it's gonna affect them getting their grades and stuff. I think it'll help them with discipline and all that.

Kevin continues to stress that sports are simply a tool that African-Americans should utilize to gain access to opportunities that may not otherwise be available,

Just because you play sports doesn't mean that you can't be a doctor, doesn't mean that you can't be a lawyer. …..Ya know sports is just a gateway, or should I say a catapult to get you to wanting to be other successful occupations other than playing a professional sport.

Summary. Current literature is riddled with similar themes that surfaced during this research. Harry Edwards (2000) and many other scholars have suggested that the over emphasis on sports participation has drained Black talent away from other areas and caused many Black males to overlook other more viable means of economic success. Edwards (1973: 44) contends that "Athletics, then, stifles the pursuit of rational alternatives by black people." Others view sports as an avenue toward educational and financial opportunities that are otherwise blocked for African-American men. Many of the respondents viewed sports as a 'way out' of their current social situations. As hypothesized, many respondents view athletic achievement as the most realistic avenue toward success. Paradoxically, most of the respondents viewed this sensationalized view of athletics as a

distraction, enticing African-Americans toward sports to the detriment of cultivating other valuable talents and objectives for their futures. This creates a type of schizophrenic mindset toward an issue that is extremely important in most young African-American athletes' minds. On the one hand, sports is the only way to become success and exit an undesirable social situation. On the other hand, many are aware or become aware that they have put too much emphasis on athletic talent and neglected other talents that could have been useful in life.

SALIENCE OF ATHLETIC IDENTITY

Athletes participating in high-level sports competition have been noted to have an exclusive athletic identity, with most of their self-definition and self worth based on athletic participation and success. The role of athlete takes precedence over all other roles and identities. This has been attributed to the time that is spent on and around athletics, as well as the enormous amount of praise and social support athletes receive for success on the playing field, both in the African-American community and in society as a whole. They also feel dependant on this identity due to the fact that athletics becomes their lifeline as their financial support at universities depend upon sports.

African-Americans have been found to be vulnerable to the exclusivity of the athletics identity because of the intense socialization toward sports by family, peers, the community, and the mass media. Since the early socialization period is when identities form, many African-American males nurture the development of one identity, the athletic identity. Consequently, minority males in football and basketball have been found to have the highest rates of identity foreclosure (Scales 1991). The group of respondents in this study showed evidence of identity foreclosure and an exclusivity of the athletic role. When asked to give a percentage as to how much athletics defined them, the vast majority of respondents assigned a very high percentage to athletics in their self definition. Table VIII shows the percentages that the respondents felt that athletics defined themselves.

TABLE VIII
SALIENCE OF THE ATHLETIC IDENTITY

Respondent	Percentage of self defined by athletics
Adam	40
Brad	0
Calvin	75
Devin	50
Eddy	80
Fred	80
Gavin	40
Hubert	90
Ivan	60
Jack	80
Kevin	50
Lenny	90
Matt	90
Nate	70
Oliver	Very high
Perry	75
Quinton	85
Richard	80
Steve	80
Tevin	90

Self-Definition. As shown in the above table, fifteen of the respondents felt that

athletics made up sixty percent or more of their self-definition. Furthermore,

twelve respondents believed that sports makes up over seventy-five percent of

who they are as a person. This shows that the largest part of images of their 'self'

is made up of the athletic identity. Many respondents felt that this foreclosure

happens at a very young age, and is supported by their environment. Eddy

discusses his athletic identity development,

> Um, it was definitely cemented by the time I was twelve, when I got to
> junior high school and we started having, ya know, the team at the school I
> was definitely on the jock side, the athlete side. That was one of the things
> that I saw right away in the seventh grade, then the eighth grade when I
> played on the team that's when I could see that there was those people and
> there was us.

Others attribute their success and development as a person to the opportunities

provided by and lessons learned through athletic participation. Gavin describes

himself through sports and feels that without sports, not only would he not be in

college, but states that he doesn't believe that he could accomplish anything

outside of sports,

> It would include sports a lot , because if it weren't for sports and you
> know school and stuff I don't think that I would be where I am now… No,
> because I mean, sports is basically me, and I love sports, so I don't think I
> can do anything outside sports.

Like several respondents have suggested throughout this study, Jack believes

that sports instill pro-social values. He states that much of himself as a man has

been shaped by the lessons that he learned through sports,

> I'd have to say a high percentage, I learned a lot from sports. Uh, a lot of, I
> don't want to sound like uh, down on my upbringing, but a lot of my
> learning to be a man or learning to how to cope or learning how to deal
> with adversity, a lot of it came from sports. Ya know most of my, coming
> from a single parent a mother, not having a father around a lot of the
> things you have to learn on your own and you learn, you deal with your
> coaches you deal with your teammates. So I'd have to say sports is uh
> 80% of who I am……About 80% of who I am today is because of
> athletics.

Matt takes a similar stance, viewing sports as creating who he is as a person. He

views sports to be as important to who he has grown to be as his parents have

been,

> I'd say about 90% of who I am comes from my life in sports but at this
> point 20% of my life is sports…. Yeah, I think that comes from…you
> learn your whole life when you're little. You learn most of the things then,
> that's where it starts for me. Sports has been a part of my life, just as much
> as my parents have been a part of my life. I don't know who I would be
> without it.

Others Definition of Oneself. Most respondents felt that others viewed them and

related to them in terms of their athletic identity. Adler and Adler (1989) suggest

that the commitment to the athletic role as a master status, above and beyond

social and athletic identities, is caused by their 'selves' being treated as objects

by others. From this point of view, the overemphasis on the athletic identity by

others reinforces or even leads to athletic identity foreclosure. Everyone from families, to peers, to strangers seemed to only be concerned about one aspect of their being – sports. Brad discussed the feeling that most people only relate to him as an athlete,

> ….its always somebody that wanna come up to you and talk to you about sports cuz they feel that's the only way the know you by. Or that's the only way that they can communicate with you. So, I mean, yeah you, in some way its like a toss up where you can say that people define you as a athlete, cuz of sports.

Several resent the emphasis that others place on their athletic identity. Eddy describes wrestling with this after exiting athletic competition,

> Yeah, initially, I mean always, ya know 6'5" so did 'you play basketball?', 'you played basketball?', 'you play basketball', and yeah I used to like I said for a while, right after college I went through a period where I was like 'okay yeah, okay 6'5" black guy of coarse I played basketball genius.' So I went through a period where I was fighting it and it was kinda like an actor named Ricky when he was a child and now he wants to be called Rick when he's older sort of that kinda thing.

Jack echoes the sentiments of Eddy,

> Well I think to this present day you run into, I mean I haven't played sports in ten eleven years now and if I was to run into somebody I knew nineteen years ago that's what they wanna know. I still see people, and they as me 'do you still play ball' and I'm like 'Nah man, but I still read.'

Lenny also felt that members of society related only to his athletic identity. He goes on to describe how this hindered him as he exited athletics, and entered the occupational sector outside of athletic participation,

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Uh, yeah they begin to just, that was the only thing they were really worried about and that was ya know the only conversation they really would have with me, about the athletic events that I was participating in. I was also playing baseball and running track and it seemed like that was the majority of the conversations was consumed with that. Uh ya know, it caused problems later on and ya know after I began my career outside of sports that's the only thing they wanna talk about. I had a problem with that… Ya know if your gonna interview me for a job and you asking about sports, you won't get to know about me and my capabilities, you'll just know about the sports. And a lot of times you don't get the job because they don't have anything down good about you about the capabilities that you can do on that job, all they know is about sports. So I felt like that was a problem in the interviewing process.

Oliver also believed that the others fixation on his athletic identity followed him into his current profession as a police officer,

Even on my job, if we have to run after somebody, and I happen to catch 'em somebody'll bring up well he played football, or if I had to knock somebody down and be physical with somebody, it'd be brought up so. Even in the position of what I'm doing people still see me as 'that's such and such who played football at that university.' So, I don't know, I think I'll always look at myself as a athlete.

Other respondents, such as Hubert and Nate, felt that others are interested in their athletic identity due to the fact that most of their friends and people in their current social circle were gained while participating in athletics,

Um, most of the people, even now that I have a different frame of mind, as far as athletics, most of the people that I still have relationships with, I say 50-60% of those are still athletes. Because the people that I met through athletics were good people. I still have a lot of those relationships. It seems, it seems to me that I relate better to those people….

Majority of them do (relate to as an athlete), um I say that because the majority of 'em, of my friends, I met through athletics. Not only do they see me as an athlete, I also see them like that as well.

Summary. This line of questioning revealed that, in accordance with the current literature, most of these respondents have a self definition that is inundated with the athletic identity. In the case of the twenty for collegiate athletes that participated in this study, the athletic identity is more salient than any other aspect of themselves. Additionally, most respondents felt that other members of society, both significant others and the general public, related to them in terms of their athletic identity. Thus, many have identity foreclosure concerning their 'athletic self' and this foreclosure is reinforced by others. These finding have very important implications for this study. First, identity foreclosure and attachment to the athletic identity is associated with low career maturity and negatively affects career decision making (Brown et al 1999, Good et al 1993). Additionally, those who have a strong commitment to the athletic identity have been found to be less prepared for life after sports, having more psychological difficulties as well as career transition difficulties (Gordon 1995).

COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE

The wedded nature of institutions of sport and education, especially at Division I universities, has created the dependence of universities upon the commercialization of their sports programs. This dependant relationship is related to the generation of revenue, recruitment of students, and alumni support

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that big-time college athletics produces. These athletes, namely exceptional African-American athletes who are over represented in revenue-producing sports, are of high monetary value to universities. Outside of college scholarships, many athletes leave the universities feeling as if they have given far more than they have gained. Several negative consequences have been associated with this interrelationship between the athletic and educational institutions such as exploitation of student-athletes and a lack of emphasis on educational and career development. In fact, universities benefit from the obsessive pursuit of sports fame that has been found to be detrimental to academic and social development because this enables coaches to obtain maximum effort from these young men. A clear emphasis is placed upon the physical capabilities of student-athletes, thus their academic capacities and role as a student are often overlooked. This section of findings includes several important themes which are as follows: 1) the manner in which the athlete felt they were treated by coaches and staff 2) whether their educational development was emphasized 3) racism on campus and 3) their view on big-time college athletics.

Treatment. Often, the transition out of athletics is plagued by past oriented thoughts concerning incidents that athletes feel could have altered the direction of their professional sports careers. Many of these respondents felt that they

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were treated unfairly by the coaches or had some other type of negative experience as college student-athletes. In fact, only four of the twenty respondents felt that they were treated fairly or had an overall good experience on campus. Many went as far as to say that their coaches spoke negatively to NFL scouts about their abilities and character. Adam gives an account of his adverse experience with his head coach and the consequences of that experience,

> Ha Ha Ha whoa…….was I treated fairly….. I was treated unfairly, cuz I really didn't have a, I guess I really didn't play for a players coach I played for a coach who, who was more of a business, a business to him so ya know because it was that type of relationship we never really saw eye-to-eye. And so when, when it really started affecting me is when, probably round my junior year when we bumped heads and that was the end (of my starting position)… unfortunately, the coach that I had, he was well known, ya know he had coached at a professional organization and a NFL team and he had a lot of friends, so, I mean you probably know. If they say something bad about you during the draft then that kinda is a domino effect. Ya know, to the rest of the teams and the scouts, and because he was a well-known coach, that is what happened to me.

