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A for Academics or Athletics: A Critical Look at African American Male Student Athletes in Search of Identity

Tamekia Bush
tlb6v4@mail.umsl.edu

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Running head: A for Academic or Athletics

A for Academic or Athletics: A Critical Look at African American Male Student Athletes
in Search of Identity

Tamekia Lee Bean-Bush

M.Ed., Education Administration, University of Missouri- St. Louis, 2012
M.Ed., Curriculum and Instruction, University of Missouri- St. Louis, 2006
M.Ed., Secondary Education, University of Missouri- St. Louis, 2005
B.S., Recreation, Alcorn State University, 2001

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Advisory Committee

Matthew Davis, Ph.D.

Chairperson

Timothy Makubuya, Ph.D.

Carl Hoagland, Ed.D.

Thomasina Hassler, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family, friends, and teachers. A special feeling of gratitude for my loving and supportive husband, Marcus for being so understanding and willing to assist in any way possible to help me reach this milestone. My parents, Lee and Viola Bean for being a constant support with any and everything that I have ever needed. My grandmother, Mary Cummings for encouraging me to get as many degrees as my heart desired. My aunt Ruthie Bean for being a positive role model and giving me direction. My children, Isaiah and Olivia for being the sunshine that I needed to keep pushing because I knew I had little eyes watching and waiting to call Momma a Doctor.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my two best friends, Tara and Shannan, whose words of encouragement kept me on my task especially on those days when I wanted to continue an extended break. My high school volleyball coach Hubert Butler for pushing me to succeed academically and athletically while instilling a “never quit” attitude. And last but certainly not least, all my teachers from East St. Louis School District 189 for laying the foundation that lead me on this path. Each person has made a positive contribution to my academic success and for that, I am eternally grateful.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how African American male student athletes developed their athletic and racial identity and how this impacted their academic identity. I conducted two in depth interviews with 6 African American male current or former student athletes who played basketball or football in high school but were not eligible to be a NCAA qualifier for an athletic scholarship. I sought to investigate the point when the student athletes began their career in athletics and when athletics began to impact their academic performance and why it impacted academic performance. I also investigated how the African American male student athlete began to develop identity and how athletic and racial identity impacted the development of their academic selves.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Personal Orientation

It has become all too familiar to meet former athletes who are willing to discuss their missed opportunities. Many of these athletes are ready to discuss their stellar athletic performance in their sport of choice. They are extremely proud of their high school athletic careers. They describe, in detail, their athletic abilities and what they've accomplished on the court or field. However, I have found that when they begin to talk about their athletic careers after high school, many become solemn. Their moods change, and they begin to discuss how their careers ended after high school.

As a former female student athlete, I was able to take full advantage of my athletic abilities by receiving an athletic scholarship. My goal, which was the goal of many student athletes at my high school, was to receive an athletic scholarship and continue my education at the collegiate level. As a high school student, I remember taking the ACT and knew that I had to have a certain GPA to accept any offer from a Division I or Division II college or university. My ACT score and GPA coupled with my athletic abilities opened up a new chapter of my life at Alcorn State University. The majority of my team mates also received and was able to accept their athletic scholarship offers; however, this wasn't the case for many of the male student athletes at my high school. My situation isn't unique or unusual; however, many African American male

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student athletes find this to be the holy grail of athletic opportunities. Many African American male student athletes find that they have missed life changing opportunities because they were unable to accept college scholarship offers because of their lack of academic performance. In my experience, many African American male students' athletes suffer from a disidentification of who they are racially, athletically, and academically. Multiple scholars posit that students' identification with academics is a major component of academic success (Awad, 2007; Osborne, 1999).

As an educator, I continued to see the same situation play out over the course of my 12-year career. I have met remarkable African American male student athletes who were dynamic in their sport of choice. They were wonderful individuals but struggled academically. Many of these athletes loved participating in their sports but dreaded going to class. Many expressed that they didn't like school. I often pondered how they got to this point in their educational careers that they would develop such a disdain for school. Many blamed teachers, while others simply didn't give a reason at all. Most expressed an interest in attending college or playing their sport of choice professionally. Some even expressed an interest in becoming professionals such as doctors, lawyers, or professional athletes upon completion of their collegiate careers. However, their dreams did not match their GPA's or test scores. The latter forced me to wonder how they could have such high hopes of success without achieving academically. Are they purposely putting all of their efforts into athletics and not into their academic selves? Who are these students that I have these conversations with daily about their future?

The question becomes, who am I as an African American male student athlete. Am I a student? Am I an athlete? Am I a student athlete? Am I an African American

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student? Am I an African American athlete? Am I an African American student athlete? How the African American male identifies can have a significant effect on their academic performance. When a person places himself into a particular category, they are essentially identifying who they believe themselves to be. According to Erickson (1968), Adolescents discover their identity through exploration and personal investments based on experiences. For the African American male student athlete, this process becomes more complicated because they not only must begin a process to figure out who they are as an African American male but they must also identify as either a student, an athlete, or a student athlete. The latter becomes even more complicated when factoring stereotype threats that African Americans face concerning intelligence. Steele and Aronson (1995) described stereotype threats as a factor affecting someone psychologically; it's also described as a social issue that psychologically affects the American image of African Americans as intellectually inferior. According to Aronson, Fried and Good (2001), Stereotype threat analysis occurs when a Black student has an additional cognitive and emotional burden that does not apply to others race who are not affected by the stereotype. According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), when African American students are less connected to their culture, they subsequently increase the ability to succeed academically. This statement is indicative of why many African American males may suffer from stereotype threats or racial identity because some believe that they must renounce their culture to achieve academically. Awad (2007) believes that the role of identity in the academic achievement of African Americans is not still unclear and African Americans who are academically successful identify as African American on a low level. Other races are not required to consider accepting another

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culture to be seen as having the potential to be intelligent or even being capable of learning on a higher level. Aronson (2001) states past research suggests negative stereotypes stifle the African American students intellectually and plays an active role in the academic failure.

In addition to the latter, racial/race realism could also be at the root of the black male student athlete's academic failure. According to McGreal (2012),

“Researchers with an agenda based on race realism would have people believe that all the socially desirable characteristics that people can have are clustered together, and as a corollary, all the unpleasant and antisocial traits cluster together too. More pointedly, the desirable traits are supposedly concentrated in certain racial groups (e.g., whites and Asians), whereas the undesirable ones are characteristic of other races (i.e., Blacks)”

(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/unique-everybody-else/201210/personality-intelligence-and-race-realism>)

Is it possible that the African American male student athletes believe that the stereotypes that plague African Americans as a race are true? Therefore, this proposed study seeks to shed light as to why African American male athletes continue to miss opportunities to compete as a collegiate athlete because of racial identity and stereotypes that African-American males are not as smart as their White counterparts.

This study will contribute to knowledge about education by showing that black male student athletes are often stigmatized in the educational setting and glorified on the athletic field. It is important to note that I will use the terms African American and Black interchangeably. Since the stereotypes about black male student athletes manifest

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themselves in the classroom, many of the black male athletes begin to believe that they are not as intelligent as their white counterparts. This study will help shed light on stereotype issues and hopefully bring solutions that can be utilized in the school setting to help remove stereotype threats for black male athletes.

According to Awad (2007), the U.S. school system focuses on Western cultural history while ignoring the history of African Americans thus creating a system that miseducates African American children about their culture resulting in the African American taking on a Eurocentric cultural perspective. Schools often only address Black history during Black History Month, while starting the dialogue at the point of slavery. By the educational system failing to acknowledge that Africans had a successful history before slavery, schools send the message that African American history starts in bondage. The bondage that occurred during slavery not only was a physical bondage but was also psychological. Africans were not allowed to attend school, learn to read, and forced to renounce their African heritage in an attempt to assimilate them into the European way of life. Africans were forced to give up their culture and way of life because the slave masters needed to break their spirit and remove any semblance of who they used to be. African Americans racial identity is not acknowledged in the educational system because history books or curriculum do not accurately give account of African heritage which is, in fact, the culture of the African American students that they are charged with educating (Loewen, 1995)

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is Theory of Identity Development. In developing an identity, people view themselves one way and interact with others based

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on those images and interactions. (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine, 2006). These interactions help shape how people define themselves and how they identify themselves based on their lived experiences. In addition to developing an identity based on interactions, African American children are also aware of stereotype threats that center on academic achievement and the perceived lack thereof of the African American student. When the African American student encounters this stereotype, he may, in fact, believe that he is academically inferior or dumb, or decide that they are not inferior but still have an overwhelming feeling to prove that they are not inferior or dumb.

The purpose of this study is to identify if racial identity and athletic identity of African-American male student athletes affect their academic identity. The Theory of Identity Development is the overarching theory as this study seeks to understand how the participants developed their identities. Critical Race Theory applies to this research question because the racial identity and athletic identity of African-American male student athletes might be formed by stereotype threats that are commonly applied by the majority group to people of African descent. African American teenage males not only have the task of figuring out who they are and where they fit in but also have to contend with multiple identities. “Given the presumed connection between identity development and academic outcomes for African Americans, an important variable that may be related to academic achievement for African Americans is racial identity” (Awad, 2001, pg.189)

America has used education as the means to divide by social status and economic power while denying equal opportunity to some citizens (Ogbu, 1997, 2003). One must pay careful attention to how education is used to divide resources especially regarding the African American male and the resources meant for equal opportunity and academic

success (Stinson, 2006). Dougherty (2004) discussed the racial identity issues that plagued the African American community during the migration of many African Americans from the south. One particular incident that helps gain a moment to derail the negative media attention was to stop the airing of Amos 'n' Andy television show in 1951. This program depicted blacks as “amoral, semi-literate, lazy, stupid, scheming, and dishonest” (Dougherty, 2004). The latter is just one example of how African Americans are faced with developing a negative racial identity. Even within the African American community, African American children are faced with ideals that teach them that they are not equal to their white counterparts. African American children who are of a lighter skin color were treated with preference over those who had darker skin by other Black people. We are taught to believe that whites are better academically, socially, and morally. The latter becomes evident in Clark's “Doll Test” during 1939. Clark (1947) used four baby dolls that were the same except in color. The dolls were shaded white to a deep dark skin. He tested students ranging in age three to seven. He asked each of the participant's questions in an attempt to determine their racial perceptions and preferences. Clark asked each participant the following questions:

- Show me the doll that you like best or that you'd like to play with
- Show me the doll that is the 'nice' doll
- Show me the doll that looks 'bad
- Give me the doll that looks like a white child
- Give me the doll that looks like a Negro child
- Give me the doll that looks like you.

The children in this study overwhelmingly identified the white doll as nice and the one in which they would like to play. Clark also found that when the participants were asked to show the doll that looked like them, the children picked a doll with a shade that was several shades lighter than their actual skin tone. Davis (2005) repeated this study in 2005 in Harlem. Davis conducted a study titled *A Girl like Me* and found that of the 21 children she interviewed, 71% believed the 'white' doll to be the nice doll. While Davis' study was not groundbreaking, it did show that our young African American children may be suffering from a negative perception of self.

Statement of the Problem

African American student athletes are losing opportunities to compete on the collegiate level because of a lack of academic identity. It is believed that many African American student athletes may disproportionately identify as athletes instead of having a desire to achieve academically. This disidentification may be attributed to the high number of African American males in revenue producing sports, such as basketball and football. African American males make up a large percentage of professional athletes. These professional athletes are thought to have made it when they reach the point of being paid to play a sport professionally. Making it may be the goal of many African American males because the academic setting is an obstacle that stands in the way of them and their goal of playing professional sports. In the 2013 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Basketball Association (NBA), the NBA continues to lead the sports industry in its hiring practices that support racially and gender hiring standards (1). The NBA boost of having an A+ rating for racial hiring practices especially for players. The NBA employed 76.3 percent African American male players in 2013. 43.3 percent of all

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head coaches are African American while four African American were chief executive officers (3 out of 31) and presidents (1 out of 7) in the NBA and six African Americans or 20% are general managers. Only 5% the NBA team physicians were African American. The allure of making millions of dollars while participating in a sport that one loves has a lot of appeal. At one time, athletes did not have to attend college to be drafted into professional sports. The latter was the case for LeBron James, a professional basketball player who has played for the Miami Heat and Cleveland Cavaliers. LeBron James entered the NBA after high school in 2003 and had earned over \$109 million to date. It is believed that these athletes are the people that many young African American male athletes view as role models. It is believed that these are the people that they model and desire to be because the young African American male student athlete dreams of becoming the next LeBron James instead of the next Dr. Fred Bonner, Ed.D. Based on the information obtained from 2013 Racial and Gender Report Card: the positions within the NBA that require higher education were not held by African American males in large numbers (Lapchick, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to explore why some African American male student athletes may identify more athletically and racially than academically.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how racial and athletic identity impacts African American male student athletes academic identity. I took a critical look at the high revenue sports: basketball and football. The critical questions that I sought to answer shed light on issues that are faced by many African American male student athletes. While I have found literature investigating African American male racial identity and

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academic identity, there is a gap in the literature as it pertains to African American male student athletes and how they form their academic identities during their K-12 years. The critical questions that I investigated are:

1. Does the African American male student athlete identify as a student athlete or an athlete?
2. Does racial and athletic identity create an environment that is not conducive to learning for African American male student athletes?
3. Are there lasting implications of disidentification of the African American male student athlete's future in collegiate institutions?