Tevin also feels that his head coach had a negative influence over his chances in the NFL,

> ….I didn't feel like my head coach really pressed me, to get my name out there, to get me drafted to get teams interested in me ya know. I think he held me back I don't know, I don't know the specifics, I'd be surprised if he didn't speak some bad words about me….All in all, looking back over my whole college career, if I could go back in time, I wouldn't have went there, I would have went somewhere else.

Several other athletes discussed the political and business-like nature of college athletics. Thus creating an atmosphere in which various factors outside of ability and work-ethic come into play concerning which players would be allowed to showcase their abilities on the field. In this instance, these players did not feel that they had a fair opportunity to market their goods (athletic prowess) to potential employers (professional teams). College sports are the only avenue for athletes to exhibit their skills, especially for football players who do not have the option of entering a professional league out of high school. Calvin gives his view of this contention,

> ….a lot of college football is about politics. And the best player don't always get to play and it's really not up to your ability. It's more like a business in college, it's not for fun. And so, sometimes coaches will recruit you so they won't have to play against you and just put you on they squad and never play you. It's not fair because all I needed was a shot, a chance to be seen.

Gavin echoes this response,

> I think they weren't fair because, ya know they have their picks and it has to do with ya know the politics. So the people who are good and have the ability to play ya know politics override that because ya know a lot of people want to see ya know who they pick do better than another person on the field. Politics really hurt my chances, I mean for real.

Other respondents felt like their coaches did not care about them as a person, but were simply concerned about their performance on the field. Hubert did not feel that his coaches cared about him as a person,

> …the way this was proved to me is after I graduated, um probably maybe two of them would call and the span in between me going from my

university to my year and a half playing in the league, I didn't hear from any of those coaches until I did get picked up in the league. So when I wasn't on a team no one called to see how I was doing or if I had a job. And even trying to go through the football program to get a job, they, huh I had a degree and the best job they could get me is a job at Foot Locker, and I'm fresh off a degree from your university, I know you got better ties, you got better pull than that. So um, no I really don't think…..they really cared about my well being as a person. They didn't want me to die or nuthin, but as if I wasn't doing a service on the field they didn't really care.

Perry felt that the level of caring and support was contingent solely upon their importance to the team athletically,

…that support factor, um that caring factor went to those athletes that were the superstars in my opinion. Um so I did feel that, I did feel that although I was a part of a successful program and even an individual success at my own right um if you just wasn't that guy who was the superstar or the it may have been one or two or three guys, I wasn't that guy considered the superstar so the preferential treatment or the uh caring and concern wasn't immediately there.

When asked if he whether or not coaches cared about him, Steve discussed feeling like 'used goods' after his eligibility was exhausted,

No, no, no because after football is gone, ya know like I said I exhausted my four years of eligibility I actually stayed an additional year to get my undergraduate degree….pretty much they didn't communicate with me after that, I mean after football, ya know that was it, I was used goods……If I was an athlete that had gone on to play professional sports they would have (cared about me), because you know it's a recruiting tool…I didn't play professionally so they cut off the communication lines.

Eddy and Jack, who attended the same university, note that race may make a difference in the level of care that coaches display,

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> ….for me one of the amazing things that I had, black men that were my coaches…My very last year in college, ya know, coincidence or not, I had a different coach, a white coach for the first time in my basketball career and ya know for the first time I was on the other side of my coaches good grace sort of…. I felt like that coach was all about how much his salary was, ya know, not so much concerned about what happens to us off the court after basketball. He said things, but I just didn't feel like I was being cared about totally like I always had been.

> Well you know… our situation was a little bit different because we started off with a coach like Coach A. who was more of a father figure and so I'd have to say yes and no to this because the guy that came after him, Coach B, treated you more like a piece of meat or a bumper. So I don't know if it was the racial make up of the two or not. I don't know what it was, but they were the polar opposites.

Educational Development. Student-athletes on scholarship attend universities agreeing to perform athletically in exchange for an education. Athletes usually hold up their end of the agreement, playing until their eligibility is exhausted, however universities often do not give much attention to educating student-athletes. Although sixteen of the twenty respondents in this study have gained their college degrees, nationally, graduation rates for African-American student-athletes are significantly lower than that of their white counterparts. Additionally, most of the respondents who have degrees feel that it was not a reflection of the universities emphasis on education, but through their sheer determination. As Calvin states that "everybody say you a student-athlete, but coaches think they want you to be a athlete first then a student." Several other respondents felt like

athlete-students instead of the converse. Devin discusses the term "student-

athlete",

> ...they tell you you a student first and an athlete next, but really you an athlete first and a student second. There is more emphasis on making your practices and meetings. They hit you with the go to class and all that stuff, but they don't care. As long as they get them four years out of you they could care less if you get a degree or not…..I think they have to (care about athletes getting degrees) cuz they job depends somewhat on it, but personally, naw, I don't think they care.

Several other respondents, such as Oliver and Hubert, stated that any reference

to education was directly related to eligibility,

> ….the name of the game is to stay eligible ya know what I'm saying. I guess in the recruitment process, when a coach or who ever is representing that university is sitting in front of your parents uh, academics is stressed highly. However when you get there, that is not the case.

> I mean they drill on um you going to class and making the grade, but that's only because if you don't go to class and make the grade, then you can't be on the field.…Student-athlete, that's not how it is, its athletic-student. It's backwards for college athletics. I mean, that's kinda a given because you are there because of that. I mean for myself because I was on full scholarship so if I'm there because of that then that's my reasoning for being there.

Additionally, discussion of graduation or educational development was simply, as

stated by Eddy "lip service." Gavin's response resonates with a similar sentiment,

> The coaches I don't think they really care if you do get a degree or not, because ya know they say that but its like they say one thing, but they mean another. They just want you to come and play for them, so ya know you can help their program out.

Adam, who attended a nationally acclaimed football power house, stated that the

coaches were very upfront about their emphasis on football over all other

priorities including academics,

> I mean from the time that you get there, they tell ya, "you here for
> football, you got a scholarship." Its up to you to ya know put yourself in
> the right classes and to choose the right major… Anything else dealing
> with academics that was up to you. Ya know what I mean. Whereas with
> football, they took care of all of that, as long as you was playing football,
> you was treated like a king or whatever.

Racism. Another notable aspect of the college experience for African-American

student-athletes is racism. A few respondents experience racism on campus and

in the classrooms. Many considered racism as systematic and a part of everyday

life as an African-American, therefore it was an expected consequence of

attending college on a predominantly while campus. As Adam stated "It wasn't

the first time that I had ever experienced racism, ant it wasn't the last." Devin

stated that "I attended college in one of the most racist places in America, so

yeah I felt racism damn near everyday." Like several other respondents, Calvin

felt racism in the classroom,

> …in the classroom they made a racist statement in which I was the only
> African-American in the classroom and they tend to forget that I was in
> there, and once they realized I was in there everybody face turn red and I
> had a whole lot of apologies. But ya know that's a part of life, you have to
> accept it and move on.

Devin also experienced racism in the classrooms, but he adds that being

an athlete intensifies that tension,

> Um, me personally, I was usually like the only black person in a lot of my classes and being an athlete and the only black person in the class, that's two strikes against you. A lot of professors see athletes as a problem. They figure you not gone come to class, you not gone do your work, you know a hassle.

When asked if he had experienced racism, Lenny discussed the irony of

white fans that have racist stereotypes concerning the players that they

cheer for at the games,

> Not amongst the players, not amongst the coaches, but uh we often had to, I played at the (coliseum) and it was right across the street from (my university) and after the games a lot of times we would have to, well when we had a home game we would have to walk back to the campus and it was surprising that the same Caucasian uh, fans that was cheering for us about thirty minutes ago on the field, well we didn't have our uniform on so they would be grabbing their purses, locking the door, and I actually went up to one and I asked her "miss I'm not at thief, just cuz you see I'm black, I'm not a mugger, but I am the same individual that you was just cheering for on that field". And she was kinda hurt by it the statement because she was like 'oh I'm so sorry' I said 'oh don't be sorry, just educate yourself that not all black people are robbers. So you do feel that racism as far as they just see you in the uniform but when they see you outside of the uniform you just another ya know minority in the population and they stereotype you…they treat you accordingly to your color.

View of Big-time College Athletics. Current literature concerning college athletics

discusses the labor exploitation of student-athletes. In return for their labor,

athletes are given scholarships. However, with the demands of big-time college

sports, many athletes do not fully reap the benefits or obtain a quality education.

The fact is that many student athletes do not reap the educational benefits promised by universities is illustrated by the poor graduation rates, 34% for basketball players and 48% for football players (CAC 2002).

Additionally, the profits generated by successful sports programs, are enjoyed solely by the university due to the NCAA's power to make rules and control the finances of universities and their student-athletes. The NCAA maintains that student-athletes should be considered amateur athletes driven by education and the physical, mental and social benefits that are derived from being student-athletes (Netzley 1998). However, through television contracts, merchandising, ticket sales, bowl games and tournaments; universities, television networks, clothing companies and nameless other industries profit billions of dollars off of the back-breaking labor of student-athletes. When asked if athletes and universities were benefiting equally from college athletics, only one of the twenty respondents felt that athletes and universities benefit equally . Adam played on a highly profitable college team and stated that

> ..the colleges make so much money off of the athletes… those athletes are producing those winning records and those winning records are producing millions for that college but the athletes don't see any of that, and they get away wit it by saying "well ok we're giving you a free education." Well a free education may be 125,000 dollars over 4 years but that 125,000 dollars couldn't equal the millions of dollars over one year they play or get to the NCAA championship.

Several respondents also referred to scholarships as a benefit, but not a benefit that could be compared to the profits that universities reap from successful

athletic programs. Oliver, Nate, and Kevin all discuss scholarships as an unequal

benefit for student-athletes,

> I'd have to say the university will get more out of it because….their school is getting paid for I, so I guess you could say they reaping the benefit that way, however they're (colleges) gonna reap a whole lot more than I guess what a college education would cost or uh, you go to a bowl game and the school gets two million dollars depending on what king of bowl game it is and they might toss you a bag or a watch or a ring that's gone tarnish sooner or later. I mean I guess from an overall standpoint, the university will benefit more because, even if you look at bowl games I mean, not even from the financial standpoint of them getting money, but however when they're on television uh they're gonna advertise the university ya know business it has which is gone give the public perception which is probably bring in more students. Ya know so, I would think the university would reap more out of the situation.

> You and I both know that there are athletes that spend four or five years at college or university and don't do nothing and the college or university actually just uses them up and when their finished their done and uh the reason why I say no is because uh ya know the college athletes are out there their working hard ya know their actually running, ya know getting bumps and bruises things of that nature for themselves, but its also for the university. Okay. And um the university is making millions off of 18-22 year old kids ya know and all the kids are getting is a 46,000-dollar education out of it. The numbers wise in mathematics wise, the numbers doesn't add up. The kid that actually taking advantage of his college experience, learning from that, got a degree and actually taking his life further it does balance out a little bit, but it still doesn't balance out.

> No, not at all I don't know what it is like today, but I know when I was in school not at all, not at all to me. Living, when I was in school, even though we had a full ride all your academic and everything, books and all that stuff is taken care of but I know when I on campus, I lived on campus in the dorms and that little whatever thirty dollars a month little thirty dollar check that we got living on campus was nothing especially when you coming from a background, a family background where you can't, ya know I wasn't able to call home and be like ya know 'mom please send me this, send that' you know I had to gut it out with whatever we was getting at the time was like thirty dollars when you were on campus. So I

totally don't agree with how college athletes are not benefiting from all the money we bring to colleges.

Above, Kevin adds in another dimension, which is the fact that many student-athletes do not have money to handle their day to day needs, nor do they have resources, to obtain financial support, and due to NCAA rules are not allowed to work. Devin sums up this notion stating that "they make millions of dollars off of athletes, you get that funky ass scholarship check, you supposed to survive off of that." Matt adds that he lived on campus without any financial resources stating that "all I could do is ya know go wash clothes and get a combo meal that's it." Fred agrees that the financial needs of student-athletes are not being met,

> I'm not gone say we should get paid to play, but our monthly income that they give the students is defiantly not enough to live. Just because they pay for room and board, if you move off campus that check is really not enough to cover expenses to live especially since they always find reasons to take money out of your check instead of putting money in.

Several respondents, like Brad, Tevin and Hubert believe that student-athletes should be paid,

> I mean they make it hard for guys that's student athletes. I mean you can't have a job….So I mean the athletes don't win, I mean I believe, myself personally, that student-athletes should be paid….I mean you have no time to make money. I mean you are doing football 24/7, year-round. I mean, you don't have a summer vacation, you have quote-unquote voluntary practice that you have to be at. So you not really have the opportunity to, ya know help you family back home, if your family need help with any type of finances. So I think they need to set up programs that can help student-athletes to make money where it won't be illegal.

Football and basketball are the two most profitable things that a school can have, ya know. You got the NCAA tournament, you got the bowl games, the BCS bowl games, but those are big money makers that schools are benefiting from these kids playing football. Its like they're using them, four or five years of athletics, but as soon as the last game in your senior season is over with they don't care nothing about you. The kick you out the door, they don't say good luck, they don't shake your hand, it's like they don't even know you. Okay we've used you up now so good-bye and good luck to ya and don't come back around here no more. Some people might say that they're befitting equally, ya know the schools getting what they want and the players are getting a free education and playing football. That's one way of looking at it, ya know, but I choose to look at it from the other side, ya know. So I think that they ought to give the players some kind of payment. It'll never happen, because the NCAA won't allow it to happen, but I think the kids should be reimbursed some kind of financial ya know monetary amount, pay them.

Overall, I see them benefiting more than we are because of the money that they make off of us. So, your next question would probably be should we get paid? And yes, they should be paid something more than a little scholarship check because if you look at the revenue, that they're bringing in for the university

Several other respondents added discussed industries that profit from student-athletes hard work. This is yet another way in which they are profitable, but do not profit from their labor. Lenny's statement summarizes this notion,

I feel like we were treated unfairly because we didn't get any money for the proceeds that we brought to the university. And uh, I don't know if you recall, but I was, I think in '92 or '93 was when John Madden first came out with the collegiate Nintendo game or whatever and even had our names and numbers of the players on the jerseys of those players. And we were offended because they were making money with our names. And uh they quickly took out names off, because they probably figured we were gone have a legitimate uh beef for royalties on that. So I felt like on that aspect we were treated unequally or unfairly because they would not share the money that we were making for the universities…. its totally lopsided. with Nike he was getting paid a million dollars for us, for the players to where Nike products, now I feel like it should have been divided a little bit

more equally than that. If we were gonna wear the products then we should have got some of the money too from Nike. And the university was getting money from the ticket proceeds and all the paraphernalia that we were wearing and making popular because we were out there winning, so I felt like they coulda, we were getting at the time I was playing football, I think we were getting 675$ a month stipend and that was supposed to get us meals, wash clothes, pay bills, and man that's just not right. They were making millions of dollars off us in a year so I felt like they coulda divided the money a little bit more toward the athlete who was doing the majority of the workload.

The only equalizing factor motioned by any respondent was only if athletes moved on to play in professional leagues. Matt, Hubert and Jack mention this possibility,

I think that the university benefits more than the athletes. I mean, I say the athlete would probably benefit if he knew for sure he was going to the league, but if he wasn't I'd say the university would benefit more. I mean , cuz regardless of what he do they still gone get they money from the games or whatever.

Um, I'd have to say no, because even having a degree right now, you have to have more than a degree to be successful because um, society , not society, um people without degrees, they're just as successful these days as people with degrees. What college athletics is benefiting from us is a little bit more, cuz they making a lot more money than what we are, even with our degrees. If we go into the league maybe uh, that helps to propel us so I mean it's a case-by-case thing.

No not at all, I think the universities benefit a lot more. I think they use these guys as a meat market and kinda the rules. They sell, for example, a Chris Weber jersey the Michigan 4 jersey, the university of Michigan made all kinds of profit, the NCAA made all kinds of profit off that jersey, but if Chris Weber jersey would have broken his ankle or messed up his ACL his sophomore year, he would have got nothing. He wasn't even allowed to have a full time job while he played. They definitely use the athlete…..I think they exploit 'em to a certain degree. They give you the opportunity to get out there and make a name for yourself and you can put

yourself up and maybe get drafted into the NBA, but the odds of that are very low, only like one out of every eight people are gonna profit off of the experience that they had by going to the NBA.

Summary. Most of the respondent had collegiate experiences that they did not consider positive. Only four of the twenty respondents reported having an overall good experience on campus. Sixteen respondents felt that they were not treated fairly by coaches and their careers were hindered by the business and political nature of college athletics. Although most respondents received a degree, many did not feel that their educational development was emphasized or that they fully reaped the benefits of a higher education. Finally, these respondents are fully aware of the fact that universities are reaping far greater benefits than student-athletes. Some feel exploited, others feel that student- athletes should be paid, but eighteen of the twenty respondents agree that universities are garnering far more benefits than student-athletes.

Studies have shown that athletes tend to be past oriented and spend a great deal of time reflecting on the past and perceived injustices rather than current life situations (Parker 1994). The findings in these interviews are consistent with this contention. Several respondents feel that unfair treatment influenced their playing time and ultimately their chances to play sports professionally. The type negative collegiate experiences found in this study feed

past orientation that is detrimental to forward movement, thus hindering career transitions and current life satisfaction.

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS ASPIRATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Due to the overemphasis on athletic achievement of African-American males, many continue to be drawn into holding unrealistic expectations for professional sports careers (Coakley 1998; Leonard 1998; Edwards 2000; and Sailes 1984). The media and other socializing agents depict sports as an accessible route to social and economic mobility for African-American males that is more realistic than all other opportunities for success (Edwards 2000). As seen in findings presented above, many of these respondents have had family, neighborhoods, and role models that encourage them to believe that there is a high degree of likelihood that they will have a professional sports career. The literature provides a strong foundation demonstrating the disproportionate numbers of African-American male athletes whose career plans include professional athletics.

Throughout their entire education, many student-athletes, particularly African-American student-athletes, believe that they will play professional sports despite the overwhelming odds against it. In my previous quantitative findings concerning student-athletes on a Division I foot ball team. Eighty-five percent had

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expectations to play in the NFL (Beamon and Bell 2004). Additionally, that belief was associated with poorer academic performance and more pronounced behavioral problems. This elucidates the fact that high expectations to play professional sports are detrimental to social and educational growth. In this category, several themes emerged. The first theme is aspirations, and examines the respondents' professional sports aspirations. Next, the respondents' view of the unrealistic nature of professional sports aspirations will be explored. Finally, fourteen of the twenty respondents have had experience in with professional sports on some level. Another five respondents are currently pursuing their first shot at professional sports. The respondents' experiences in professional sports will be examined by presenting several narratives that follow their journeys through professional sports.

Aspirations. Most of the respondents have had high aspirations to play professional sports for a large portion of their lives. They have dreamed about it and planned on making sports a career. As presented in earlier findings, many of the respondents view sports as way out of their economic and social situations. Some discuss their professional sports aspirations not as a dream or a desire, but as a concrete opportunity that was simply expected by themselves and those surrounding them. Eddy expresses this notion when asked if he expected a professional sports career,

Definitely, it wasn't a dream, it was like real, it was like understood. Never once did I see it as a dream, a dream is something that you think about that may not come true. This was a reality. I mean at twelve it was pro football, later pro basketball so maybe I didn't know what sport I would go pro in, but I knew I was going to play pro ball. It was always a reality. I took it very seriously from age 12 on, I moved toward the next level and succeeded at every level so it was not like a dream or desire it was just a fact.

Others, like Brad, discuss reinforcement of this belief that comes from others,

I mean, it was a strong desire. You have people calling you left and right, telling you that you can do this, you can do that. I mean I just got more and more focused on what I had to do to make it. I mean this was from teenager on to now.

Gavin's belief was reinforced by seeing the role model that he identified earlier in the interview move on to the pros,

When like I said my cousin went pro and I see ya know that I loved sports and I was just the same as him in sports, always doing sports in high school, I was like this is it, this is what I'm gonna do.

Gavin is currently working out preparing for professional league tryouts. Ironically, Gavin has not had much, if any, playing time throughout his college career, however when asked what his chances are to play professionally he stated that "I think I still got a good chance if I keep working hard at it…. I think I still got a pretty good chance." In reality, someone in Gavin's position, with no playing time or recognition in college, has a very slim chance to move on to any professional league. However, Gavin has spent the semester working toward a sports career rather than looking for employment. He has not distributed any resumes or applied for any positions.

Nate's desire to play professional sports also came at a very early age.

However, the desire increased and was feed by success,

> Uh the desire came when I was pretty young, I'd say ya know I was under 10 years old. It was always a dream or something you want to do. The desire got stronger and stronger year in and year out and those years started clashing I started coming closer and closer to that….Actually seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, ya know kinda give anybody the incentive to do what their doing.

Steve also felt a strong desire at a young age. He discusses how that desire

followed him throughout the years, but began as young boy,

> I had that desire when I was, like I said, seven or eight years old. I know I wanted to play pro football bad. Ya know they wasn't even havin, I didn't have the NFL jersey, but I would get a like a t-shirt and write the number of star NFL players on a white t-shirt and I would play all day. I would that t-shirt a team color and I would go outside and actually kick the ball to myself and run and play full games both sides of the ball, by myself. I wanted to play pro football that bad. It just followed me from there.

Fourteen of the twenty interviewees began to have a desire to play

professional sports by age twelve or older. Several expressed that sports careers

were the only future oriented aspirations that they ever had. Matt discussed

wanting to have a sports career by the age of five, and the fact that most people

around him encouraged that line of thinking.