As a former student athlete, I noticed many African American male athletes who did not earn an adequate GPA to participate in athletics beyond high school. Many of the male athletes were outstanding on the playing field, but less than stellar in the classroom. I often wondered if these jocks believed the hype about African Americans educational achievement and male athletes being dumb jocks. I pondered if there is a relationship between athletic superiority and academic disconnect. The potential findings from this research can be useful by:

1. Exposing any disconnect for African American male athletes and their educational experiences.
2. Give information to help prevent student athlete's failure to meet NCAA requirements if they are offered athletic scholarships to compete collegiately.

It is important to try to understand if there is a trend that will allow those that are charged with educating African American male student-athletes to address them in a way to enable them to reach their full potential. The life of a student-athlete can be more

challenging than the non-athlete. The student-athlete must learn to balance and structure a schedule that will allow them to be more productive on and off the field. However, this prioritization would occur based on the student athlete's main identity. Therefore, it becomes vital to understand why some African American male student-athletes' may identify more with being an athlete while giving little consideration to being academically sound.

This study was a qualitative research study that utilized a phenomenology approach to analyzing the lived experiences of former African American male student athletes who failed to accept an athletic scholarship because of a poor academic performance.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were that I only studied African American male student athletes who participated in the sports of football and basketball. The findings of this study will not be generalized to the general population because the sample size was small. I also sampled from predominantly African American high schools in large metropolitan areas in the Midwest. Because I was not certain I would be able to generate a large sample from one metropolitan area, I looked within the Midwest for participants. The criteria were the participants must be from an urban area. There were other factors such as socioeconomic status (SES) that were not addressed during this study. While SES could have been a major contributor to the issues at hand, they were not a factor for this study.

Definitions of Key Terms

Academic dis-identification- whereby students disconnect their self-evaluations from their academic performance in response to experiencing stigma in the academic context (e.g., perceived negative stereotypes, low expectations, unfair treatment due to race) (Steele, 1992).

Academic dis-identification refers to the process by which individuals disconnect important aspects of their personal identity (self-esteem, self-concept, values) from the academic domain (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Steele, 1992)

Academic identification - is the extent that individuals develop strong connections between the self (e.g., self- concept, self-esteem) and the academic domain (Crocker & Major, 1989; Osborne, 1997; Steele 1992).

Academic identification - refers to a connection between one's personal identity and one's role as student or learner within the academic domain (Hope, 2013)

Athletic Identity- is defined as the extent to which individuals delineate themselves as athletes (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993).

Acting White - a label used by scholars and others to describe people of color who are academically inclined (Fryer, 53).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) - a theory that acknowledges the normalcy and permanence of racism (Bell, 1992)

Dis-identification/dissociation- this dis- identification or dissociation of one's self-evaluations from the academic domain can manifest in decreased academic motivation, including devaluing the academic domain, reduced effort on academic task, lower

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academic expectations, and ultimately poorer academic achievement (Aronson, 2001; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002)

NCAA- National Collegiate Athletic Association

NCAA Qualifier- prospective student-athletes are required to have graduated from high school, and have completed a core curriculum consisting of the following:

- English (4 years)
- Mathematics (2 years)
- Social Science (2 years)
- An additional course in English, mathematics or science (1 year)
- Additional courses in any of the above, or in computer science, philosophy, no doctrinal religion or foreign language (2 years)
- And achieve a combination of minimum grade point average (in the core curriculum) and minimum SAT/ACT score as indicated by the NCAA's Division I Qualifier Index. (NCAA.org)

Personal identities – Individuals are more likely to connect their personal identities--- including self-evaluations—to domains that enhance self-concept or allow them to maintain positive self-concepts (Hope, 2013).

Race- an assigned classification of present day human based on a combination of characteristics especially skin color (Dictionary.reference.com).

Racial Identity- To examine Black students' racial identity beliefs in our study, we draw on the multidimensional model of racial identity, which defines racial identity as the beliefs and cognitions related to one's racial group membership (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998)

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Snowball sampling- a technique used to find research participants by asking the initial participants for names of others who fit the research criteria (Atkinson & Flint)

Stereotype threats- Steele posited that Black students, particularly those who identify strongly with academics, are concerned with confirming stereotypes of academic incompetence and racial inferiority in academic settings—stereotype threats (1992).

Summary

There has been extensive research on the African American male. There is extensive literature related to racial identity and how to educate the African American male. There is extensive literature on the collegiate African American male student athletes and their identity development. However, there is a gap in the literature as it pertains to educating the African American male student athlete during the K-12 years and why many disassociate from academics. There is little discourse on how to address the issue of the African American male student athlete's identity during the K-12 years and how this can affect their academic identity. This study will attempt to identify why African American male athletes may not identify as student athletes who put their very goals in jeopardy. It is important to understand why some dream of achieving only athletically when academic achievement will help them attain their goals of possibly reaching the next level of athletic participation: college and possibly, although not likely, the NBA.

African American male students have been the subject of many studies. However, the majority of these studies were not to find a solution to an overwhelming problem in the United States which makes African American males feel like second class citizens. The studies were conducted to provide evidence about African American

males being a problem (Steele, 1995). According to Stevenson (2002), African American men have many sociocultural and academic challenges that stem from emasculation, police brutality, educational tracking, lynching and high rates of imprisonment. Because many inner city African American males may experience or have experienced some of those denigrating issues not only in the streets but also in schools, it becomes even more complex when attempting to form a positive racial identity in term of education.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

One of the goals of many student athletes on the high school level is to receive an athletic scholarship and play their sport professionally. While many athletes have the athletic ability to attract the attention of collegiate scouts for their respective sports, some lack the required grade point average and standardized test scores needed to accept an offer to compete on the collegiate level. High school student athletes must maintain a minimum GPA and obtain the minimum score that is required for the ACT and SAT. Meeting these criteria; student athletes are considered to be qualifiers for an athletic scholarship for Division I or Division II schools. The prospective student athlete is required to maintain a minimum of 2.3 GPA and achieve a core score (the sum of English, math, reading, and science) between 36 and 98 (NCAA.org). While the NCAA tries to level the playing field for prospective student athletes, consideration is not given to minority athletes who suffer from racial identity and stereotype threats in the educational setting.

African American students are faced with numerous problems that are not faced by other races. While other races can claim they live in a colorblind society, African American students are constantly reminded of their Blackness. Whether it is the local news stations disproportionately reporting on crimes committed by Blacks or the local shop owners who follow African Americans around their stores, to the local newspaper that often prints biased information slated to upholding stereotypes of the African American community. African American students are told daily that they must have failed academically because their school districts are always in the local media because of failing test scores. Their schools are not well equipped when compared to their suburban peer (Ogbu, 1986). Their neighborhoods may not be pristine like their suburban peers. This is simply a partial list of the stereotypical racial issues that African Americans face daily. If we couple these stereotypical issues with the fact that the teenage years are a time to begin to define self-identity, we create a situation that forces the African American student to identify not only who they are but also with what it means to be African American in the United States.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how racial and athletic identity impacted African American male student athletes' academic identity during their K-12 years. I took a critical look at the NCAA high revenue sports football and basketball. The critical questions that I sought to answer shed light on issues faced by many African American male student athletes. While I have found literature investigating African American male racial identity and academic identity, there is a gap in the literature as it pertains to African American male student athletes during their K-12 years. The critical questions I will investigate are:

1. Does the African American male student athlete identify as a student athlete or an athlete?
2. Does racial and athletic identity create an environment that is not conducive to learning for African American male student athletes?
3. Are there lasting implications of disidentification of the African American male student athlete's future in collegiate institutions?

Historical Background

Historically, we know that the African American student has endured severe racial discrimination. African American students were not given the same educational opportunities as their white counterparts. In Dougherty's (2004) book, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform*, he discussed the racial identity issues that plagued the African American community during the migration of many African Americans from the South. African Americans were forced to live in undesirable areas because their white counterparts did not want to live in the same neighborhoods because of racial stereotyping. Initially, African-Americans were not given the opportunity to attend school. However, when the opportunity for African Americans to attend school arose, the African-American community was met with resistance in educating their youth. Out of this resistance, *Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka* was born. This monumental lawsuit proved that separate but equal was detrimental to the African American child's identity (Nasir et al., 2009). This is just one example of how African Americans are faced with developing a negative racial identity. Even within the African American community, African Americans are faced with ideals that teach us that we are less than White Americans. Children who are of a lighter skin color were treated with

preference over those who had darker skin by other Blacks (Dougherty, 2004) African American children are taught to believe that whites are better academically, socially, and morally. The latter has been reinforced by not providing African Americans with access to resources that would allow them to flourish. Instead, African Americans seemed to succumb to the racial realism and began to believe the narrative that they are in fact all that others claim them to be. As a result, athletics is viewed as a means to leave poverty and escape the reality of the African American in the United States (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Theory of Identity Development

In developing an identity, people view themselves one way and interact with others based on those images. (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine, 2006). It is believed that each person has multiple identities that are influenced by interactions that occur within their life. These interactions help shape how people define themselves and how they identify themselves based on their lived experiences. To develop an identity, individuals go through a process of selecting roles (Mead, 1934), as they derive meaning from this role; they gain a deeper understanding of what it means socially and culturally (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). The longer individuals interact in a social group, they understand their role and how to interact within that group (Harrison, Harrison & Moore, 2002), while gaining the groups perception, or what Mead (1934) calls the “generalized other. An individual not only understands his or her role but models his or her self after the ideals of the reference group (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009).

The latter does not mean that an individual can choose to be any self that they may desire because much of self is resultant from others (Awad, 2004). The individual

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must rely on others to complete the picture of himself (Goffman, 1959). Positive feedback from peers increased the development of an identity which impacts the total self (McCall & Simmons, 1966). While an individual is developing an identity of self, a heavy emphasis is placed on the identity that receives positive accolades resulting in others area being underdeveloped because they do not contribute to the positive view of self (Stryker, 1980). For athletes, the academic identity receives less time because the athletic identity receives greater acknowledgment (Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Hoberman, 2002). As a result, an individual forecloses on one identity and embraces it (Goffman, 1959).

Academic Identity/Academic Self Concept

Academic self- concept is the blend of beliefs that individuals hold about their own academic abilities (Okeke et al., 2009). Self-concept can be shaped by both internal (self) comparisons and external (against others) comparison (Marsh, 1986, 1990). It is possible that many African American high school student athletes may solely identify as being an athlete thus limiting the amount of effort that is given to the academic task. These athletes are motivated to give an unlimited amount of effort on the court because they may have a high athletic identity. They receive praise and recognition for their athletic accomplishments while consistently receiving negative feedback about their academic achievements.

Black American students have a hard time relating to a European curriculum that does not recognize the history of Black Americans. African American culture is underrepresented in terms of recognition for the accomplishments of Black Americans in education (Sellers, 1998). Awad (2007) discusses the significance of African Americans learning Western cultural history while the importance of their own history is not

considered. Many Black students may suffer negative performance outcomes such as reduced academic engagement lower scores on the standardized test because of a fear of confirming racial stereotypes which stifle their intellectual abilities (Good et al., 2003).

Another issue faced by African American students is academic self-concept. Academic self-concept is a set of beliefs about one's academic skills (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997). Academic self-concept also consists of a comparison of students academic skills compared to others (Cokley, 2000). This comparison to other students and mostly other races contributes to the major issues faced by African American students. When this comparison is made about black students vs. white students, some African American students may believe that they are supposed to score lower because historically they were taught that blacks are not as smart as whites.

Neil de Grasse Tyson received a doctoral degree from Columbia University in 1991. Good (2003) states that de Grasse Tyson was the seventh African-American astrophysicist out of 4000 astrophysicists nationwide. He spoke at the Columbia's graduation and stated:

“In the perception of society my athletic abilities are genetic; I am a likely mugger/rapist; my academic failures are expected; and my academic successes are attributed to others. To spend most of my life fighting these attitude levies an emotional tax that is a form of intellectual emasculation.” (de Grasse Tyson, 1991, pg 77).

The emotional tax de Grasse Tyson referred to aptly describes the undermining role stereotypes can play in the intellectual life of African-American students- and, indeed, of anyone who continues with stereotypes that question his or her ability. (Good, 2003)

Stereotype Threats

Steele and Aronson (1995) described stereotype threats as a factor affecting someone psychologically; it's also described as a social issue that mentally affects the image of African Americans as intellectually inferior. According to Aronson, Fried, and Good (2001), in situations where a stereotype about the group's intellectual ability is relevant, Black students carry an additional cognitive and emotional weight that others do not. The extra cognitive and emotional burden stems from the Black students' desire to not confirm negative stereotypes about their race. There is a stereotype that states that African Americans are superior athletically to Whites while Whites are superior academically to African Americans (Hernstein & Murray, 1994). This notion attempts to reinforce the commonly held stereotype African Americans are superior athletes but intellectually inferior to their White counterparts (Harrison, Lawrence, 2004; Hodge, Burden, Robinson, Bennet, 2008). According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), African American students who lessen their association to their cultural backgrounds increase their chances of succeeding in academic domains. This is "acting White" (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986, p. 47). While achieving academically is viewed as a White stereotype, acting Black means not achieving intellectually, not speaking proper English, and listening to rap and R&B music (Carter, 2006; Delpit, 1995).