Unrealistic Nature of Sports Aspirations. When asked why so many African-

American males like the ones in this study hold such strong expectations for a

professional sports career despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, one of

the most prevalent responses centered around sports as the 'easy way out' or even the only way out. Steve stated that as he grew up, he "often look at it as a way out, that's how I look at it as a way out." Adam discussed this from his point of view,

> I mean if you look at some of the rough parts of any city, the people are black….., and so when you are around one of those types of atmospheres then its only two things that you really can be. I mean it's either…..one of the main ways you see yourself getting out is through sports or ya know rap or something or entertaining somehow. I guess the easiest way is through sports. And so, ya know, because you come up, I mean I didn't come up the ghetto or the gutter or whatever you call it, I definitely by no means was rich so I saw sports as not a way to get a job, but something that I could do to get away from some of the stuff that I lived around.

Jack also sees blocked opportunities in the African-American community, which leaves young African-American males looking toward sports, crime, or entertainment to "get out."

> A lot of it is, a lot of black athletes come from a situation like mine. Single mom and even worse, I'm not from the ghetto but ya know they come from where it's not a lot of money around. You have a lot of people in the position where I can sell dope and make this quick cash or I could become a rapper or a singer or I can become an athlete. That's what society has basically told black people that they have to do since the early twenties, early thirties, the put some black faces on and entertain the masses for some money. That's, its just, I don't know why but that's something that's been around the black people community that we need to get rid of, we need to stop thinking that way. That stops us as a community as a whole from blossoming into who we could really be.

Calvin feels that many are drawn to athletic careers because they appear to be easy,

It's a easy job and you really only perform on Sundays, I mean you
practice during the week but you get paid millions of dollars and you don't
have to work a nine to five. You do something that you love to do and get
paid a lot of money. Most corporate world jobs, it might not be a job that
you prefer, but you making money. But in the league, you gone at least get
six figures.

Devin, who has been struggling to land on a team for the past three years, does
not believe that student-athletes are really aware of the statistics and the difficulty
of making it into the professional leagues.

Cuz they see it as the easy way. They don't, they don't see like, they see
like the monetary aspects of it and they ignore all that. A lot of time, most
people most men, they don't know that, they don't know the statistics.
They don't know how hard it is and the slim chance, they don't know that.
If a guy can play ball then they bank on that instead of actually getting
something out of school. I thing a lot of it is that they just don't know

Others make reference to the media images that promote the image of the
successful African-American athlete. However most respondents discuss denial
and feeling like the statistics were unrealistic, not their aspirations. Additionally,
many feel that those who try to tell them about the overwhelming statistics, are
simply, as stated by Lenny, "trying to hold them back." Fred summarizes this
notion,

When you do something your whole life, who is statistics to tell you that
because somebody feel like they done the research to come back and tell
you 'you wont make it because 2 out of every ten players that's free agent
make it to a team or hundred out of five thousand people coming out of
college only get put on a 55 man roster.' I mean, yeah, yeah, you can
shoot all that stuff you want to shoot in my face when I'm trying to get to
the NFL, but that don't mean I have to listen to it. See that's negativity,

and when you trying to do something positive, you weed out the bad stuff and keep the good stuff. Nobody listens to that… What a lot of people don't understand is that most kids who play the game start playing in little league and ya know, the same ones who start playing football in little league start going to school when you are first able to go, so when you put that much time and effort into something who is somebody else to tell you not to have dreams and aspirations to go to the league… I mean when you put that much time and effort into something you like to see results…..everybody wants to see results from what they do, they put time and effort into it. So I mean that's how I look at the whole sports thing as far as the NFL, nobody ever gives you the percentages about how many people that's in the NFL, they give you the percentages of people who don't make it or how many people try out and don't ever get to go to the NFL. There is a negative aspect to that, when you tryin to get something accomplished as far as the NFL. People never have a positive word, they have the negative statistics.

Nate and Perry discuss feeling that they are exempt to the rules or that they are somehow different from those who did not make it,

They think they're different. The black mentality now days is that the rules do not apply to me. Ya know I'm not saying that that's what everybody thinks about, but from interacting with ya know kids today as a coach, interacting, just being around black people, everybody thinks that their and exception. 'I'm an exception to this rule.' I'm gonna get in.

You know as black men ……we can do anything we want to do, although he didn't make it doesn't mean I can't do it. Uh and therefore, I think that that mentality is instilled in us in some kind of way just the way we're brought up and I can only speak from coming from the environment that I came from. Um 'I'm gonna go for mine and whatever happened to that person is not gonna happen to me cuz I'm lets face it a little bit better than he is', so I feel that mentality that we have. I think a lot of that is inherent in our nature. I think that we're driven by that, that drives us. And also, another part of that is what else am I gonna do, I gotta go for it I ain't got nothing else I can do, or I ain't got nothing else I can fall back on so

Tevin adds that many African-Americans have trouble with delayed gratification,

> They feel like it's their only way that they're gone make it, ya know...
> When you have guys out there making seven figures, six figure salaries ya
> know, they want it. We as a people, we want instant gratification, we want
> it right now ya know, we can't delay gratification. They see that as a quick
> fix, a quick way of getting what we want. Other than that, it's all they see
> and they wanna be like that and a lot of them ya know 30 years old still
> trying to play pro ball. I don't know why, they can't explain it.

Post-Collegiate Sports Experiences. Fourteen of the twenty respondents have

experience in professional leagues. Some have played in Arena League, others

in the National Football League, and one played with the Harlem Globetrotters.

Many of the respondents feel that their actual experience in professional sports

was overall nothing that they had dreamed it to be. Several mention feeling like

property, some even likened the NFL to modern day slavery. They were traded,

cut, moved around, and mistreated. Several mentioned the many

disappointments that lead to a change in their focus concerning their careers.

Some of their narratives will be presented in their entirety in order to get a real

glimpse into what professional sports careers are like for the vast majority of

players. Lenny felt as if players were not respected as men and when he stood

up for himself, his career went on a downward spiral. He also discusses feeling

like a slave,

> I did go up to Canada also to play with Montreal but uh I just got tired of
> bouncing around. I never was solid on a team, uh I had a problem with the
> coaches, the way they talk down to you and you were less than a man and
> if you weren't in the top five percent of the money players….. now they
> respected those guys as men but if you were less than that they'll talk to
> any type of way. That's the only reason I'm probably not playing now is

because my coach, he talked to me bad and I told him if he did it again we were gonna have problems. Well he did it again and I had a fight with my coach. Then I started getting bounced around. I went to Canada, and I was supposed to sign with the Cowboys..and they never called me back. I felt like that was my sign that hey I was being blackballed out of the league because that situation. I felt like I had my two degrees to fall back on and I didn't need them and basically I told them that. And uh, the next, another team called me and I told them I'm retired. And they were like you retired, you too young to retire. I said I don't need your money because a lot people don't know that a lot of athletes even though they are making a lot of money they're ending up broke when there're finished. So I saw the handwriting on the wall and put pencil to it and because I was a there I was giving my ten percent of my contract and the agent was getting three percent and then the 33% that I was getting in taxes, you do the math your paying fifty percent of the money out you might have a million dollar contract but your only getting five-hundred thousand. And then you living a million dollar life style so you end up broke… It's like you're robots, you're owned by a team. Its modern day slavery is basically what I consider the NFL. They strip you down, they put you on stage, they put a big light on you and they have you turn around and they looking at your legs, your buttocks, your back, your chest, their measuring your hands, and you're a piece of meat to them and it really makes you feel like your not a human. Then they take you through that long psychological test….you basically a piece of meat. They own you…
I wasn't a gangsta, I didn't kill nobody, my brother didn't kill nobody and really I wasn't really beneficial to the NFL. That's another aspect. I wasn't really attractive to the NFL because they couldn't have the opportunity to say 'look what the NFL has done, we rescued another poor black Negro from the projects.' They didn't have that storyline with me so I couldn't make money for them.

Tevin's story was extraordinarily interesting because the team owners called his mother in an attempt to persuade him to return to the NFL. This demonstrates the idea that many African-American parents value sports and in this case, the team owners used that overemphasis to their advantage. His story is typical in that he was cut and resigned several times:

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Uh well, I signed as a free agent, I though I was gone get drafted, it didn't happen uh my agent, he knew the personnel director for the Buffalo Bill and he called him up….we'll give him a tryout. So they signed me to a free agent contract, I played a year with buffalo in 94 I was good enough to make the practice squad. So that first year I didn't travel with the team, I just practice with them, ya know, I got paid for it, uh but the next year I went to camp, I had a great camp, I actually made the active roster that year, played in all the games made the playoffs….um after that season I went back to camp, I uh cut my leg out on the grass and got a real bad staph infection so I missed training camp and they felt like I had fell behind so far that I couldn't make up so they actually let me go, they cut me. My agent called around, Washington redskins signed me, they felt like I needed some more playing experience so they sent me over to Europe to play in the world league….that following training camp, I came back to the redskins, uh went the whole camp, had a great camp, thought I was gone make the team, but they cut me after the last preseason football game. uh went back to Europe, played again in the World league, came back to the redskins training camp got cut again. So I said, forget it I'm done playing football. I came home, I was coaching at Dallas (high school), uh during that season the redskins called me up and said hey Greg, our starting safety has gone down with a knee injury, we want to sign you to a contract. I'm like "naw man, I'm through playing football, I'm tired of being cut and raised and brought back, I'm tired ya know.' So they actually called my mom, and tried to get my mom to talk to me get me signed back up. She called me 'Tevin go head and do it one more time and Tevin get that money for the 14 games on the season and then be done with it.' So I agreed with that. They sent me a plane ticket and said hey fly out tomorrow morning on this flight and the next morning came and I slept on it all night long, I said I can't do this, I'm not going back. I had a great job…so that morning the plane came I wasn't there….so once again the general manager called my mom, he actually threatened my mom. Well if Greg don't come back, then he'll be ruined for life, he'll never play in NFL again. My mom got upset ya know…I went back played in all fourteen games had a great 14 game season, I did some good things. I thought that would be enough to solidify my spot with the redskins…but I got cut again the following season.

Many athletes attributed their lack of success to politics or other issues outside of their actual abilities. Fred, Matt, and Perry discuss this issue,

> Alot of players in the league, it's different from what everybody thinks it is, it's not …. It is different because people look at NFL like if they don't succeed its their own fault, that's not necessarily the case cuz the NFL is something that uh, its not just controlled buy how much ability you have and your ability to understand plays and do what you have to do on the field; it's a whole lot of something else really that I don't understand. That's why it is so hard to get in and stay in or to get drafted or to go free agent.

> Once again I think it was political and that whole thing there, I thought I had pretty good chances, everybody else thought I had pretty good chances but coaches have a big say so and in your character when he's talking to different teams he has a big say so and what he, ya know, his word is kinda bond. So whatever he says goes so….. that whole experience, I think that's where my depression came in at. Because at that point, you don't have no scholarship, you don't have money at all coming in, unless you're working a job and its kinda difficult to work a job and try to make these try outs, stay in shape, tip top shape and ya know going all over to different towns and states trying to make workouts and things like that so…….I didn't even get a shot at the NFL.