Other common stereotypes for African American youth in the U.S. are they are loud, angry, athletically inclined, and have rhythm when dancing (Fordham, 1993; Hooks, 2004; Lei, 2003; Stevenson, 1997, 2004). This statement is indicative of why many African American males may suffer from stereotype threats or racial identity because some believe that they must renounce their culture to achieve academically. Awad

(2007) believes that the role of identity in the academic achievement of African Americans is still an unclear issue. Hogg, Terry, & White (1995) defined identity salience is conceptualized as the likelihood that the identity will be invoked in diverse situations (p.257). Chavous et al. (2003) found that high identity salience, as well as an awareness of societal discrimination, was related to positive academic outcomes among African American students. Other races are not required to consider accepting another culture to be considered as having the potential to be intelligent or even being capable of learning on a higher level.

Aronson (2001) states past research suggests negative stereotypes stifle black student's intellectual abilities and plays a direct role in their academic failure. Steele (1995) stated awareness of the stereotypes could psychologically threaten African Americans; this is a trend is known as stereotype threat which impair both academic performance and psychological engagement with academics (pg.1). In addition to the African American student reacting negatively to stereotype threats and standardized test scores being the preferred method for college acceptance, it is not surprising that African American students only make up 10% of college admissions to four year university because they tend to have lower GPA's and lower standardized test scores (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Because of the lower GPA's and standardized test scores, there may be an enormous impact on the collegiate life of African American students. The possible lasting implications of the latter are attending remedial courses spanning to not being admitted to a college or university.

The development of an affirmative racial identity is important for the African American youth and their social and mental adjustment because their race has been

historically devalued (Cross, 1991). Research on racial identity has adopted a multidimensional approach to examining the significance, and personal meaning individuals attribute of being African-American (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Racial centrality is a part of racial identity where youth view their race as defining who they are (Thompson, Gregory, 2010). This aspect of racial identification is particularly relevant during adolescence as race becomes more salient for youth (Chavous et al., 2003; Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2009).

According to Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998):

“Racial salience refers to the extent to which race is an important aspect of an individual’s self-concept at a particular time in a specific context, whereas racial ideology is an individual’s attitudes and beliefs regarding how African Americans should act. The third dimension is racial regard or a person’s evaluative judgment of his or her race. Two aspects of regard are defined: private (how an individual feels about African Americans) and public (an individual’s view of how African Americans are seen by others” (pg. 371)

Okeke et al. (2009) believe "the influence of stereotype endorsement on an individual’s self-perception will be especially strong if that individual feels strongly connected to the group for whom the negative stereotype applies" (p. 371). Okede et al. also stated, "If being African American is central to one’s self-definition, endorsement of race stereotypes is more likely to negatively influence self –perceptions than if race is not particularly important to the individual" (p. 377). Unfortunately, I have found that many African American students tend to believe the stereotypes wholeheartedly. They are not equipped with the tools as a youth to understand the nature of stereotypes and the length

that some are willing to go to preserve the balance of power. It is an arduous task to break free from the threat of stereotype threats and the damage that they cause within the African American community. Racial identity suffers when one believes the negative stereotypes about their racial group (Sellers, 1998). Negative racial identity has the potential to destroy the educational experience of the affected group by placing a mental barrier that validates the failure of that racial group (Quintana, 1998). This study sought to understand the lived experiences of current and former African American student athletes who have potentially suffered because of these beliefs.

In their expectancy-value model of achievement motivation, Eccles et al. (1982) thought that a child's belief of stereotypes could influence their beliefs about themselves. According to this theory, endorsement of traditional academic race stereotypes would lead to lower self-perceptions of academic competence for African Americans (Okeke et al., 2009). Many theorists believe that membership to a certain social group is central to social cues as a result of the member's identity development (Erikson, 1968; Oyserman et al., 1995; Thompson, 2006). Since racial stereotypes are still present about intellectual ability and those who may be considered members of a particular social group, it could be expected that Black Americans would report a lower expectation of academic competence than Whites (Okeke et al., 2009). Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh et al., 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000 stated: "Beliefs about competence influence actual achievement outcomes because of their motivational effect, particularly on challenging tasks and in response to failure" (pg. 9).

Racial/Race Realism

Bell (1992) stated “racial realism as a philosophy that requires African Americans to acknowledge the permanence of their subordinate status which enables them to avoid despair, and frees the to imagine and implement racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph” (pg.373). African Americans are expected to accept an inferior status by realizing that the negative stereotypes about them are true. While there may be many who do not believe that racial realism is fact, there are others who believe it wholeheartedly such as the author of I am Black-and a Race Realist. Adebayo (2015) stated (as cited in the American Renaissance),

“I accept that the cause of the one-standard-deviation difference in the average IQ scores of blacks and whites is primarily genetic. I am convinced that blacks tend to have different dispositions from whites and East Asians—also for genetic reasons... In a short time; I had gone from believing that blacks were oppressed to believing that blacks had the power to lift themselves up... Stereotypes of blacks have been consistent throughout history, and black’s academic performance has always been lower than that of whites.”

The self-proclaimed racial realist gradual came to the conclusion that the intellectual stereotypes about African Americans were true especially since the stereotypes have remained consistent throughout history. Curry (2008) stated that “In America, White-Black race relations are systemic, and reproduced culturally, institutionally, and socially from generation to generation” (pg, 6). The racial stereotypes that both authors describe are the same; however, the difference is the acceptance that African Americans are inferior genetically. Bell, (1992) stated,

“Black people are trapped in a racial time warp. We are buffeted by the painful blows of continuing bias but maintain that the disadvantages we suffer must be caused by our deficiencies because we are told without even a trace of irony, racism is a thing of the past”(pg. 186).

Being trapped in the racial time warp is being reminded that all of the racial stereotypes about African Americans that existed in the past are still present today. It seems virtually impossible for African Americans to escape the stereotypes which may lead to acceptance that the stereotypes must have some level of validity. In terms of this study, the stereotype stating African Americans are superior athletes and intellectually inferior may be in question if the participants suffer from racial realism and have accepted these stereotypes as truth.

Discrimination

We cannot discount the level of discrimination that young African American students feel in school. Research has revealed that experiences of discrimination are a reality for youth (Brown, 2008; Simons et al., 2002). Although the nature of discrimination has changed from blatant acts such as using racial slurs to deceptive acts such as racial bias in discipline practices, the associated risks of unfair treatment remain. (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002)

According to the literature, African American youth are more likely to recognize discrimination as they get older (Brown, 2008; Quintana, 1998). Research suggests that adolescents are vulnerable to discrimination because they have developed the necessary cognitive skills to understand how their racial group is viewed by society (Thompson & Gregory, 2010). Thomas and Gregory (2010) posit that adolescents are more likely to

investigate and understand their ethnic and social identity which helps them understand how others treat them. In addition, as their social worlds expand, African American youth may have more contact with the alleged dominate culture exposing them to experiences of discrimination (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006). A study conducted by Greene et al. (2006) explored the trajectories of perceived adult and peer discrimination among ethnic minorities primarily examining the difference in perceptions of discrimination among African American, Latino, and Asian American high school students over a three year period (pg. 45). Their findings showed that African American adolescents reported the steepest increase in perceptions of discrimination from adults over time when compared with other racial/ethnic groups (Greene et al., 2006).

A 5-year longitudinal study conducted by Brody (2006) showed that African American youth from around age 11 to around age 16 showed an increase in perceived discrimination over time and this was linked to more depressive symptoms and conduct problems (pg 45). The findings suggest that African American youth may internalize discrimination as they matriculate through the early years of high school (Brown, 2008). Thompson & Greene suggest that it's possible that a student's academic performance may be compromised by perceived discrimination in the beginning years of high school, initiating a downward academic trajectory (pg. 6). The awareness of racial discrimination creates an unfavorable environment for the African American student. In 2003, McKown and Weinstein thought children's knowledge of racial views showed a broad range of racial attitudes and beliefs. The study subjects were between the ages of 6 to 10. The children were given a scenario with Green people and Blue people. The subjects were told that the Greens believed the Blues were not as smart as the Greens.

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The children were then encouraged to talk about the issue as it pertained to the real world. McKown and Weinstein (2003) found that “awareness of stereotypes increased with age so by age 10, 80% of ethnic minority children and 63% of majority children were aware of race stereotypes in the broader society” (pg.2). Another study conducted by Hudley and Graham (2001) aimed to show children’s own racial beliefs by using a first impression task. The racial groups that were included in this task were African American, Latino, and European American junior high students. The students were given a series of descriptions of youth and selected which individual from a set of photos corresponded to each description.(pg.2) Rowley, Kurtz-Costes, Mistry, and Feagans (2007), used a visual analogue scale that the youth used to rate the abilities of members of different racial groups in academic and non-academic domains. Their findings showed that” both Black and White middle school youth were more likely than fourth graders to endorse traditional academic race stereotypes such as European Americans are smarter than African Americans”(pg.3).

The results of these studies show that students as young as 10 years old are aware of the negative stereotype threats that surround the African American race. Since we are aware that adolescence is a time when most youths seek to identify who they are, African American youth are forced to contend with the negative stereotypes of being dumb but highly athletic. The major issue is that some youth are more inclined to believe that negativity and thus fall into the stereotypical categories that society has defined for them.

Athletic Identity

How African American male student athletes identify is critical to their athletic and academic success. “Identities make up much of the content of the self-concept and

refer to who or what one is ...to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and other” (Gecas & Burke, 1995, pg 42). One’s identity is composed how one see’s oneself which is self-identity and how they are viewed by others which is their social identity (Beamon, 2012). Athletic identity can be viewed as one’s social role or an work-related self-image (Pearlin, 1983; Astle 1986). Athletic identity can also be defined as the extent to which individuals delineate themselves as athletes (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Elite athletes receive high levels of social reinforcement for their physical/athletic abilities and have much of their individual view of identity and self-based upon their athletic performance; therefore, their self-identity is composed solely of athletic and social identity as defined by others view them as athletes (Beamon, 2012). According to Beamon (2009), “African American males overemphasize the role of athletics and nurture one identity, the athletic identity.”(pg.10)

Beamon (2009) also stated, "the theory of identity foreclosure that is defined as a commitment to an identity before one has meaningfully explored other options or engaged in exploratory behavior, such as career exploration, talent development, or joining social clubs or interest groups" (pg.42). Identity foreclosure occurs when a person is not exposed to a wide range of alternatives (Petitpas, 1978). Individuals in identity foreclosure have prematurely committed to and identity because of praise, accolades, and encouragement from parents, peers, and close significant others (Marcia, 1966).

According to Beamon (2012), athletic identity foreclosure occurs when athletes tend to choose this self-identity before they have considered other possible roles and statuses; consequently, they forgo exploration of other talents, interest, hobbies, or

occupations and center their identity on athletic participation and achievement. For many athletes, athletic identity foreclosure begins very early in their athletic careers. Many receive excessive praise for their athletic accomplishments by parents, peers, teachers, and coaches. This praise may be the reason that many of the student athletes lean heavily towards a predominately athletic identity. Receiving status and recognition for athletic achievement while receiving minimal academic praise could result in increased athletic salience.

Family and Athletic Identity

The family plays an active role in involving the African American male in sports. It is ok for girls to participate in athletics; however, there is more pressure placed on boys to participate in athletics (Messner, 1992). In many cases, boys are encouraged to participate because of the male figures in their lives and their potential athletic success (Messner, 1992). In the African American community, the family is the social support consequently when a male is encouraged to play sports, the impact is greater for the child (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2000). Often, there are few alternatives besides sports for African American boys (Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Hawkins, 1992). There is a lack of options or choices, so it isn't necessarily about just choosing a sport (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2000). High expectations for athletic success combined with limited options for participation for African American boys (Harris, 1997), creates a situation where parents pressure boys to pursue sports results (Edwards, 2000). Desiring to gain parental approval, boys play (Egendorf, 1999), believing sports to be their way out of poverty and a means to help their family in the future (Hoberman, 1997). African Americans place a lot of emphasis on sport participation and success, the overemphasis comes from the

family, peers, media, and community (Beamon and Bell, 2002; Beamon and Bell, 2006; Beamon 2008; Edwards, 2000; Eitle and Eitle, 2002; Harrison and Lawrence, 2003; Hoberman, 2000; Pascarella et al, 1999; Scales, 1991; Smith, 2007). The overemphasis placed on athletic achievement helps to foster the athletic identity of the African American male student athlete. The student athlete receives recognition and praise for their athletic abilities which increase their athletic identity while decreasing their academic identity (Harrison & Moore, 2007).