> On the professional level, and I got the wake up call that this is about business and all the idiosyncrasies of business of being a professional athlete and then realizing that I went from a group of good athletes, the good athletes went on to college, the above average or great athletes went on and got a chance to go on to play professional football, but all the athletes in professional football have some greatness about them…but when I was up there among all the great athletes and you know that your abilities are better than another athlete, but because of the political games that are going on with being in that business, it took so much fun out of it.. I didn't maintain that perseverance and I always felt like if I would have maintained my perseverance and the steadfastness that I would have become a pretty successful athlete.

Summary. In concurrence with current literature, many of the respondents have held strong expectations for professional sports from a very early age. Those aspirations have been reinforced by significant others, and solidified with every success that they experience. Most respondents were aware of the data concerning the unrealistic nature of this strong expectation, however most found methods to employ justifying their aspirations. Finally, most respondents are past oriented when reflecting over the reason their professional careers were not successful. All of these issues will factor greatly into their transitions out of sports.

CAREER MATURITY

One of the major consequences of the overemphasis placed on sport by African-American young men is a lack of career maturity. Career maturity is defined as "the maturity of attitudes and competencies that are critical in realistic career decision-making" (Meeker et al 2000: 126; Crites 1978). The athletes in this study were found to have socialization processes that were geared toward athletic achievement by family and the community/neighborhood, and this was reinforced by role models and the media. Many expressed feeling that athletics is one of the primary means toward upward economic and social mobility, and had very salient athletic identities. All of these findings are relevant to their transition out of sports and their career maturity. Additionally, most felt that athletics had

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come first during their college careers and their focus was to stay eligible. This category of findings is organized into two major themes. First, the respondent's college preparation for careers after sports such as choosing a major or engaging internships and other career preparatory behavior will be explored. Next, the post-collegiate experiences will be examined.

College Preparation. One of the primary sources of career immaturity amongst college athletes derives from a stunted ability to make career choices including choosing a major. Student-athletes do not have the freedom to explore courses and majors, spend time on internships, drop and add courses with changing needs, or focus on finding a career that suits their abilities. Student-athletes work under several restrictions such as the inability to change majors or drop courses due to eligibility requirements or choose majors that may offer courses during times set aside for sports participation. Thus, majors and subsequent careers are often chosen by default. The respondents in this study express the effects of all of these issues found in the literature. Several expressed a desire to major a course of study that was not possible due to time constraints that student-athletes must operate under. Devin had a desire to become an engineer, but ended up majoring in general business,

> My major was something I just kinda wind up getting, I started off wanting to be an engineer, but it's like the labs and stuff would conflict with practice. And cuz I was on scholarship, they figured, uh, my football

stuff was more important than going to class or being what I truly wanted to be, so I kinda fell into my degree.

Hubert's found himself in the same situation,

> Initially when I first went to college I wanted to major in psychology. But because my um, the classes for my major, the classes for my major were going to conflict with football practice. So I was not allowed to choose those….so instead of psychology I chose journalism.

A few respondents felt as if they were lied to during recruiting concerning what they could major in once they came to campus. Oliver recounts what he was told on his recruiting visit,

> I wanted to major in criminal justice and when they were recruiting me I was told that I could major in criminal justice but when I got ya know to (college) there wasn't a criminal justice degree. I found out that all the classes were in sociology and that is different that is not criminal justice which is what I wanted to major in.

Perry speaks of how his major was chosen. He felt that the university has ulterior motives in pushing student-athletes to chose a major before they had explored any options,

> When I first got there, what was making the university look good, and I was a red shirt freshman…..we meet with counselors…it was all about making UT look good, you know when you watch the football games on Saturday, they put your face up there and it says majoring in whatever. That was the whole purpose of this counseling part, which I later, I didn't find this out until after my career, but basically you get in there and they try to get you to commit to a major because the more people we got in business, makes us look good.. . I committed to business and in that commitment to business, uh I had to then had to get enrolled in classes to head me into that direction. Well those classes were absolutely overwhelming for me…..so I don't think that they were in our corner as

young folks coming to school. I think they were in the corner of UT making UT look good and so in order to get off of probation I had to write and appeal letter and get a school to accept me which was social work….well I grew up in the system of social work I can relate to this, so I shouldn't have nothing but success in something that I could relate to. I had an interest in architecture, but the thing about architecture..the school of architecture classes conflicted with football practice. My friend lost starting position who went through with it and majored in architecture.

Others spoke of rules concerning eligibility, as well as athletic academic counselors, pushing them toward majors that were not their choice. Matt discusses being talked into a major, and then being unable to change his major back to his first choice,

Actually it was graphic design and I switched it. Me and my counselor sat down and talked about it, and I told him yeah I want to work with my hands and these different types of thangs. And he said 'you might want to try this (fine arts) and plus you'll graduate faster.' So I switched it then a couple semesters down the road I decided I wanted to switch I back to graphic design, because I was kinda looking into it and I found it wasn't nothing in fine arts that really I could do except be at, work at a museum or something which I didn't want to do. And at that time it was too late it was already backed up in that major so I was stuck with it.

Fred, who actually wanted to be a meteorologist, was also talked into choosing a major that he was not interested in,

Um, its funny, cuz I remember how I got in this major because I don't like business. I don't like this major, I don't like the one I got into. And I went in and I said, 'I don't know what I want to major in.' and they said 'well you should go into business cuz young black males are successful in this part, I mean it's easy to be successful when you go into this major.' I said okay I'll buy it. So when I got into it, and I didn't like it, but I had so many hours toward it, it was no choice but for me to stay into it. I really don't like that.

Tevin's major was also chosen by default due to sole emphasis on

athletics when choosing a university to attend rather than focusing at all

on education,

> I wanted to play division one and TCU was the biggest one to offer me a scholarship so….I just called them up and said hey I'm coming, sign me up. Not even looking at the academic side what they had to offer me, ya know. Once I got there it was time to declare a major and I was like what am I gonna do…we have business, we have fine arts, I didn't want to do none of that I wanted to be an engineer or I wanted to be an architect. But they didn't have a school for those for engineering or architecture at the time so I didn't do my homework. So now what am I gonna do, its either P.E. or criminal justice, I didn't want to do that….My major was chose by default. I have a degree in criminal justice.

Additionally, several respondents, such as Fred, discuss the time and schedule

constraints the inhibit career preparation:

> …if you are working out four and a half to five hours a day plus this kid already done went to class, right when he comes out of class he goes straight to practice, when comes out of practice, he ya know, goes to training table, when he gets out of training table 7:30, 8:00 I mean his day is really full by the time he gets time to study or gets with his tutor or whatever he needs more of a thirty-two hour day as opposed to at twenty-four. We just do not have the time.

<u>Post-Collegiate Experiences.</u> Many of the respondents had negative experiences

finding a career after sports. Most were unprepared, never considering career

options outside of sports. Matt seemed to have one of most challenging

experience finding a career after devastatingly not being able to play professional

sports,

> It was tough, I mean I probably went through 6 or 7 jobs in a year. Ya know, just, I mean I had no experience at anything. I couldn't work in college, couldn't really couldn't do no internships in college…so I was basically in a pickle I didn't know what I was gone do. So I was just picking up jobs wherever I could.

Jack and Steve were equally unprepared for a career after college,

> I had no plans, it's by the grace of God that I am where I am today. Which I am no multi-millionaire CEO, but I am pretty proud of where I am, especially considering where I did come from. I had no plan in place, I had no idea what I was gonna do. I think I had a little more savvy, had a little more gift of gab, a little more charisma than a lot of people that were in my position probably wouldn't have made it. So I just think it was probably by bringing some of the things my mom had instilled in me and maybe some of the things I learned in athletics some of the survival skills.

> It was terrible trying to ya know get a job, because I hadn't put enough, ya know, I had put more time in athletics than I did into academics. Ya know they had internships and things like that which I wasn't taking and other people was taking and uh when I got out of there, my girlfriend from college, she jumped right into it, nice job with Mobile and stuff doing accounting and like hey I should be there. I didn't put more emphasis on the learning end of it.

Six of the respondents are firefighters, and one was thinking of becoming a

firefighter after sports. When asked why so many ex-athletes become firemen or

police officers many respondents made reference to a need for continued

physical work, adrenaline rushes, and being seen as a hero. Tevin discusses

why firefighting turned out to be the best career for him "I need that type of job,

active and physical…the guys, the camaraderie, it's just like the locker room, and you still get that adrenaline rush." Kevin also felt drawn to the physical nature of firefighting,

> I wanna be a um, I actually I was going to fireman school last, matter fact this spring until this arena team called me and asked me if I wanna come and play for 'em. Buy I was going to fireman school. ….I think its something that's kinda physical ya know like playing football. Its something that I think is real physical and it demands a lot. Probably not as much as football does but its demands a whole lot, and I got a chance to help people and that's one of the things that I wanted to do, I wanted to help people. And the money is not bad to from what I understand, they don't, they don't work they only work ten or twelve days out of the month. I know in Dallas where I was applying for they only work like 10 12 days out of the month. They work like a full day on and two days off and the money is not bad either.

Lenny held a lucrative job in corporate America, but felt that the fire department was a better fit for him,

> Corporate America is a boring job, its uh paper pushing and I was miserable…it was a nice job, but I was bored out of my mind. So I had to do something that was very exciting and I feel like it was God leading me, I was lead to the fire department cuz it is exciting. I am paramedic so every shift I go to is different and ya know you get a little adrenaline rush because you get to try people live or survive. So it wasn't originally a smooth transition because the boredom drove me crazy, but when I found something exciting, uh I felt like that that. And then starting my own business, ya know is a challenge just getting there. That's a self-challenge to me to uh own my own business and self sustain and allow me to help others to provide them with employment.

Both Devin and Fred recently had major setbacks in their attempts to play professional football. Devin stated that he would keep trying "until I am physically unable to." However, the reality that football fame may not come to past was

beginning to set in. Nevertheless, he had not devised a clear or definite plan for a

possible career. His major in college was general business, but when asked what

he was planning to do he stated "I don't know, I'm thinking about going back to

school, going to med school," which is not impossible, but he would have to go

back and take several prerequisites as a undergraduate. Fred is actually dealing

with the possibility of his career ending, but still has not devised a career plan,

> Sales rep, some people have approached me with that. Right now I'm
> getting by and that's really what it is, getting by, I could probably do
> something better. But I will.

Summary. As the first step in career planning, many of the respondents had

adverse experiences choosing a major. They were constrained by the limitations

on time in collegiate athletics, as well as the NCAA rules that impede them from

changing majors or dropping courses. Non student-athletes are free to explore

their career options buy changing majors at any given time during their

matriculation. Student-athletes are not at liberty to do the same, and often find

themselves "stuck" in a major. Additionally, due to schedule constraints, student-

athletes are not able to hold summer jobs or internships. Consequently, they are

not as marketable for employment as non student-athletes because of a lack of

relevant work experience. Additionally, many former athletes continue to be

obsessed with "the world of physical performances," and only want to perform

jobs that allow them to use their bodies and continue to be heroes (Hoberman

2000:5). Although these careers are still very respectable, this fact does demonstrate that they remained preoccupied with the world of the physical. When discussing their experiences finding employment after sports, many discussed being ill-equipped for the process due to their certainty that they would become professional athletes and lack of preparation for a career in college. This further illustrates that the obsessive pursuit of sports careers leads to African-American men becoming placed on a "fantasy island lacking the skills necessary to propel himself into the flow of mainstream America" (Gaston 1986:371).