Time Commitment of Student Athletes

The amount of time that student athletes invest into to sports requires that the athletic identity of student athletes becomes priority over any other role and identity (Beamon, 2012). The time commitment to athletics achievement severely limits any exploratory behavior needed to develop any other identity (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Pearson and Petitpas, 1990). Since there is a severe restriction of time and energy to explore other identities, the athletic identity becomes the chosen identity because of the rewards, encouragement, and accolades (Danish et al., 1993). It is natural and normal to believe that if one invests an enormous amount of time into sport participation any other identity outside of athletics will be stagnant (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988). Student athletes must focus on academic eligibility time commitment to their sport of choice which also limits exploration of other identities (Beamon, 2012). Student athlete's athletic participation is often equal to a full work week and can be year round (Selden, 1998).

Summary

The Theory of Identity Development is central to understanding the lived experiences of African American male student athletes. How these athletes develop their identities is very important to understanding why some African American male student athletes disassociate with academics and focus more on athletics. Their experiences in their communities, families, schools, and social circles help to dictate who they are currently and who they will become later in their academic/athletic lives. Is it possible that the African American male student athlete racial identity creates an environment that causes them to distance themselves from the academic domain? Or is it more plausible to think that their athletic achievements bring positive attention while academics bring no attention at all? These are a few of the questions this study sought to answer based on a theoretical framework of the theory of identity development.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The methodology section includes a detailed description of research procedures, the design rationale, sampling, variables, data collection, data analysis procedures, and ethics/human relations. The purpose of this study was to investigate how racial and athletic identity impacts African American male student athletes academic identity. I took a critical look at the potential high revenue sports of football and basketball. The critical questions that I sought to answer did shed light on issues that are faced by many African American male student athletes. While I did find literature investigating African American male racial identity and academic identity, there was a gap in the literature as it pertained to African American male student athlete's identity development during their K-12 years. The critical questions that I investigated were:

1. Does the African American male student athlete identify as a student athlete or an athlete?
2. Does racial and athletic identity create an environment that is not conducive to learning for African American male student athletes?
3. Are there lasting implications of disidentification of the African American male student athlete's future in collegiate institutions?

Design Rationale

The design of this study was qualitative. It was necessary to utilize qualitative research methods to explore how current and former student's athletes viewed themselves in relations to racial identity, athletic identity, and their academic identity during their K-12 years. It was possible to discover the participant's views on the research topic by utilizing interviews to gather data. Initially, I wanted to utilize Critical Race Theory as the guiding theoretical framework for this study utilizing counter storytelling to give a voice to those who may otherwise go without being heard. However, after I began analyzing the data, I realized that the Theory of Identity Development was the guiding theoretical framework while Critical Race Theory was a conceptual framework.

Qualitative research includes observations, interviews, and surveys and the type of data that researchers use in this genre of research is words. These words are a reflection of the subject's knowledge, understanding, insight, opinions, and feelings. This type of research records events, actions, activities, and personal exchanges. According to Glesne (2006), qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the experiences of participants: this is accomplished through in-depth, long-term interviewing relationships. For this study, I utilized in-depth, phenomenological interviewing that was a combination

of life history interviewing and phenomenological interviewing that was introduced by Seidman in *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and social sciences* (2005). The methods introduced by Seidman incorporates the use of open-ended questions and the ability to build on and explore the responses given by the participant to go in depth with their experiences and the meaning made from these experiences.

Sampling

In qualitative research, the sample sizes are usually smaller than that of quantitative research studies (Mason, 2010). According to Creswell (1998) and Mason (2010) a sample size of 5 to 25 is appropriate for phenomenological research studies. The researcher recruited 6 participants for this study. Purposeful, purposive and snowball sampling was utilized in this study. Purposive sampling involved selecting data in which the researcher can substantially learn about the phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 2005). Snowball sampling is defined as a chain referral sampling process that relies on referrals from initial participants to generate additional subjects (Johnson & Sabin, 2010). Polkinghorne (2005) indicated qualitative samples should not be random or left to chance because the aim is to collect data that sufficiently refines and brings clarity to understanding the phenomenon. In addition to utilizing purposeful sampling, Morse (2000) stated, “if data are on target, contain less dross, and are rich and experiential, then fewer participants will be required to reach saturation.” (p. 4). This study examined the phenomenon of stereotype threat, athletic identity, academic identity, and racial identity of the black male student athlete. The student athletes selected for this study were:

- Average or below average students and stellar athletes.

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- GPAs of 2.5 or lower.
- Was not a NCAA Division I qualifier and either did not attend college or attended a junior college as a result of not being a Qualifier.
- African American male current or former student athlete
- Age 18- 46

The student athletes targeted for this study were selected from a pool of volunteers who met the criteria for this study. I also asked participants if they are aware of any other current or former student athletes who meet the criteria and was willing to participate. To gain access to additional participants, all potential participants identified in snowball sampling were given my contact information, and they contact me to show that they are indeed interested in participation. There were six black male student athletes in this study. I believed this sample size was sufficient because it allowed the researcher to go in depth and understand why some black male student athletes suffer academically and excel athletically. I also utilized social media to find potential subjects for this study.

In this study, my data analysis and collection focused on very specific information. Stereotype threats, athletic identity, academic identity, and racial identity of student athlete were the major focus. I allowed my theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory to guide my study by looking for themes that may emerge that were specific in racial disparity and stereotypical issues.

Methods of Data Collection

The methods of data collection that I utilized in this qualitative study were questionnaires and interviews. The purpose of utilizing two measures for information is to try to establish the validity and consistency of the information collected. Each

participant received a questionnaire that asked specific questions that were relevant to the study. The questionnaire asked basic geographic information along with questions that directly relate to the study. The answers to the questionnaire lead directly to the interview questions of the participants. Each participant had two individual interviews. The purpose of the first interview was to establish a rapport with the student athlete. The second interview was semi- structured and allowed the student athlete to elaborate on particular questions that sparked more interest. A third interview was not needed because each participant provided sufficient information for analysis in the first two interviews. The researcher looked for themes and patterns that appeared during the course of this study. The researcher looked for common patterns in age of athletic participation, age when athlete began to feel that school was not a safe place, the overall feeling of education, stereotypes threats that have been experienced by the participants, and their racial identities. These themes and patterns helped shape the course of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to take a critical look at how African American male student athletes developed their identity. I sought to explore why these male student athletes overly identify as athletes while under identified as student athletes. Historically, many stereotypes of African Americans suggest that they are superior only in athletic ability. Stereotypes also suggest that African Americans are also inferior to other race, especially Caucasian, academically (Harris, 1997). Therefore, it was necessary to explore how African American males developed their identity in terms of racial stereotypes as well.

Study Design

This qualitative study was conducted by interviewing African American male student athletes between the ages of 18-46. All athletes attended high school in the Midwest and played either football or basketball. All athletes were offered at least one Division I scholarship and was unable to accept it because of either their GPA or ACT score was too low which excluded them from being an NCAA Qualifier.

Six former student athletes were selected for this study based on meeting the criteria and their willingness to participate. The researcher utilized snowball sampling which resulted in each participant being screened/interviewed to be sure they fit the research criteria. The first screening/interview was conducted to introduce myself and give the participant the opportunity to become comfortable speaking with me. The initial screening interview was not recorded; however, interview two and three, when necessary, were tape recorded and transcribed.

Data Collection

Prior to being research and conducting interviews, the researcher completed and received approval from University of Missouri- St. Louis Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving IRB approval, the researcher began utilizing the snowball method to locate participants for the research study. Each potential participant was asked a series of questions to determine their eligibility to participate in this study. The list of qualifying questions can be found in the appendix. Each participant read and signed the Informed Consent form before being the interview process.

Data Analysis

Upon completing phone interviews, the researcher located six participants that not only fit the profile of the needed participants but were are willing to participate in the study. Each participant was an African American male between the ages of 18-46. Each participant played either football or basketball in high school and received an athletic scholarship offer for a Division I college or university but was unable to accept the offer because of their grades/GPA/ACT score. All participants attended high school in the Midwest. For the purpose of this study, all participant names have been changed to protect confidentiality. Each interview was analyzed to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the African American male student athlete identify as a student athlete or an athlete?
2. Does racial and athletic identity create an environment that is not conducive to learning for African American male student athletes?
3. Are there lasting implications of disidentification of the African American male student athlete's future in collegiate institutions?

Henry the Point Guard and Older Brother

Henry the point guard is a 44 year old African American male who attended high school in a small Midwest town. His high school was predominately African American. Henry was the eldest of 3 boys. His mother was a single mother who worked nights to support the family. Henry's father was a professional baseball player but was not present his entire life. His first experience with basketball was around the age of 4 or 5. He played basketball his entire high school career and was offered several Division I

scholarships but was unable to accept because of his grades. As a result, Henry was offered a scholarship to attend a Junior College instead of a Division I University. The first question was “tell me a little bit about you”. He stated,

“...you know- I couldn't have been able to advance or do better academically. The teachers were there, curriculum was honorable. It was given, in different ways... Teachers were seasoned. I had the opportunity to advance; you know in the world of academia, but ... after that it [athletics] started to play a part. You know, a bigger part in my life, in opportunities, you know, and just humanly, you know, success, popularity, and things of that nature. And I just kind of, you know, veered away from education and wasn't serious about it. Stopped applying myself and, it cost me in the long run. Definitely and obviously... athletic opportunities for attending certain universities and whatever. I didn't qualify as far as NCAA requirements. So, wasn't able to attend a major university out of high school. And even with the habits I have developed you know, after the popularity and success in athletics, you know, came about I had to go to the junior college. And I was still being recruited by a lot of the same schools. But that lack of discipline that I showed or didn't have it played out and I didn't get my Associate's Degree. So, academics, which I really value now much more. And I'm on the path to becoming a teacher myself. So, it was never that I couldn't do the work, it was just me applying myself. And with that, coupled with that- nothing against my family or nothing, but my mom worked certain hours and there were times that I lacked real structure as well as far as continuing on that course to , you know, excel in the classroom. But with that said I don't regret

anything. I do kind of wish I had done things differently, but you know, here I am. I still finished, got a college degree, scholarship, you know, so I got a free college education. So, maybe, I could have went to a better university or a major university and had more opportunities presented to me, but you know... that's Henry the Point Guard in a nutshell.”(Anonymous personal communication, May 2016).

Henry the Point Guard was a three sport athlete. He played basketball, baseball, and football. Henry stated that “some people say I was probably a better baseball player” and that baseball was actually his favorite sport. He could recall the point in his life when he made a shift from baseball to basketball and why basketball became his primary sport.

Henry stated,

“...I started dressing varsity and that was a pivotal time when I realized success, and I kind of strayed away from education, academics and that kind of traveled over to baseball. Cause when I got chicken pox late in the season, I thought, ‘okay, ‘cause I’m

done with this anyway’. And then those “Be like Mike” commercials came ...

And I’m going to be honest with you... Selfishly, in baseball, I’ll bat like every two and a half innings or so, they may hit a couple of balls to me today.

Basketball, as a point guard, you know, on offensive role or defensive rebound, well defensive rebound, the ball is outlet to me. And even on an offensive rebound, if we don’t have a good shot, the ball comes to me.”

Henry realized his freshman year of high school that basketball could provide him with something that was not available in his favorite sport of baseball. Henry admits that his

reasons for playing basketball were “selfish” in that he would receive attention, recognition, and praise. Henry states:

“...So, selfishly, I chose basketball (laughing), ‘cause it was a way I could kind use my God-given abilities, gifts, and talents consistently and more openly, more frequently... And at that time it wasn’t about my particular physical giftedness or skill set, how they could be used in that particular sport. It was strictly about feel me, attention, and recognition. So, I kind of just, I started playing basketball. Then stuck with that the rest of my sophomore year, junior year and senior year and on through college.”

Henry recalls his 8th grade year of middle school and the transition to high school. Henry detailed his freshman year of high school and how he began to shift from the student-athlete identity to strictly an athletic identity. Henry stated,

“So, I fell off a little bit there [middle school] and then my 8th grade year, started to come back around. Again, I took that whole year playing basketball and you know how we was doing things. I realized then that I had to get good at this. If I’mma do it, I gotta get good. So, my 8th grade year- Oh! That’s another major accomplishment. I was a- we had this Catholic Youth Organization- CYO All-Star game at the Auditorium. They made me the captain. I went out and at that time, I had been playing with guys so much older than me. You know, watching Isaiah, Magic. They didn’t know- they hadn’t seen a guy who could pass on the move, no-look. I was just an inner city kid. You know? They were like- hey, he’s doing this! That was one of my accomplishments, starting there, getting my picture in the paper, my mom was able to catch that game. My mom was off on

Sundays and Mondays. It was in the local Auditorium. That was a big thing then. Wrestling there. All these events. Major Universities played there. Rock concerts. That was another thing. But, at that time, I kinda fell off. Then we got this little talk about before we left. They talked about NCAA requirements and getting good grades and going to college. I went to high school. Got As and Bs 1st semester. A B in Spanish, like the first quarter. First couple quarters I'm doing good. Then comes January, man, started that , new semester. They put me on Varsity, man. Threw me for a loop...In with Seniors, they were like "What's up with you little dude?" (laughs) So, I guess... that popularity, I kinda fell off from there. And this is when- I don't want to put no teachers in harm's way, but, I don't think, after that it was- I would still go to class sometimes and sleep with my legs up or whatever. But it was just- from then on, at the end of every quarter, it was just 'all you got to do is make up work.' I could come in everyday and don't do nothing, but then they'd just give me make up work at the end of the course. So, I'm not really learning and progressing as a student should."

(Anonymous, Personal Communication, May 2016)

Henry quickly began to notice the notoriety he received from being a varsity player his freshman year of high school. Despite having conversations with his 8th grade coaches about NCAA requirements and what was necessary to be a NCAA qualifier, Henry found it challenging to assume the identity of student athlete because his success was found in athletics. Henry stated:

"I started dressing varsity and that was a pivotal time when I realized success, and I kinda... strayed away from education, academics and that kind of traveled over

to baseball. Cause when I got chicken pox late in the season, I thought, ‘okay, ‘cause I’m done with this anyway’. And then those “Be like Mike” commercials came...”

(Anonymous Personal Communication, May 2016)

At this point Henry began to identify more with his athletic self because of basketball. In addition to the beginning of Henry developing a positive athletic identity, he began to take notice of professional athletes and their status. The “Be like Mike” commercials are a reference to Michael Jordan, an African American professional basketball player that rose to fame with the Chicago Bulls basketball team beginning in the early 1980’s. Henry was asked a series of mixed academic and athletic questions before the researcher asked “What was your greatest achievement in high school?” Henry’s response lends itself to an athletic identity. Henry’s response was:

“, I would say an assist. I led two different teams to State. I knocked off number one ranked, , teams in the state. , Let me see. Just, that’s probably it– winning big games, knocking off- lost to number one team in the nation, we should have knocked them off the second time, but knocking off the number one team in the state...Led the team into State, [led] in assist, and leading two different schools to State.”

When Henry was asked if he considered himself to be a student-athlete, his response revealed a deeper athletic identity because he was able to identify the disconnect between academics and athletics. Henry stated:

“If I would have been honest, I would have said I’m a basketball player because at those early ages, you don’t really know your identity. At that age what you do is

who you are, often times unless that specifically, intentionally taught to you.

Ingrained in you...”

Academically, Henry was asked what would have been his biggest academic accomplishment in school. Henry described that accomplishment as:

“, let me see. I can remember times and stuff like, looking over material and just- in high school, just feeling good knowing the answer the next day.

(laughs)...And I guess my freshman year, when I got them A's and B's and stuff, I knew I could do it. You know, and I was always like a straight A student before then. I was good at math and stuff like that, you know, the Beta Club.”

Henry felt that he was a capable student; however, the development of a strong athletic identity revealed that his effort academically began to lag. Henry was asked about his time commitment in high school to his athletic and academic endeavors. Henry was asked to quantify his time commitment to basketball vs. academics with the total being 100. Henry stated,

“It was 85-15, 90-10. And to be honest, I wasn't about drilling [in basketball]. I didn't do no drilling. I wasn't even learning nothing, running extra... I was just playing the game. I was just handling it by myself, far as just moves and counters and combos. And pull up Js- I would always work on that. That was basically my training. And that was still—it was a 90-10 thing. And to be honest, I only did that like if I wasn't playing. If I hadn't played in a while- ... Guys had got to high school and they getting girlfriends in the summer time and they moving around... Or if I felt like I needed—get enhanced-- I might see Isaiah do something and then -- I'd just go and [think]: “I got to get that.”

You know, Magic didn't really have an in between game or a pull up game. It was his vision, or court awareness. I would just go and do some things. I remember one time, in 8th grade, I woke up, and I was at my grandma's house. She had came- my dad's mom-- And I woke up and Wake Forest was playing North Carolina. Ironically, Wake Forest was one of the school's that recruited me. I saw Mugsy, you know, D.C. cat, just cross over Steve Hill and go lay it up. "I gotta get that." You know, so I'm out here, just trying to figure some stuff out. Go do that, but it was never anything other than... stats, reading sports columns. It was never that I felt like I had to learn. It might be some make up work- I gotta be eligible. This teacher getting mad at me. I got to do this. It was a big part of my brain. But no, I didn't pursue academics nowhere near—I don't even know if I pursued it. I did what I had to do, but- ... The way I did, I pursued athletics, though."

Athletics were ingrained in Henry from an early age. The early athletic identification began with his father who was his first role model. Henry's father was a professional baseball player for a while. This was a major accomplishment for his father and young Henry. When he was asked about his role models he stated:

"Definitely. Magic [and] Isaiah. Chris Jackson was just 2 years older than me, but how good he was, I looked at him. I liked Keen Anderson... I liked Dr. J. I liked, I like OJ Simpson for a while, Jim Brown. As I got understanding from my other role models Public enemy. As I start to understand things from a social standpoint. 'Cause I had—my dad for a while was my role model first, far as male role models. You know the things he was able to accomplish. But he would

always inform me too, about the struggle no matter how old I was. Whenever I was around him he would inform me about the struggles.”

Henry stated that he expected basketball to take him to the league. The league is the NBA (National Basketball Association). He stated that he knew that he was going to college but the greater question was “how am I going to get to this league”. Henry’s strong athletic identity created a situation where Henry did not reach his first athletic goal which was to attend a major Division I university to play basketball. Consequently, it is important to explore whether Henry’s athletic identity created an environment that wasn’t conducive to Henry’s academic success and whether racial identity affected his academic success as well.

Henry recalled that during his elementary and early middle school years that he was an A-B student. Henry described how he was a member of the Beta Club, an academic club for students who are achieving on a high level. However, Henry admits that his positive outlook on academics began to change upon experiencing athletic success. As Henry recounted earlier in the interview, his grades began to fall once he started playing varsity on his high school team as a freshman. That experience began to define him and he began taking on an athletic identity. Henry stated,

“Honestly, if a guy came in, academically inclined and serious about his education, he was nerd. But I’mma be honest with you. Nah, it was always like they knew they had to give assistance. A part of it is a certain kind of balance ...but I was kind of with the mentality of 4.3s don’t make 3.5s. Like guys who run 4.3s don’t make 3.5s. ‘Cause he do a little bit more running than studying.”

The latter was a reference to whether male student athletes were expected to be smart. Henry believed that the time commitment required of athletes to excel at their craft came at the expense of academics. Henry realized that his own academic achievement became secondary to his athletic aspirations. His realization that he began to overly identify with an athletic identity began to create an environment where academics were an afterthought.

“So, I guess... that popularity, I kinda fell off from there. And this is when- I don't want to put no teachers in harm's way, but, I don't think, after that it was- I would still go to class sometimes and sleep my legs up or whatever. But it was just- from then on, at the end of every quarter, it was just 'all you got to do is make up work.' I could come in everyday and don't do nothing, but then they'd just give me make up work at the end of the course.”

Not only did Henry begin to identify strongly as an athlete but the lack of academic success was being reinforced by adults in his school. Henry stated, “...It was the first time the school went to State. We was making history there before they closed.” Henry recalled a teacher that would not give make up to anyone except him. All of these interactions help to strengthen Henry's athletic identity while creating distance from academic growth and Henry's athletic goal of going to college and competing in the NBA.

In addition to Henry building a strong athletic identity that assisted in his academic disidentification, Henry noted several racial stereotypes that also played a major factor in his lack of academic success. Henry stated,

“At that time, I knew [Black] people and kids who were smart. My mind was just so much into this athletics stuff. But I didn’t think black people were supposed to be smart because of how we were depicted. ...In media. I remember recalling... I never watched the Cosby Show ‘cause that wasn’t my reality. I was a Good Times guy. I thought that was fantasy. Black doctors? I didn’t know any. I did not think black people—they didn’t depict us that way. In my mind, it was always a dream, on the perimeter, but, you know- big synopsis kind of thing...but the content of my dreams was my content. ... My information was my information. I only knew what I knew. So, me not having any academic aspirations really had me limited about academics on the whole. So Clare and Cliff?? Man, they lying! Know what I’m saying? But James and Thelma or James and Florida- yeah, that’s it. Even that’s kind of bull. They always acted like every show had to end with drama. Man, we laughed at that. ... But that was TV, they always got to act like it’s some [thing]—every episode. Here comes the boom. But I related to that ‘cause I had more boom. Far as my-- this my real kind of view, or whatever. I ain’t really know that blacks could excel like that academically.”

In addition to viewing the main stream media messages as being discouraging to African Americans and their academic worth, Henry also saw the same message being carried out within his own neighborhood. Henry was asked did he believe that racial stereotypes gave justification for academic failure and whether academic failure was accepted in his neighborhood. Henry stated,

“So, I just think academics were—poor academics was accepted ‘cause so many had not excelled in that world. And we can blame America, The Man, The System. There just weren’t enough- isn’t enough people today coming back, sharing the benefits of education and how it contributed positively to their lives. We don’t get enough coming back; you know what I’m saying? So...It was definitely accepted in the hood, for various reasons- whether it was envy, whether it was education had never benefited them... ‘Whatever, it ain’t going to benefit you. Welcome to the club, keep rolling.’ But, you know, , that’s just where we are and we’re still accepting...you know... poor or poor grades, or the inability to advance- we’re still accepting it more today.”

Henry also recalled one of his friends who excelled academically and was also a member of the basketball team. Henry stated that this young man had a better balance in life because his father was not only an athlete but also a college graduate. Henry recalled,

“He had a better balance, but he didn’t like to show that he [had] intellect—he went to class and did his work, but he didn’t give off “intellectual guy”...if he was around neighborhood kids all the time... In my neighborhood, you couldn’t give off [intellectual]... You could give off “conscious rapper”, backpacker... I’m still backpacker to this day. But you just couldn’t give off “curriculum guy”. “I excel” - nah. You couldn’t, ‘cause they didn’t excel. That’s just how it was. You could give off “conscious rapper”, but “smart guy”... naw. That intimidated... That’s their insecurities. There were so many kids that didn’t read well, didn’t comprehend well... they didn’t really have ... you know... have a grasp of vocabulary or things like that. And it was certain, just things they didn’t

understand. Everybody didn't listen to Rakim, Chuck [conscious rappers] and them, whatever... but with that said... he didn't exude that. ... He put his work in and did whatever he had to do, but he didn't really ever come off like that. And part of him wanted to be like: "I'm in it with y'all. I'm an athlete."

While Henry noticed the difference in his friends' behavior and how he would downplay his intelligence while among his peers, Henry was also aware of his acceptance of his athletic identity. When Henry was asked if he believed that academic failure was acceptable he stated:

"Back then accepted were poor grades- it definitely didn't inspire me to push myself academically. 'It's cool. It's cool.' You know what I'm saying? ...So, and then... Not just with poor grades, but all this athletic stuff, you're accepted with these poor grades. I remember... there was a valedictorian back then, a couple of smart girls that I would converse with... And even now, some of them that I didn't talk with are like, "I thought you was [dumb]"... "I didn't know you knew anything." (laughs) So, the hood accepting poor, no academic achievement and then, kinda like the other stuff ..., it put me in that stereotypical athlete, jock guy realm. It put me over there, definitely."

While Henry recognized what he perceived as racial stereotypes of African American academic achievement and the message of what it meant to be an athlete, he also realized his own involvement in his academic failure. Henry stated "It was discouraging, but it was also my excuse to not push myself...It might have been discouraging, the racism, but it was also me wanting the excuse not to do it; not to push myself to you know, excel. "

Henry also expressed that African American males were superior athletes in comparison to White athletes. Henry stated,

“Of course Of course... for several years now—I don’t know how this will stand.. on the P.C. roundtable, but I really do think it’s a part of God’s way out for us. To get the next phase. And I really don’t think there’s a glass ceiling for a Christian. It just takes some perseverance, or it may not get to that extent, the great length of your dreams. But you just got to know when- know when and know how to transfer... Or you apply the dream elsewhere and you got to be okay with that... I think as far as the 48-inch vertical, the behind the back, no look between the legs crossover with- you know them things that Michael Jackson, Prince. I think just in whatever setting, that’s our ticket. But we allow it to define us and we hang around too long. ...Jerry Rice out running... sticking around too long and then you start to become with the 1 Percent. Cause honestly, I think even—not just academically, I mean athletically we have a prowess... I know this for a fact- we’re capable mentally. We’re capable intellectually. We’ve advanced in great lengths. Not just from Pyramids and things like that... Today I look at things more in a mental aspect... I run into people and I appreciate who they are for their perspective on world views. And you know far as them mentally and intellectually. So I look at that. And the athletic world, obviously, but I look at that. But I just tend to think that if me and you at Fortune 500 Club and we golfing with some guy that we see all the time: It’s cool and alright: “yeah, yeah, yeah.” Respect that. Mmmhmm. But the moment we try to consider ourselves equals with them, that’s when they want to take us down, put

us in our place. Whoop-de-whoop. ... And with that said, that same 1 Percent, that same Fortune 500, these are the people who own franchises and teams. When you start to getting out here and you're Tiger Woods and you're superior—And I don't know... Tiger saying that stuff: "I don't need the PGA Tour. PGA Tour needs me." And it's been times where Tiger wasn't going to play in the Master's and he decide a day before tickets go up \$250 more each! And they sold out in an hour or two. You know, so, on that alone... But I don't know... was Tiger starting to put his self on these levels as far as: Who he think he is? He going to sleep with the Duchess of Melbourne. How he going to? He on our level man. That ain't mind when it was just nannies and sports cars girls. You know what I'm saying? ... But when he finally started getting out here... with nobility, oh put him in his place. You know? ... That kind of stuff."