RETIREMENT AND TRANSITON OUT OF SPORTS

As presented in the findings above, the respondents have faced exploitation, attachment to the athletic identity, unrealistic expectations concerning professional sports, and stunted career development. These factors suggest their athletic retirement will poses a definite set of difficulties. Many athletes have been found to be ill-prepared to handle life after sports and experience significant personal disruption upon retirement (Botterill 1982; Ogilvie and Howe 1982; Werthner and Orlick 1986; Wooten 1993). Additionally, retirement is most often involuntary, resulting from deselection, injury, or age. Athletic retirement has been referred to as social death in that the assumption among athletes is "life" is dependent upon continued involvement in the sport or

close and direct association with the game. Quinton expressed this sentiment stating that "athletes die twice."

Many of the respondents admittedly invested much of their time in college preparing and training for professional sports careers. The transition from competitive athlete to non athlete is inevitable and has been experienced by all but two players who are currently in the AFL. For the remaining respondents, retirement from competitive sports has occurred at a relatively young age. Most of the respondents have had difficult and disturbing journeys toward economic viability, occupational satisfaction, and identity reformation. Most of them self identify depressive symptoms. The following category of findings has only one theme, struggle out of the athletic role. Entire narratives of respondents will be presented in order to illustrate the struggle that they all discuss.

Eddy discusses feeling depressed and out of control. He felt ashamed of being an athlete and only recently began to be proud of his athletic past:

> I mean, I was depressed it was like the darkest time in my life. My esteem was at its lowest point in my life. For the first time I felt helpless I guess, I couldn't just go to the gym and practice harder, go run some extra sprints, shoot some jump shots to get better, to get back in the game. I didn't really know how to use a computer, I didn't have the type of connections that my friend who was like in a frat. I was irresponsible, I had my first child out of marriage, drinking, ya know. I mean I could get a job making copies or something. Most of my boys who were athletes were like UPS, Fed Ex. I mean people would talk about people like 'what if you don't go pro?' and I would be like 'I feel sorry for those people who don't go pro.' But me, I mean a job, I make jump shots, that's what I do, I make jump shots in the clutch. Get a job, what if, blah blah blah, I make jump shots…. I do still feel that way and I recently ya know started feeling proud about it again.

There was a while after I stopped playing I went through ya know, depression, what am I gonna be, what am I gonna do, I don't want to do that. Watching people that I played with for years play on TV on the next level and ya know kinda dealing with the, ya know, it's a different playing field when you've been in college playing sports the whole time, and you've got a camp every summer and you play basketball all summer and you don't go intern while everybody else who ya know you're gonna be competing with were going to business classes doing internships and stuff like that. I kinda fought with the anti-jock thing after college until I talked to somebody. There's a firm in Atlanta that was hiring black athletes, to major companies. Coca-Cola was their major client, these companies were looking for the kind of leadership that ex-athletes had in college. I mean we're talking about carrying a twelve-hour course load minimum and all the things that athletes had to do and travel and play and go to practice everyday. Then it was like 'oh yeah, I was an athlete and I'm not gone hide any more either' and I started using it in my own interviews and in my résumé's everywhere and the more I used it the more it the more I though about it. It's like all the tings my coaches used to say, every little drill that we were doing started coming into play. So for me the pride just started coming back about being an athlete, but after I stopped playing it was sort of a stigma of people asking me like 'you didn't want to go pro?' ha ha ha 'nope sure didn't wanted to work for 24,000 dollars a year, naw didn't wanna play.' You know how they be all up in your life. I just wanted to make sixteen with this criminal justice degree I have.

Eddy went through a range of emotions and difficulties, but finally began to let his experience as a student-athletes work in his advantage. He stated that he is still working out some of the depression that he feels when he sees people that he went to school with and from the neighborhood who are successful professional athletes. Eddy's neighborhood socialization toward holding professional sports expectations was very strong, as was his parental socialization toward sports. He previously stated that aspirations for a sports career were a reality, not a dream and that he had never considered that he

would not be successful in professional sports. All of these factors seem to have contributed to his difficult transition.

Matt, who is from the same neighborhood as Eddy and had never considered that he would not play professional sports, also had a difficult transition:

> It was literally unbelievable, because I mean this was something, its like losing your left leg or one of your arms or something cuz its something you've had all your life, its been in your life all your life as far as you can remember and its just gone. After, its been plugged into your head all your life 'well you gone continue on, you gone make some money doing this' that's been plugged into your head all your life I mean its like unbelievable. And then it comes to the point where you gotta face your friends, you gotta face all the people that supported you and believed that would be going further than this. You gotta face them and that's half of it right there. I didn't want to go back to the school, I didn't wanna see any of my friends, didn't wanna see any of the fans, or ex-teammates or whatever cuz it's the same thing every time. Ya know, 'what team or you with, what teams have you talked to, when you leaving for camp' it's like you disappointing them. I never thought about it. That's part of the depression cuz I didn't know how to handle it.

When asked had he come out of that depression and if so how he stated:

> Basically it was a conscious thought in my head well I mean, I am not football. That's not all, that I was fortunately blessed with other talents and either I'm gone stay like this for the rest of my life or I'm gone get off my ass and do what I gotta do, ya know. And I choose the ladder. It was really a conscious thought. I can remember lying in the bed thinking that.

Matt earlier described sports as a "much a part of my life as my parents." With such a strong connection and attachment to the athletic identity, as well as

professional sports aspirations, Matt's transition was destined to be a difficult

one. Perry also discussed feeling as if he had let down his family and fans:

> I went through…oh…haha..aw man if they'd a had doctor Phil back then all these so called experts, yeah I would have been a good case study….that episode of not being successful when all of the, when your family… there was a big fan base, and extended fan base from that core once you have success in college and now your in the pros and everybody's saying ya know its all about your sport accolades, even with your family. And therefore I had set goals too…..I'm here to now take care of my family, it wasn't about me any more, it was well hey I want to get my momma a house I wanna mover her out of that low income neighborhood, I wanna take care of my aunts and my cousins and so on and so forth. Well when that didn't happen, when I went through the getting release, I saw those things drifting away. I saw those dreams just melting through my fingers. So it was a big problem for me…it was big problem for me because I felt like I was letting my family down…I wasn't gonna be able to accomplish those monetary goals that I wanted to accomplish for my family. And I felt like they had a lot riding on me and I'm still dealing with those issues today, I guess this is why this is important. I mean here I is, and I've been away from this as long as I've been away from it but uh its not as bad, I mean I don't dwell on it as much, but I think about oftentimes had I had successes or the success that football would have brought…what keeps me grounded is had I had that success I probably wouldn't be married to my wife today I probably wouldn't have the kids that we have and its so many other things I probably would have gotten into….when I was going through that transition, it was a transition of uh all kinds of emotions and what it got me out of it was my spiritual faith and my foundation….I had to find myself, I had to grow up again and mature. A sign from God that…..this is what I want you to do. Transition was hard.

Hubert also feels that it was his spirituality that helped him through the transition:

> ……..Its something that I think had to just pass over. I had to come to the realization for myself that I was more than that, um as far as the depression goes it probably went of for like, and it wasn't necessarily like depression like, I wanna kill myself depression, it was depression like, um I wake up and I go train for this, train for the league still and ya know I feel like I can't do anything else. I don't wanna go pursue another job

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because I'm gone wait around on them to call me back or it wasn't like depression like per se 'oooh I just wanna kill myself' its like feeling like a part of you that you're used to is gone and you're wanting it back and not moving or doing anything else um because you're set on doing that and the fight in you tells you 'naw you can't quit, you gotta continue to do this, you gotta train for this' and the fight and the faith tells you to continue to train for this and God is gonna open up the door, but then the reality is maybe God wants you to see yourself as something else, you know what I'm saying. He might want you to see yourself as something else so he can make you move to anther stage in your life. So. As long as it takes anybody else, I don't know, it might take other people longer, but the reason why it didn't take me as long, I don't think it was long at all, but um it didn't take me that long is because of my relationship with God.

Jack describes his transition as difficult and misses playing basketball. He also felt distrust toward society due to the manner in which he felt others treated him after he was no longer an athlete:

its kinda multi layered in that when the seasons change once the whether gets cold, its starts getting cold, and you just laying on your sofa doing nothing, you expect to be out playing basketball in the gym. Or, ya know, when its springtime, you expect to be in a tournament. That wasn't there anymore so you deal with that. I left the basketball team and immediately once I realized when I left they only cared about me cuz I played basketball then you have to deal with the fact that 'okay I don't trust anybody, I can't trust nan one, I'm not dealing with people.' So I really just shut the world off for maybe like six months to a year and it's just and it injured me. I have to just get into me, do what I know is right, screw what anybody thinks and go from there. So I would say for about six months to a year it was really rough…. I don't know I, sheer determination. Just determine. I knew the alternative to not coming out of that was just poverty, eternal poverty and I was not willing to accept that.

Although Nate has begun his career and is climbing the ladder of success as a college football coach, he stated that he would give it all up today if an NFL team

called. He discusses losing competitive sports participation as liken to losing a

family member:

> Well, uh I think about playing everyday and uh ya know, uh right now its kinda hard to actually get the opportunity or to actually get workouts, but when I do get the chance to talk to teams I do talk about it and I do let them know that hey I still have it in me if I can go. That part of life is still here, I haven't actually thrown it away yet, it's something I think about everyday. If I get the opportunity to actually do it, ya know a legit opportunity, I'd drop what I'm doing and go in a heartbeat. Yeah, yes, uh I did go through a depression phase, a down phase, mainly because it was something that I wanted so bad, and uh ya know it's just like you actually get to the candy store and get put out ya know it's much worse than actually not getting there. Okay. And uh, ya know, its something that I been wanting to do from day one and ya know everything was gearing towards everything was going to work out….I was doing things I needed to do, ya know getting compliments from people I was supposed to get compliments from. And then toward the end it took a drastic turn. I can say yeah, the transition is hard, I can say its still hard ya know, cuz its not easy I mean you spend that amount of time that amount of years actually doing something that you like something that you love uh its hard to let go, its kind like ya know, losing a family member.

Steve felt the depression come into play due to the loss of status:

> It's, like I said football and playing at each level, pretty much everything's done for you. I mean you used to people waiting on you hand and foot, you used to being the big man around campus, and ya know whatever you did you're pretty much god. When you get out there in the real world and things of that nature, its pretty much, going through the interviews and interviewing process and things like that…and I'm still thinking that when people see my name on a piece of paper, they supposed to know who I am ya know, I'm Steve and I know I'm gonna get this job. And I had a lot of turn downs…..I wanted to start at the top working in the accounting field without the knowledge….I'm still in that egotistical stage that I played sports, I'm still on top….that was the most depressing thing to me

When asked if he missed the sport itself he answered:

Yes, all the time, all the time, I mean I sit up there and daydream when I'm watching college football or any pro, professional football. I find myself in a trance sometimes 'damn what if that was me' ya know 'I wish that was me' ya know it happens all the time. I think I'm pretty much a fan of sports because of that….what if, what if I would have done this different, what if I'd woulda trained just a little bit harder ya know or focused my energy just a little bit more, what if my knee wouldn't have gave out ya know so you try to compensate by playing on all these rec teams or flag football trying just to still stay in that mindset. I still hold on to it, I still haven't retired from it, I'm still holding on to it. Ya know, I'm still having that competitive edge and I'm looking at people like 'man I can do that' or why did this guy doing that I think I'm just as good as he is.' Sometimes I set back and have a reality check on that.

Steve displays the past oriented manner of thinking, in which many former athletes dwell on what could have been. Tevin also displayed past orientation:

I had ill feelings about the business about the management, coaches. I also missed the lifestyle, I was used to making six figures and going to making 30 thousand ya know that was hard for me. You watching guys that you know you are better than, and you're thinking 'why not me, I played with that guy, I'm better than them.' As far as practice, and two-a-days and training camp and staying in shape year round I don't miss that, I don't miss the cutthroat, back stabbing ya know that side of it, though.

Although still holding on to the chance that the NFL might come calling, Fred seemed to have one of the healthiest views of his impending sports retirement:

Well, in the past three or four months I realized, okay I can keep pursuing this dream and keep coming up short or I can just, or I can still see myself involved in sports and do something else. Now I have not shut the door on playing football, cuz I keep myself in shape and I am still doing the things that I need to do, not necessarily waiting on a certain workout, but um the door stays open. I , I mean I'll still walk through it, I ain't gone shut it in my face. I mean, I'll go through it, but I mean realistically, people have to learn to get on with they lives and they still get caught up I trying to get there so much that they look back and they say well what do I have? And they got lint in they pockets, they don't have anything. You go and then

you try and depend on somebody else for as long as it takes you to get on your feet and that's just a position that I can't be in. I have to be able to depend on myself. I can't keep looking for somebody else ya know to keep me out of any type of situation I'm in.

Summary. All of the respondents mention some type of difficulty in transitioning out of the role of athlete and retiring from competitive sports. Although the difficulties varied in severity and form, all had trouble during this process. As presented in the findings throughout, the data in this study were consistent with previous quantitative studies performed by the researcher, as well as in the information found in the literature. The athletes were intentionally and intensively socialized toward athletics by family, peers, coaches, community, and the media. Most held athletic role models and saw sports as a "golden opportunity." Additionally, the majority of respondents had very salient athletic identities that were solidified during or before adolescence. All had expectations to play professional sports and were ill-prepared in college to make career choices after sports. Accordingly, the transition out of competitive athletics was troublesome for all of the respondents. Many describe feeling depressed, others report feeling a loss liken to personal death, the loss of a body part, or the loss of a family member. They grieved and mourned for the loss of a part of themselves that had been extremely significant throughout most of their lives. This study has given this sentiment a voice and allowed the respondents to give meaning to the

hypothesized ideology and quantitative findings that are found in most of the

current literature.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

African-American males have been found to have socialization processes geared toward athletic participation and achievement. This intense socialization by family, peers, and the mass media has created a phenomenon in which many members of this group are stagnated in their development in all other areas outside of athletics. Additionally, as noted in the literature, as well as in a previous case study conducted by the researcher, a vast majority of African-American male student-athletes not only desire professional sports careers, but expect them. Prominent scholars suggest that this obsessive pursuit of sports fame has distracted African-American young men from developing the skills necessary to compete in life after sports, as well as drained potential talent away from other worthy career options (Edwards 2000). It has also been suggested that collegiate student-athletes are being exploited by both racism and labor exploitation. Additionally, African-American student-athletes have been found to be vulnerable to athletic identity foreclosure and lack the necessary career maturity to plan for employment beyond professional sports.

With the intense socialization toward athletics, overemphasis on professional sports careers and athletic identity, labor exploitation, and lack of career maturity found in the literature, this study sought to uncover the effects of these issues on the post collegiate experience of African-American male former student-athletes. Since such a large proportion of this group believe that they will

become professional athletes and only a minute proportion actually play professionally, most former collegiate athletes will face extreme disappointment and abrupt role transformation when their eligibility has expired. The findings presented in this study indicate that the transition into life without sports is indeed influenced by all of the factors mentioned above. The respondents in this study were socialized intensely into expecting a professional sports career and attaching themselves to the athletic identity. Additionally, the respondents in this study all felt exploited by the universities and most felt as if they did not receive a high quality educational experience. The transition process out to the athletic identity and into the occupational sector was extremely difficult for most of the respondents. The majority of the respondents still cling to the chance that they may one day be able to play sports again, or the contention that their careers were ended unfairly. Consequently, the respondents in this study report experiencing depressive symptoms for several months, to a couple of years after their sports careers were over.

Sociological theories concerning socialization and identity development, and the social reproduction theory were utilized to develop this study. A thorough review of literature concerning socialization, exploitation and racism in athletics, professional sports aspirations, the athletic identity, and the career maturation and the retirement process of athletes was conducted and guided the areas of interest during the interviews. Twenty interviews were conducted and recorded over several months. Snowball sampling became the primary method of identifying respondents, as potential participants began calling voluntarily to be

included in the study. This displayed the desire of former student-athletes to give this phenomenon a true voice. As stated by Eddy, "I've got something I want to say, a point that I want to get across from the inside looking in." The twenty interviews were transcribed and coded into useful categories and themes that emerged during the course of the research. This chapter gives a thorough discussion of findings concerning the research questions, as well as limitations and implications of the study.

DISCUSSIONS OF RESERCH QUESTIONS

This research examined the post-collegiate experiences of African-American male student-athletes in order to understand the transition out of sports as a process guided and affected by several relevant factors. In order understand how those factors affected the transition process and address the research questions, the data was organized into seven categories with several associated themes. This allowed for the researcher to examine these issues through a life course and finally interpret how the issues affected the transition process. The research questions in this study are as follows: 1) are African-American male student-athletes subjected to and are they aware of the intense socialization into athletics by family, community, and the media? 2) Is the career maturity and transition out of sports impeded by attachment to the athletic identity, college experience, and/or unrealistic professional sports aspirations?

Research Question One. The first research question is concentrated on the socialization process. It asks if African-American male student-athletes are

subjected to and are they aware of the intense socialization into athletics by family, community, and the media. This question must be addressed by first considering data that may suggest subjection to family, community and media socialization, and next considering data that indicates whether or not the respondents were aware of that socialization.

Although only a few respondents felt that their parents pushed them to play sports, many of them indicated that their parents supported their athletic endeavors more than any other area of their lives. For example Steve referred to his father as "Dad slash Coach", and Calvin discussed tutoring sessions during professional football games by his father to improve play by himself and his brother. Most respondents had parents that attended most of their games, and more importantly they encouraged athletic scholarships for college attendance. This encouragement enhanced the belief that many respondents expressed concerning sports as one of the only opportunities for success in the African-American community. Additionally, many expressed that extended family members influenced them and praised athletic achievement above and beyond all other achievements. For example, Hubert and Fred are brothers and cousins to Calvin, all of these respondents discussed feelings that athletics were important not only to their parents, but other cousins and uncles. Most respondents had athletic role models, but many had athletic role models that were members of their families such as brothers, uncles, and cousins.

One surprise finding was concerning sport socialization in African-American neighborhoods. The literature and previous study by the researcher

mostly concentrated on sport socialization through family and the media. However, in this study it emerged how important neighborhood can be in socializing African-American young men into the athletic identity, as well as expecting professional sports careers. Not as a result of snowballing, these respondents were garnered from different clusters, however six from the same neighborhood in which sports was of maximum importance. Of these six respondents all mention either the neighborhood school, or the many young men in the neighborhood who had been successful athletes as one of the main sources for developing and reinforcing expectations to play professional sports.

Many respondents motioned the media's role in socializing African-American males toward athletics. An awareness of blocked opportunities for African-American men was realized by all of the respondents. The media strengthens that awareness by focusing solely on African-American men who have become successful through athletic achievement or entertainment. Several respondents attribute their unrealistic desire to play professional sports to this fact.

Many of the participants of this study indicated a belief that sports were a 'golden opportunity,' or a way out of their social and economic circumstances. Some indicated that they felt their parents encourage them to achieve athletically for future success. Others indicated through their responses that they were aware that members of neighborhood expected them to obtain sports fame. Also many indicated a knowledge that the media deliberately promotes the notion that African-Americans must succeed through sports.

Through these findings, it is evident that the respondents were subjected to socialization processes inundated with an overemphasis of athletics by family, community, and the mass media. Although some were more affected by one of these socializing agents more than others, all of the participants had responses that indicated that at least one of these agents contributed to the overemphasis on athletics in their own lives. It is also evident that the respondents were aware of the intense socialization toward sports that African-American men are subjected to. Whether from the family, community, and especially the media, the data suggests that the respondents were aware that they were being pushed toward athletics.

Research Question Two. The second research question is concerned with career maturity and the transition out of sport. This question asks if the career maturity and transition out of sports is impeded by attachment to the athletic identity, college experience, and/or unrealistic professional sports aspirations. This question must also be addressed in two folds. First the salience of athletic identity, collegiate experience, expectations for profession careers must be examined. Second, the career maturity and transition process must be explored, in search of difficulties that may be connected to athletic identity, collegiate experience, and/or aspirations.

The vast majority of respondents, fifteen out of twenty to be exact, felt that 60 percent or more of themselves was defined by athletics. Many also experienced this identity foreclosure before or during adolescence. Additionally,

many respondents attributed all or most of their positive qualities and pro-social values to athletics. In fact, Matt stated that sports were as important to his development as a person as his parents were. The strong attachment to athletic identity is reinforced by both significant others and general members of society. Many felt as if others only related to them as athletes. Personally, several respondents felt that they would not know who they were if they could use athlete as a part of their self-definition.

Sixteen of the twenty respondents felt as if they were treated unfairly by coaches or staff during their collegiate careers. A vast majority of the participants of this study also believe that the university only valued them as athletes, and neglected their educational development. Some experience racism by fans and in the classroom by students and professors. Finally, adding to negative views on college experiences, nineteen of the twenty respondents believed that an unequal relationship exists between the university and student-athletes, with universities reaping far greater benefits from their labor.

Concerning aspirations to play professional sports, eighteen of the twenty respondents had expectations for professional sports careers before or in high school, or by their first year in college. This belief was instilled during the socialization process and reinforced by socializing agents throughout the life course. Although most were aware of the negative statistics indicating the unrealistic nature of this belief, most found ways to justify possessing these expectations.