Although Henry believes that African American male athletes are superior athletically, he also believes that there is a limit to the amount of power that will be granted to the African American male by the majority group. This racial stereotyping and "keeping African Americans in their place" helped to contribute to Henry's academic disidentification as well. Henry also admitted to believing that "an A in the inner city is a C in the burbs." Henry's racial and athletic identity helped to define who he was and how he viewed academic achievement. Despite developing a low academic identity, Henry stated that he knew he wanted to attend college. Henry stated,

"We knew we was going to college. We just- we knew. It was: how we going to get to this league, though? We always thought, like that ain't enough. We didn't even see or know at that time, the value, the importance of higher education. We

just always knew we was going to go- it was always about the [millions]. Even when Prop 48 came, I was like – “I don’t need 4 years no way. Just let me get up in this door!” When you was thinking like that, we didn’t even see the value or importance of education. So, round about 9 – 10, I knew I was going to go. It was certain Division 1 or like mid-majors...”

While Henry’s goal of attending a major Division I university was not realized because of academic disidentification, Henry was able to attend a Junior College on scholarship to play basketball. Henry recalled his experience,

... I didn’t qualify as far as NCAA requirements. So, , wasn’t able to attend a major university out of high school. And even with the habits I have developed you know, after the popularity and success in athletics, you know, came about I had to go to the junior college. And I was still being recruited by a lot of the same schools. But that lack of discipline that I showed or didn’t have it played out and I didn’t get my Associate’s Degree.”

Shortly after leaving the first junior college, Henry had a conversation with his father about college. His father offered a solution to help Henry with school. Henry stated

“But anyway, my pops said to me: “hey man, you [play football in school]?” I’m like “...no, I’m kinda through with it now, why?” He like: “man, for real, right now I’ll call my friend. He’s doing NFL games. He’s doing stuff like NFL games. ... He can get you on right now on academic probation.” He say “Harvard”. I say, “Harvard? Man, pop my transcript ain’t like that, man for real, man.” And he like: “naw, naw. He can get you in on academic scholarship, academic probation. Like now. He can go ahead and do it for you man. He can

get you in. All he got to do is sit down and talk to you.” And , I don’t know what it was. If it was fear or not. I just told Pop I didn’t want to do it, or whatever. My experience right then with education, what it was just makeup work. I didn’t get serious about school ‘til my last 3 or 4 semesters when I got close to graduating college. Started going to class, trying to do the best that I can. ... Nobody in my family had graduated at that time. So, anyway, I told pop: “let me sit on that, Pop. Let me pray on that.” So I came back a couple days later—I was a young Christian cat at that time. ...I told my pop- “hey I don’t really want to just be out here, just to prove I can hang at Harvard. I don’t think my life really about that right now. I’m seeking more. I’m on something else right now.” He said, “I can respect that, but you could do it though.”

Although Henry faced many bumps in the road, he was able to turn things around academically. Henry definitely felt a strong athletic identity and in the end realized how his racial and athletic identities affected his academic identity. Henry stated

“I don’t regret anything. I do kinda wish I had done things differently, but you know, here I am. I still finished, got a college degree, scholarship, you know, so I got a free college education. So, maybe, I could have went to a better university, or a major university and had more opportunities presented to me, but you know... that’s [Henry] the point guard in a nutshell.”

Johnny the Quarterback

Johnny the Quarterback is a forty three year old African American male. He is from a small town in the Midwest. Johnny was raised by his mother. His father passed away while he was a young child. Johnny had 5 siblings; 3 brothers and two sisters. All

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but one of his siblings are older. Johnny was being recruited to attend at least two large Division I universities for football; however, he was not considered a NCAA qualifier based on his GPA and ACT scores. Each participant was asked to describe himself, Johnny began, “I am a native of Indiana. I went to college in Missouri. I’m about 6’4. I like to garden. I like sports and that’s about it...and music.” (Personal communication, July 2016) Johnny was a three sport athlete playing basketball, football, and track and field. Johnny recalled his first experiences with athletics,

“I think at an early age my brother kind of forced it [basketball] upon me, so I didn’t like it. I kind of got away from it, but I didn’t like it as much and then you know, basketball just kind of...you know, when I sit one day and I was just like, it looked really fun and I got started playing I wanted to focus on that goal. You know once I started playing football, I think football kind of took over.”

Johnny was initially steered toward basketball by one of his older brothers. He stated his height was the main reason his brother felt he would be a good basketball player. This pattern of thought continued well into high school,

“At first I think, right at my freshman year I think I met with a counselor and they kind of ask you what your profession would be and I think I just immediately said...I said Pro-Basketball because that’s just where I was at that point, but then after playing football it just kind of you know, changed my mind just a little bit, so I wanted to play professional football.”

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At this point, Johnny realized that he wanted to pursue athletics as a career path.

Initially, he wanted to be a “Pro” professional basketball player and later a professional football player. When asked if he had a plan to achieve his athletic goals, Johnny stated “Not at...No... No not until my junior year. During his freshman year of high school, Johnny encountered a situation that threaten his dream,

“... My freshman year, second semester I played basketball where you know, the academic part of it you know, you have to make sure you have the grades also. So, I think I got two F's and I was kicked off the basketball team and it kind of made me realize that it could be taken away from you if you don't you know, if you don't make sure you have the grades. So, it kind of hit me.”

At the time, Johnny realized the importance of academic eligibility and how it could compromise his athletic participation. Johnny admitted that he did not develop a plan to accomplish his athletic goals until his junior year of high school. In the meantime, Johnny found that his athletic abilities continued to grow; however, his academic progress had slowed. Johnny stated,

“... I was good at all three aspects like you know football, basketball and track. , like I said...you know, mom being you know, working three jobs I guess...Like I said, no one was there to actually stress the academic part of it. No because back then I guess it wasn't...it wasn't like it is now. So, you know, someone actually coming in, explaining every aspect of you know, what you need like ...Like I said, sophomore, junior year I was always behind the eight ball with it because you had to have like four years of this and this. I think I remember you know sitting with

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the counselor or somebody they say, well ah, to get in such and such College you're going to need four years of English, four years of Science, four years of math and blah, blah, blah. So, that was kind of the thing that I think was lacking back then.”

During Johnny’s time as a high school student-athlete, he would have to score a 18 on the ACT, maintain a 2.5 GPA, and complete the core course requirement (math, science, English, foreign language) in order to be considered a qualifier. Although Johnny could recall having a conversation with someone who outlined what was required to gain admittance to different universities, Johnny still found himself “behind the eight ball” or lacking the requirements to be considered a qualifier.

Johnny was asked whether he considered himself to be an athlete or student athlete during his high school years, he responded that he was an athlete. The follow-up question asked why and he stated,

“Just because, like I said, the academics weren’t stressed like most parents do now. You know my mom...Like I said, she worked a lot so, it just wasn’t stressed. I mean it was probably talked about, but not stressed that we would be now a days...Well, when you train athletics you become I guess the person that is known especially you know around town and you know, my town wasn’t super huge, so I guess I become a very well-known person... I guess like I said, I guess the attention you gain when you are pretty good in sports. Sometimes you lose track of the academic part, but once again, if your family doesn’t stress or doesn’t

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have the knowledge of knowing that hey, you may need to focus on your academics as well as your athletics.”

While Johnny admitted that he identified more as an athlete. He also felt that he spent equal amounts of time working on athletics and academics. Johnny’s behaviors would suggest that he may have had a stronger athletic identity than academic but he did not completely disregard his academic progress. Johnny described why he felt his academic/athletic balance was 50/50,

“It was just the aspect of you know, I really played hard about the academic part of it. Like I said, the score, but it was more about getting the opportunity to play you know, for another four years and having that opportunity. You know, because the coach even said...The coach would tell us that you know some people won’t you know like your senior year this is probably the last time you’ll be on you know a basketball court or track or a football field and that kind of put me in the mind set of you know, wanting to have the opportunity to play another four years.”

Despite describing his academic/athletic balance as 50/50, Johnny maintained a 2.2 GPA in high school and stated that his GPA matched his effort instead of his intellect. In terms of his peers, Johnny stated his friends did not accept or condone academic failure, he continued,

“I think we were just as far as you know; making sure things would get done. Like I said, after freshman year...yeah... That, I would have to say no[they did not

accept or condone academic failure]...Just as far as ...not necessarily do better, but kind of help each other out. If someone knew something you know...So I guess if someone knew something or is better at a subject you know, how they help more if you struggled in that area.”

Johnny did not feel that racial stereotypes gave justification for African-American male student athletes to perform poorly in academics. He expressed “Not that I recall. I don’t think it was a big subject back then so, I don’t know...I don’t, I didn’t hear anything so...” However, he did feel that African American athletes did hold a slight athletic edge over their White peers. He admitted,

“In some aspect yeah. Yes I did just because I guess...growing up I guess, you see that as a way of getting out of like certain situations. So, I guess we work a little harder. I guess if you go back...Go back in time of slavery how blacks were treated and make them work harder, I guess just made that perfect athlete... Just trying to make it out of...you know, your mom is a single mom is going to work out of that certain situation. living in a little house with one bedroom with five people in it, probably about six people, so you want to make sure you know, you don’t I guess, revert back to the same way you grew up. If that make sense.”

In addition, Johnny recalled how he viewed African Americans and whether he felt they were considered to be smart,

“...no and I guess that goes back to the stereotype thing. I guess , it was always...I guess people made it seem like that you know white kids were always smart, but

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I'm pretty sure there was some smart black kids back then, but whenever I look at it yeah...Nah, I guess we weren't."

Despite his own beliefs of racial stereotypes of African Americans intellect, Johnny described his school as an environment that supported academic success. Johnny stated that his coaches provided academic support for athletes. He added,

"Yeah, I think there was something early morning like you know ...I guess if they needed. I think they would call something in the morning, I can't recall the name of it. I think there was something early in the morning... Maybe a teacher maybe told you and asked you know, pulled you aside and offered tutoring. That was difficult because practice was right after school, so...it was kind of hard to do so."

Johnny was asked what advice he would give to a younger version of himself. He advised,

"I would give myself the advice of make sure that your academics are taken care of. Make sure your organizing your studies around the practices. Make sure there's no lag in turning in assignments...make sure everything is on time and also you got to work that balancing act of you know, experiencing sports, but the academic parts will probably take you a little bit further than the athletic part. That's what I would tell myself."

Ultimately, Johnny did experience some level of academic disidentification which is evident because he was not able to accept the Division I scholarships that were offered

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for football. However, he did experience some level of athlete and academic success on the collegiate level. Johnny explained,

“I played (professional football), I started off with a free agent contract with the New York Giants (year) and then also to the Jacksonville Jaguars with them the same year. And then I signed with the St. Louis Rams in (year) and then the next year played through pre-season. I was released from there and then in (year) I played in the NFL for a year and then I got injured , went back to school. Finished my practice to get my certificate and all that and that kind of...you know it kind of ended right there, but because I got offered to come back home to the NFL to play then and then I kind of you know, said I’m going to finish...Make that I get my degree and make sure that I was finished so...I guess now I can say that I did fulfill my dream. I mean I don’t want to say it wrong, but I guess look at my time I played in the NFL for them years. But I also did play in-door football for 7 years also which was pretty fun but it was with an agent... Yeah, I think I made success... I graduated from College. I also graduate from College ...After graduation of high school in the summer...So, I wanted to be a physical education teacher... and also I got a teaching degree and been teaching for 15 years.”

Johnny felt that he not only experience success because he did achieve his goal of being a professional football player but he also achieved academic success on the collegiate level. Consequently, Johnny expressed his new perspective on academics and athletics,

“Yes, just as far as understanding and going through you know, certain things that make you realize, I guess, what’s important, but then as my fear came upon me

and not being able to go to those schools that were you know, offering me because of the academics parts, kind of made me understand that I went through College to kind of make sure that I took more interest in the academic part and also making sure that the athletic part was also taken care of.”

Joseph the All-American and Middle Brother

Joseph the All-American is a 40 year old African American male who attended high school in a small Midwest town. Joseph’s high school was predominately African American. Joseph is the middle of 3 boys. His mother was a single mother who worked nights to support the family. Joseph’s father was a professional baseball player but was not present his entire life. Joseph’s first experience with basketball was around the age of six. Joseph’s played basketball his entire high school career. Joseph was offered several Division I scholarships but was unable to accept because of his grades. As a result, Joseph was accepted a scholarship to attend a Junior College instead of a Division I University. It is important to understand how Joseph developed his identity and what life experiences played a part in Joseph becoming the man that he is today.

Although Joseph played basketball as a primary sport later in life, initially he had a greater love for baseball. Joseph stated,

“It was the first sport you played... first love.... and grew up playing baseball. My father played professional Baseball. I guess it was like in my blood. Just like competition. I love the me against the pitcher attitude. First thing I ever played...Baseball. I was just better at basketball. Like I will watch Baseball now, I won’t watch basketball.”(Anonymous personal communication, July 2016)

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Joseph recognized that he had a love for athletics as early as 6 years old. Joseph admittedly loved baseball more; however, basketball became his primary sport. Joseph also stated that “And I think I really started taking it serious like basketball was like in fourth grade. My first game I had 27 points.” Joseph’s first game gave him early recognition for his athletic abilities. Joseph stated that he continued to score 25 to 30 points a game in the fourth grade as a result he recalled,

“Well it was...I guess recognition because I was in the fourth grade. I wasn’t even supposed to play. It was for the fifth and six graders, so as a fourth grader playing with fifth and six graders doing that they were...the coach was excited about my talent or whatever.”

The same talent that Joseph said that his coach recognized was also noticed by other coaches as well. Joseph stated that “I think in sixth grade, some people came from another school and they ask me if I wanted to move to [new city] and I was like “shit... nawl they burn niggas in [new city].” The latter was a reference to Joseph being recruited by a White coach to move to his town because of the athletic talent that Joseph displayed in the 4th grade. Joseph stated that

“... my goal to be honest, I never thought about going to the NBA. I knew I was going to college. My goals were to be on TV. Grew up watching Georgetown. That is like my favorite school. So, I thought, I knew athletics was going to take me to college, I just didn’t know how... No plan. Just knew I was going to be good enough to get a scholarship. My mother kind of pushed that on me. If you going to do it, be good enough because I don’t have no money for school.”

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It is important to note the Joseph is one of Henry the point guard's younger brothers. A few years prior Henry received an athletic scholarship to play basketball at a junior college because he was unable to accept the Division I scholarship offers. Joseph had several role models growing up, he stated,

“My mother and my brother. My oldest brother was my favorite player growing up. After watching him, I wanted to play like him, but I also see the things he did wrong and use them as a guide not to. So, my brother was like my role model. ...Boys Club got all those neighbor kids, the boy's club got like (good player from the neighborhood), these guys...like once again they could really play. But you'll see them go in a path that you know you don't want to go down. So, I used to use them as examples.”

Joseph was asked if he could elaborate on “the path”, he stated,

“Okay, the path...You go into an environment there's choices. Sometimes the choices ain't always right. So, the path can...You can stay on a straight path, you can go to college or whatever you trying to go. Sometimes, the path, there is a fork in the road and the path could be drug selling, gangs, you know, early parenthood. You can become a parent early on. That was big in the neighborhood. That was a path I didn't want to go down.”

Joseph had a clear path that he wanted to avoid. He didn't want to make the same mistakes that he witness other young men make from his neighborhood. He stated early on that he wanted to be on television but he did not have a direct plan to accomplish this

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goal. He knew that he was going to college but not necessarily play in the NBA early on. His athletic accomplishments continued to grow as well as his notoriety in his neighborhood. Joseph recalled this experience,

“, actually High School I had a lot of triple-doubles which was at my time for point guard was kind of unheard of like I wasn't doing it then. So, I was walking one time and a guy walked up on me. He drove up on me in the car and his girlfriend was waving. I had never seen him in my life. He got out the car and he just went in his pocket and gave me a whole bunch of money. He said, man, my girl like the way you play. I said thanks. He said, get you something to eat. He got back in the car and , I don't even know that girl.”

Experiences such of the latter helped reinforce Joseph's athletic identity. He continued to receive praise and recognition for his athletic abilities. Joseph stated, “Nobody was ever put in the front for being a straight A student.” Joseph admitted that he always received recognition and praise from athletics and little to no recognition and praise for academics. Joseph was asked whether he considered himself as student athlete, he recalled,

“At this time, I considered myself strictly an athlete. Student was...did enough where people...I mean you know, where you already perceived as db which didn't, you know, people still thought that anyway, but I worked way, way beneath my level... I didn't try. Because to be honest, I probably was one of the top five smartest people in the school, but for some odd reason, cool and I didn't focus on academic.”

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Joseph admitted that his grades were straight A's in elementary, began slipping a little in middle school to a B average, and maintained a C average in high school. When asked what caused this shift, Joseph proclaimed,

“School was easy. I always liked school. I like learning. I just got cool and got you know, you start getting, like you were saying, little attention from this basketball stuff. So your focus kind of shift to little girls. You start liking girls or like you want to be cool, so I wasn't putting the effort into school. Plus it was like, school, we were doing the same thing over. Like I already had took Algebra in 8th grade. I got to take it again in 9th grade, then again in 10th grade. So, it was like, its' becoming redundant.”

Joseph recognized that affect athletics had on his identity and how it began to create an environment where academics were not valued. Although Joseph continued to grow in terms of athletic development and achievement, his academic identity stalled. Joseph had a goal of attending college and being on television. In order to fulfill that goal, Joseph needed to be an NCAA qualifier and be offered a scholarship to play basketball on the collegiate level. Joseph admitted that he did not have guidance in the academic realm to help him achieve his goal. Joseph confessed,

“At the time, athletic. Academic to me, at this time, I'm losing focus... Not one time was that (NCAA qualifications) ever mentioned to me. I never met the guidance counselor. I never knew any of this. not at all. There were no tutors. There was no study hall. No...Computers weren't big then. It wasn't really out there. There was no access to the library. There was no time put aside for

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studying... None at all (academic assistance). There were no tutoring sessions. There were no study hall. There was no...Classes that you know like certain classes, make sure you put them in, it's you know, got a better chance of being helped. None of that. You on your own.”

In addition to not having academic guidance or any academic assistance, the expectations for athletes were low. Joseph acknowledged,

“...stereotypical athlete's they were expected to be below students. Not really care about academics and just perform on the court and people would make it better for you. Make it easier for you. That was how athletes were perceived at the time... , do enough. Academics weren't stressed much with the male athlete. Do enough to get out here. Far as with the girl, the standards were high. She come in the house with a C, she probably ain't playing anyway. You know, where if the boy come in with a C, he eligible to play, he's going to play.”

Because Joseph identified solely as an athlete, he had a 95 percent to 5 percent balance in terms of athletes/academic work. The 95 percent favored the amount of time Joseph placed on athletics while 5 percent of his time was dedicated to academic achievement. Joseph pointed out,

“Five academic, ninety-five athletic...I spent all day at the boys club sharpening my craft, every day. Because school was, I always, it was easy, so I felt I didn't have to put in a bunch of time. You know, so it was ninety-five, five...Because to me I thought that was more definite way out of my situation...I didn't think like

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academics was going to provide me a scholarship or opportunity to make possible millions of dollars. Yeah, academics wouldn't provide me. I thought athletics would provide me an opportunity at a better life than academics I mean, A better way out."

Joseph acknowledged how athletics dominated his identity which resulted in his academic disidentification. Although Joseph could pinpoint the relationship between his athletic success and his academic disidentification, it is important to explore his thoughts on his racial identity and racial stereotypes. Racially speaking, Joseph maintained that he believes that Black people were smarter than any other race. Joseph affirmed,

"In high school, like I was very conscious of where about, I knew, like back, I knew we were the start of civilization...I knew that. I know, we just be on some bull...I'm a prime example because I wouldn't try. Like you know, prime example I just finished two classes. I hadn't taken a serious class in twenty years. I didn't have a book the first month. Got a C in both classes. So you know, I think it was easy. So I think we just get misguided and off track, but I didn't think nobody was smarter than us."

Joseph's belief that African American male students athletes are "on some bull" was a direct reflection to his belief that others did not have high expectations of African American male athletes and African Americans in general. When asked if he felt if it was acceptable in his neighborhood to do poorly academically, Joseph stated, "Yes, three

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people in my neighborhood graduated high school”. Joseph also stated that if you were smart you were usually ostracized, he stated,

“You usually ostracized. This guy named... he was smart... like genius guy...they had to be in the house when the lights come on. They- always made fun of them. Well, try to, but (genius guy) was also a Gorilla. You know what I’m saying, be careful what you say. He could defend himself verbally and physically, so but if you a smart guy...They, ah you a smart guy. But if you, one thing about our neighborhood, if you wanted to be...stay the smart guy, they left you alone. It’s when you try to become the gangsta smart guy, is when you had problems. You just a smart guy to be a smart guy, they left you alone, so”

While Joseph admits that a “smart guy” would have trouble relating to the other young men in their neighborhood who did not see themselves as a “smart guy”, He also added that he did not believe racial stereotypes gave justification in the African American community. Joseph declared,

“No, it did not. I think the stereotypes are way off as far as black and intellectual. I think that people don’t weigh in and buy the situation or circumstance, none of that. I just think that just it was used as a tool of oppression. You tell somebody they dumb and keep putting it in they head, they going to start actually believing it. So, have I saw that... yeah I witnessed that... I think that’s pretty much it”

Joseph admission that racial stereotypes did not give justification for academic failure gave insight to why he believed that there was no other race smarter than African

Americans. However, despite this admission, Joseph recognized that he did develop a stronger athletic identity and his academic identity suffered. Joseph stated,

“...My GPA and ACT's scores could have been way better. I had a 2.0 in High School, that's a C. You know, are grade scale was high. Like an eighty was a C in (high school). So, you know you get an eighty in College you graduated on the Dean list. So, at (high school) I had an eighty and that's a C. But , you know I didn't work to my potential at all. I didn't take it serious. Didn't understand the qualification. Didn't understand like you know, 17 or 2.0 that's extremely easy... How you can't get this unless you're not applying yourself, you know, my GPA didn't recognize my ability at all. (Athletics) It gave me, it developed my leadership skills. It developed my personal skills. It developed my competitive nature more. I was competitive in academics. Like I didn't want to go in your class and get no F because I couldn't bring no F home. But it would be days in there where I showed, you know, he got 94; I'm going to get 98. You know, I'm going to get a hundred. But it's just athletics, its competitive nature was there each and every day, so it gave me a competitive nature and insight into my political views came from athletics. , my leadership skills... Sure did. Yes I got a lot of recognition from my athletic...the skills that I learned from being a leader, yes I got recognition.”

Joseph was able to recognize his academic disidentification because he knew his GPA in high school did not reflect his intellect; instead, it reflected the amount of effort he placed

on academics. His academic disidentification and his definition of athletic success gave greater insight into his thought process. Joseph recalled,

Yes, I actually said that to myself. I actually said when , my coach, me and coach had a speech one time. He asked me about being a kid from (inner city) and having an opportunity to go to (Major Division I University). And I mentioned that, it's not about going to (Major Division I University). It's NBA or nothing. If I don't go to the NBA than I fail. So, the NBA was success to me because I felt I should have been playing on that level. So when I didn't make that level it was like, I failed. So, yeah...as I got older, I realized that success is totally different. It's not playing in the level because I know I was good enough to be that, but there's other things you got to do. I think success is being true to yourself. Never compromising your integrity. If you can do that in this world then I think you are very successful.”

Joseph articulated that if he did not make it play in the NBA, he was a failure. Over the years, Joseph's definition of success changed. Therefore, it is important to explore whether Joseph suffered any lasting implications of academic disidentification in college. Initially, Joseph recounted several athletic achievements were he set several collegiate school records in basketball, Joseph stated,

“That was constant. Where they thought just because I was here, you can't pass this. I was actually told that. Like , good athlete you think it's just an art class, I need this class to graduate junior College. He said , you an athlete, everything is given to you. You think, you ain't even supposed to be here. You don't even, you

just think the world revolves around you. You know, they already summed me up to just being somebody that didn't care anything about the class. And , I told him, man look, you know, explained my background and situation. I told him that I will pass your class... You the db jock. If that could have come out, he said everything but that. He went around to get to straight db jock... Without even saying db jock. Like you don't know me... I just experienced that in my Micro Biology class. My teacher didn't think I was good enough to be in it. White lady.”

Joseph continued to feel the effect of being labeled the “db jock”. Although he never believed that he was db and knew that his academic failure was a lack of his own effort, Joseph began to experience a shift in how he viewed himself and how he now wanted the world to view him as well. Joseph was asked if he would have done anything differently. Joseph pointed out,

“Oh yes, definitely. Yes, of course. I took academics as serious as I should have been. , I would have you know, instead of going from a straight A student to a C student just to do it. I would have never done that. I would have worked harder. I wouldn't rely so much on talent. Everything I ever did was easy, so I relied on everything was talent. I never really worked hard. I never, never really, so if I could go back and graduate again, I would have graduated with a nursing degree twenty years ago instead of doing it now because at the end of the day the ball stop bouncing whether it faster than you want it to or not. You got to be able to adjust. With academics you can keep on going. You keep going...you can grow... There's a certain point in athletic that it stop. Learning, as long you

learning, you living. Seventy/thirty... , developing your academic identity is just as important as developing my [athletic] identity. Yeah I would like to be known as the guy who is a really smart guy. To be honest, I rather be known more for that than a Basketball player. Man he was like he was smart, like he was a smart guy. That gives me a good, a great feeling to know that people see me different. Like he a smart dude, he's a smart guy, he just ain't this. In comparison to being a basketball player because I'm not anymore. Talk to me about something that I'm not, you know, I don't want to talk about that no more, I want to talk about this.”