Most of the respondents exhibited signs of impeded career maturity. Many had not prepared in college for careers other than sports, and most did not have career plans in place once their athletic careers were over. Jack, Eddy, and Matt were the clearest examples of career immaturity as they went through several jobs and periods of confusion as to how to find employment that they deemed suitable. Furthermore, all respondents described their transitions stages as difficult. Some displayed destructive behavior such as drinking and irresponsibility, most mention feeling depressed, calling this time "horrible," "the darkest time of my life," or "like losing an arm or a leg."

A reluctance to let go of the athletic identify was indicated in several responses concerning post collegiate experiences. Many respondents focused on "keeping the door open," as if closing the door and moving on was a personal failure. Several respondents mention being treated unfairly in college by coaches as ending their chances for a successful athletic career when discussing their post-collegiate experience. Others motioned being forced into a major of no interest to them, due to the universities overemphasis on athletic over educational development as a source of their confusing concerning careers. Additionally, most respondents expressed disappointment or even devastation that their expectations to play professional sports fell short. This data suggests that among these respondents, career maturity and the transition process are impeded by an unwillingness to transform the athletic identity, negative college experience, and unrealistically high expectations to play sports.

Limitations and Implications of the Study

The limitations of this research are those typically brought forth concerning qualitative research. The first limitation deals with the generalizability of the findings. This study focused on twenty respondents whose responses were consistent with the hypothesized dilemmas identified in the literature, as well as the issues that were brought forth in the previous quantitative study conducted by the researcher. However, the findings cannot be generalized to describe the post-collegiate experiences of all African-American student-athletes in revenue-generating sports. This leads to a further limitation that only revenue-generating sports were examined. Future research including other sports, namely baseball and track and field, may find similar results. Additionally, this study was limited by gender. Growing media attention has been given to the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), African-American track and field heroines, and a growing number of African-American women in other formerly white dominated sports such as gymnastics and tennis. It will be interesting to research the affects that this emergent intense socialization of women toward athletic fame is having on their post-collegiate and collegiate experience. The final limitation is also related to the sample. Although the sample consisted of men of various ages from universities across the nation, football was overrepresented. This may be due to the fact that college football has a 100 man roster, while college basketball has a roster of around 16-20 players. Also, firefighters were

overrepresented due to snowballing, self-identification, and voluntary participation of many of these respondents.

This study has implications for the African-American family. Although discrimination and blocked opportunities continue to exist in the African-American community, the African-American family has a responsibility to encourage other avenues of success beyond sports. Furthermore, institutions of high education must emphasize the educational development of student-athletes, giving them the necessary tools for successful careers and transitions into the working world without sports. To continue to generate an outlook by student-athletes that they are valued only according to their athletic contributions is a genuine form of exploitation. Although universities benefit from the obsessive pursuit of sports fame by their student-athletes; coaches, administrators and the NCAA must foster an atmosphere in which student-athletes are treated as students first. Thus allowing them to chose majors and explore options that are of interest to them and will lead to careers outside of sports.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

DEMOGRAPHICS

Age
Occupation
Sport
Marital status
Scholarship status
Playing Status (place on depth chart)

If someone asked you "Tell me about yourself" how would you do that?

SOCIALIZATION

Tell me a little about your family (background)?

How old were you when you began playing sports?

Talk about your parent's role in your athletic involvement?

Talk about some of your role models while growing up? (beside parents, and grand parents)

Did you feel pressure to participate in athletics? To go pro? By parents, friends?

Do you think your parents saw sports as an opportunity for you (Scholarships, go pro)

When did you start seeing sports as a possible career, like to make money or go pro one day?

Did you have other hobbies or interests?

Talk about what you feel to be the role of sports in our (the Black) community?

Do you think that sports is a good way if not the best way for Black men to make money? Why? What role you do you think the media is playing in the importance placed on sports in our community?

Do you think we overemphasize the role and importance of sports?

Do you think sports distract black kids from succeeding at other things? What else were you good at and why didn't you pursue that?

-Probes to get the respondents to discuss the role of sports in their socialization process will be used throughout.

ATHLELTIC IDENTIY

If I asked you to define yourself, how much of that definition would include athletics? What do you think your _____(wife, fiancé', best friend) would say on this same question?

When did you begin to define yourself as an athlete?

What level of importance do you (did you) place on involvement in sports?

Do you think others see (saw) you as just an athlete?

P: Do you ever see yourself not being an athlete?

NP: Do you still see yourself as an athlete?

How important is the role of athletics in your life and relationships with the people in your life?

COLLIGIATE EXPERIENCE

Talk about your college experience in sports, do you feel like you were treated fairly?, do you feel like coaches/ staff really cared about you? Did you have a good experience? What was good about it? What was bad?

Now about big-time college athletics. Do you feel that athletes and universities are benefiting equally from high level college athletics?

Did you experience racism on any level? What was it like being a black student-athlete on a white campus?

Do you feel like the university emphasized your educational development?

Do you have a degree?

How important do you feel it was to coaches, ADs, the university officials that you and other athletes get a degree?

How important were politics on who played and how you were treated?

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS ASPIRATIONS

Have you always (did you always) desire to play professional sports?

How strong was that desire and how serious did you take it?

Out of college what do you think your chances were to go to the league? What about as a senior in high school?

With all of the information out there about how unrealistic it is (the statistics), why do you think so many black athletes still bank on or expect to play pro?

P: Little kids, especially little black kids, do you think that you guys are good role models? Would you rather your child look up to an athlete as opposed to some other figure?

NP: Did you try to play ball any more after college? Tell me about those experiences? How long did you (will you) keep trying? Do you still think about it

things that have happened that may have kept you out of the league in the first place?

What were your academic goals? How important were they in comparison to your athletic ones?

CAREER DEVELOPMET, RETIREMENTAND CURRENT SITUATION

Have you ever considered any other professions outside of sports?

If so what do you see yourself doing?

What was your major in college? Why did you choose that major? Was there any other major that you would have preferred?

NP: Tell me about how it has been not playing sports any more. What are you doing now? Do you enjoy it? Talk about why you think you are not playing anymore? What makes you different from those that are playing (work ethic, talent, size etc)? Where you prepared to go out and find another profession or career? How long did you/will you keep trying to play? What all have you done to try to play (tryouts, NFLE, NBADL, etc.) Tell me about these experiences?

What did/are you do to prepare for "just in case"?

P: What do you think it will be like to retire and when do you see that happening? What are you doing to prepare? If your (sports) career ended tomorrow, would you know what to do in order to find a new career? What would you do and who would you go to for help? How does the reality of your life as a pro differ from what you thought it would be like?

What advice would you give a 12-year-old kid who is good in school and in sports?

NP: questions directed toward retired athletes
P: questions directed toward professional athletes only

APPENDIX C: STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND
CONFIDENTIALITY

STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

You have been asked to participate in research conducted by Krystal Beamon, sociology doctoral candidate at Oklahoma State University. The purpose of this study is to examine the post collegiate experiences of African-American male athletes. This includes the end of the athletic role in your life or, if you are a professional athlete, how the expectations associated with "going pro" differ from the actualities. The information that you provide will aid in understanding the social circumstances and processes that occur during the inevitable transition out of the role of athlete. You will be asked to answer a series of questions concerning your family background, athletic identity, collegiate experiences, desires to play professional sports, and your career development.

Participation is strictly voluntary and the interview will be completely confidential. Only I (the researcher) will know that you have predicted in this study and neither your name nor any other individual identification will be associated with the information you provide. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time and you are free to not answer any single question or series of question if you so choose.

The interview will be audio taped and I will take notes on your responses. I will keep the tapes and written notes in my possession in a locked file cabinet that only I will have access to. Again, your name will not be associated with the information obtained in this interview and I will use a pseudonym (fake name) when using quotes made by participants. Also, I will destroy the audiotapes after they have been transcribed.

Any questions concerning this research or the researcher may be addressed to the Institutional Review Board at Oklahoma State University:
Dr. Carol Olson, IRB Chair
415 Whitehurst
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-1676, colson@okstate.edu

Do you have any questions or concerns about the research or researcher?

If you choose to participate, I will now turn on the audiotape and ask you for your consent.

(Tape is now on)

If you understand that the information that you provide for this study is confidential and your participation throughout is voluntary; do you give consent for Krystal Beamon to record and use the information that will be obtained during this interview?

VITA

Krystal Beamon

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: THE LEAGUE OR THE GRIND: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE POST-COLLIGIATE EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE ATHLETES

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

> Personal Data: Born in Dallas, Texas, On May 10 1977, the daughter of Ella Jackson Beamon and Clifford Beamon, Jr.

> Education: Graduated from Skyline High School in Dallas, Texas in May 1995; Received Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology, Summa Cum Laude from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma July 1999; Received Master's of Science degree in Sociology from Oklahoma State University in May 2001; Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree with a major in Sociology in July 2005.

> Experience: Employed by Oklahoma State University, Department of Sociology as a Teaching Assistant, August 1999 through May 2001; Teaching Associate, August 2001 through May 2005, Research Assistant, Summer 20004 and Summer 2005. American Sociological Association Minority Fellow August 2000 through July 2004.

> Professional Memberships: American Sociological Association

Name: Krystal Beamon   Date of Degree: July, 2005

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: THE LEAGUE OR THE GRIND: A SOCIOLOGICAL
EXAMINATION OF THE POST-COLLIGIATE EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN-
AMERICAN MALE ATHLETES

Pages in Study: 182   Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Sociology

Scope and Method of Study: As an institution, sport holds an integral and prominent
        position as a component of our culture that is connected to the economy,
        educational institutions, family and many other spheres of social life in America.
        Accordingly, this institution has generated several areas of interest in the study of
        society and human behavior. Although participation in collegiate athletics is often
        considered a golden opportunity for African-Americans, compelling evidence to
        the contrary has been presented for decades. In fact, serious involvement in
        athletics has been associated with the hindrance of other areas of development
        amongst African-Americans, including educational and occupational
        achievement. This study examines the post-collegiate experiences of African-
        American male athletes from a sociological perspective by emphasizing the
        societal processes and pressures that make this issue a purely social phenomenon.
        It builds on a previous quantitative study of the career aspirations of collegiate
        student-athletes. This group has been proven to overemphasize sport as a possible
        career and face a special set of circumstances concerning the importance of
        athletics in their lives from early childhood socialization into adulthood. The post-
        collegiate experience of African-American athletes may mean an end to the
        athletic role that has encompassed his social identity and expose a lack of career
        maturation. Also, continuance of athletic competition as a profession may reveal
        that the expectations associated with "going pro" differs from the actualities. This
        study utilizes in depth interviews with African-American student-athletes who
        have moved on to the occupational sector as professional athletes well as those
        who have left the athletic realm altogether. The data will aid in understanding the
        social circumstances and processes associated with the inevitable transition from
        student-athlete to the occupational sector.

Findings and Conclusions: The data suggests that the respondents were subjected to
        socialization processes inundated with an overemphasis of athletics by family,
        community, and the mass media. It is also evident that the respondents were
        aware of the intense socialization toward sports that African-American men are
        subjected to. This data suggests that among these respondents, career maturity and
        the transition process are impeded by an unwillingness to transform the athletic
        identity, negative college experience, and unrealistically high expectations to play
        sports.
 ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Patricia A. Bell _____