Joseph's advice to a younger version of himself and to young men in the same situation was,

“First thing I would tell them is focus on your academics. Make sure your academics are the most important thing that you have to do. Second is your sport of choice. I tell them how hard it take you know, the effort you need to put in it. How if they work hard at they craft and whatever they do, don't ever give fifty percent effort. Put everything you know into each thing. If you're doing this, you want to be the best at this. So that means if you in class, you want to be the best student you want to be. If you at practice, you be the best player you could be. I would tell them that to stay focused. Focus, focus, focus...”

Alton the young point guard

Alton is 21 year old former student athlete who attended a predominately African American high school in the Midwest. Alton was from a single parent home being raised by his mother. Alton was the youngest of 3 children. He did have constant contact with

his father. Alton began playing basketball around the age of 9 and decided to become serious about the game around 12 years old. Alton was offered several Division I scholarship because of his athletic abilities on the basketball court; however, he was unable to accept them because of his GPA and ACT scores. Alton was asked to “tell a little bit about himself” this was his response,

“I’m an athlete. A student athlete. , I like to play basketball and I like to have fun. , my high school experience was kind of fun. But at the same time when I had got to college I realized that I didn’t get all the right things that I needed... that I needed to have and the stuff I needed to know for as college. So, my high school didn’t really prepare me for college because when I got to college it was a lot of things that I didn’t really know.”(personal communication, June 2016)

Initially, Alton identifies himself as an athlete but follows that statement with being a student athlete in addition to admitting that his high school academic experiences did not prepare him for the rigors of college. Alton stated that he did consider himself to be a student athlete; however, he identified more as an athlete. Alton’s expectation of basketball was to lead him to success. He stated, “...I expected it to take me to success in life. Just help me get to the next level and then eventually get paid to do what I love... It could be playing overseas or maybe even playing in the NBA.” Alton stated that he did not have a plan to achieve his athletic goals, he recounted,

“... I didn’t really know that’s what I wanted to do because all I wanted to do was play basketball to be honest. , I had to work for it. And , stay on top of my game and make sure my grades is right enough for me to be able to keep playing basketball.”

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Alton viewed success as “making it” to the next level which was playing basketball professionally. Alton stated that his role models were Michael Jordan and LeBron James both being successful African American professional basketball players who received multimillion dollar contracts and endorsement deals because of their athletic abilities.

Alton recalled that during his elementary years that his grades were straight A’s. Alton saw a slight drop in his academic performance in middle school by earning A’s and B’s instead of earning straight A’s like in elementary. Upon entering high school, Alton stated, “In high school, it dropped. I became kinda average.” He stated he contributed the drop in his grades to his surroundings. When asked to elaborate on “his surroundings”, he stated, Like, ... “focusing more on the wrong thing that was going on and stuff. Trying to fit in with different crowds.” Despite focusing on “his surroundings”, Alton felt that he spent equal amounts of time on academic and athletic activities. He stated that the percentage was 50athletics/50 academics while stating the he identified more as an athlete than a student. Alton stated that male athletes were not expected to be smart, he stated, “...Males like, they were expected to be good enough to get by.”

Alton stated that his coaches did discuss NCAA requirements with the team. However, this was done informally during his early high school career. Alton recalled,

“Yeah, my , my senior year my coach did...I mean, they were, but like my senior year, was like when it was focused more on me and stuff like that. He was stressing it to me...Yeah, basically. They’ll start your junior year for real, but your senior year the most.”

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Alton spoke of his school offering academic support for the student and a program called 21st Century in addition to his coaches providing tutoring for academic support. Alton indicated, “They’ll give you like, tutoring. A tutor. And a school program that’s supposed to tutor you and help you work.” Alton recalled taking advantage of the tutoring with his coaches, Alton added, “m, that was just during the basketball season. But he was still asking about it after the season”. He also recalled that his coaches would stress academic achievement but never praised it. Alton recalled his best academic accomplishment in K-12 years, “ My best academic accomplishment was being on the Honor Roll all 4 Quarters. Mmmm, I did it all throughout elementary and middle school and I did it once in 10th grade at high school.” and his best athletic accomplishment, “Yeah, ... Being one of the top players in the area in basketball.” Alton recalled that the accomplishments that received the most praise from his parents, friends, and community was his athletic accomplishments. When Alton was asked which achievement he was most proud of, he stated athletic as well. Consequently, Alton felt that athletics had a big impact on shaping his identity. He stated, “, it kinda helped a lot. It kinda like defined who I am. ‘Cause people know me from doing what I did and playing basketball..., a lot of attention and recognition.” The attention and recognition that Alton received gave validation of which activity was more important and help instill pride of the athletic accomplishment while assisting in his disidentification from academics. Alton felt, “Well, the academic attention, that’s really something that I really know that I’m doing for myself and the athletic attention is something that everybody can see and showcase.” Therefore since his academic achievement did not receive as much praise as the athletic

accomplishments, he continued to produce academically but only to the level needed to stay academically eligible to play basketball in high school.

Alton was aware of racial stereotypes during his high school years. He stated, "They just, figured we're from (hometown), we're Black, we don't know how to behave and stuff like that... From the academic end, like they figured our athletes were dumb and stuff too, but at the same time we had some of the smartest kids too." Although Alton was aware of racial stereotypes, he did not believe that they affected his academic performance. In addition, he stated that it was not acceptable to perform poorly in academics in his family. Alton also mentioned having discussions in his circle of friends about academic performance, he added, "We was talking about like, gotta pay more attention and study harder and then don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it." Alton did not believe that one race was superior to another academically. In terms of African American males being better athletes than their White peers, Alton stated, "Mmm, not really. It just depends on how you craft yourself... I did a little bit, but you can't really judge off the color of somebody's skin."

In self reflection, Alton recalled that his GPA matched his effort and not his actual intellect in high school. He acknowledged that his GPA matched his effort and not his intellect because "I was only doing enough just to get by". Alton demonstrated a strong athletic identification while continuing to disassociate from academics as well as his goal of playing professional basketball and being successfully based on his own definition. Alton reiterated, "... being able to make it out and make a lot of money, doing what you love to do... What I love to do is basketball... First of all- to me making it to

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college first... That's the first step. And then from college, being able to do it professionally... Yeah, so just get paid to play basketball period."

Lawrence the Power Forward

Lawrence was a standout power forward from a large Midwestern town. Lawrence attended a predominately African American school district. Lawrence was from a single parent home and had 8 siblings. While Lawrence was a standout power forward in high school, he found himself being ineligible for the multitude of athletic scholarships that were being offered by many major Divisions I universities. When Lawrence was asked to "tell me a little bit about you" this was his response,

"Okay, I came from a family of nine which I had one of my brothers was killed or what not and, you know my mother, single parent home and... four brothers and four sisters or what not and , at the same time, like you know, like I say, like high school it was kind of, it was kind of easy for me because I was just trying to hustle the lifestyle to where you know , I just kind of made it easy for myself to where you know , it was...It could have been better. It could have been much better. , if I knew what I knew back then what I knew now, I would have took it more serious in high school. You know, because of , like I said I just kind of looked at high school as you know like, oh this cake walk. ...you know ...

Actually you know what, I probably would have taken my senior year more serious. I would have took my senior year more serious than anything because like I say, I was also into sports. I played basketball. I was pretty good at it and I just kind of felt that you know, like at the time , I just took it as oh well, you know

, school is school. I just graduated and just you know, went about my business or what not. I never thought you know, how important high school can be you know, just in life in general. ”(Anonymous personal communication, August 2016)

Lawrence’s older brothers had a huge impact on his decision to play basketball.

Lawrence recalled,

“... , like I was growing up that’s all we did you know. Like I say, I came from a family to where you know, I had mostly you know, you know, older brothers and you know, that’s all you know, we did. We played Basketball every day, all day. And then you know, that you...you know, it’s kind of you know, the more practice...the more practice you know, and when you doing something, when you practice at it, I mean you get good at it. And that’s what it was. I mean, I had just a tendency to just wanting to play basketball and I look up and it’s like man, I was very talented at it. So...I mean you know, I mean that’s really what it was.”

During his elementary years, Lawrence seemed to have a strong academic identity. He recalled, “Elementary school? Man, I was like one of the smartest kids in the world. And I still try to figure out to this day... I’m still trying to learn like where do we go wrong. You know where do we actually go wrong at you know from elementary to middle school to high school and it’s like it’s kind of a loss of focus on you know, the bigger picture and you know, when you out here and you raising your stuff, these kids out here raising they selves nowadays. It’s like they really you know they know what’s right from wrong, but they know you know,

they going to do what they feel. It's like they feel is wrong. Even though it's wrong, if they feelings right, then they going to do it."

Lawrence continued to elaborate about his middle school academic experience,

"In middle school? Middle school I was good in the school. I was pretty good in middle school. You know, actually now I was rough. I was a rough kid in middle school because I didn't even get a chance to graduate in the school walk, do the middle school graduation because I was fighting and got put out of school, but you know, my grades were never a problem in middle school. You know, it just kind of got to high school. Like when it got to high school it was like, it was a totally different ball game when I got to high school you know."

Lawrence recognized that the academic disconnect occurred in high school. In Middle School, he did not see school as a problem nor did school interfere with his ability to explore both his academic and athletic identities. Lawrence recounted the moment he felt he made a commitment to basketball, he stated,

"I decided to get serious about basketball was probably like my freshman year. My freshman year in high school I played basketball and I started Varsity. And it was like okay, once I started Varsity...and on a high school level where I just kind of felt that you know like, man this is what everybody was talking about like when you know, when you play Varsity like you just actually you know, just kind of feel like you the man. You on top of the world. So it's like, hey I want to stay up here. I like being up here. You know, so that's when I really took it serious,

but in eighth grade that's like I said, I mean, that's when I was you know, I activated my skills to you know, to be good enough. To actually be good enough to play Varsity Basketball. Around the eighth grade, so yeah."

As Lawrence recalled what he considered the catalyst for him becoming serious about basketball, Lawrence love for basketball lead him to a realization. He stated,

"I mean, what's real funny and kind of hilarious now is that I look back and say man, I mean that was the only reason I actually even went to school was to get to basketball. Like high school you know, and it was like you know, yeah I just kind of knew like , I need the grades to play and if I wanted to continue to play then you know, I got to have you know, enough credits. , I got to have my grade point average to where I can actually be out there and that's what I wanted to do. Like I say, I took a liking into you know, playing basketball at a young age. So, it's like, man this is what I wanted to do so its was, hey I got to get my grades together buddy. It's only like I say, I only did just enough to only work or just enough to just play basketball."

Lawrence recognized that in order to continue playing the sport that he loved, he had to have a certain GPA. He acknowledged that he only worked to be eligible to compete in basketball, not to grow academically. Lawrence was dedicated to basketball and also had a dream of where basketball and athletics would take him. Lawrence stated,

"...know what? Everybody, I mean, young boys dream is to make it to the NBA. And I said, that's where I always wanted to go. I said you know what, I'm going

to go to the NBA. I'm going to play basketball and go to the NBA. But one thing I didn't know is that hey, the work you know, it takes you know, work and dedication. Not only on the basketball court, but you have to be someone in the classroom and you know, that's where I really just kind of learned like man, like you know, I was destined I was a freshman. I was a freshman in junior college. I mean, I had scholarships everywhere. Like I could have went to you know, any school I wanted to go to, but yet you know like I say, at my senior year I was more you know, focused on you know, just okay, because I'm being the greatest you know, on the court and I just always had the mentality to where , senior I just did enough to just play on the court and like, when it came time to graduate like you know and another thing like, you know my wife, today. There was a lot of things that you know my wife did that you know, it was like okay, I was awful to the girls too. When we was in high school together it was to a point where, she would take a class after school because my wife was very smart. You know, she was outstandingly smart. So it was like you know, she would take a class you know after school it was like, you know what, I'm going to take the same class because I just you know, like I say as a kid, I wanted to be with my girlfriend you know, everyday all day you know. Since she in school, I'm going to stay in school. So I end up , taking you know, extra classes or what not with her and , you know like I said, at senior year you know during my senior year , or before that or during school or what not, I was doing summer school just because you know, just because to you know, just to go because everybody else was going and then you know, everybody you know, be playing basketball or what not. So it's like,

okay we going to go to summer school to so I got to summer school. So I look up and I got these grades, right? So I said yeah, you know what, I got this you know, I got like a 2.8, 2.9 grade point average and I , I'm like man, I'm graduating in January. I have all my credits in January. This was my senior year. I say, well you know what, basketball season going on, I just you know not thinking like I say, not taking it serious. , not taking the academic part serious. You know, I just start going to school just you know, just to say, okay I'm just going to go to school for these three hours, so I can be eligible to play basketball. And you know, I found myself doing that in January and then I found myself like, stop going to school like period like after January and after the season I just find myself you know, just kind of stop going to school and what not and , really just didn't even care about it you know and , you know they used to tell me. My mentors used to tell me all the time which, they used to tell me all the time, man what are you doing? You need to come to school and this and that. You ain't done with school man. So, you need to do this and you need to do that to keep that grade point average. And I was like, okay, whatever, whatever... Yeah, so , yeah they used to tell me all the time like hey, do this and do that and do this and I used to be like, you know what, alright okay, okay, whatever. You know, it really never trip off on the mind because my wife at the time you know, was my girlfriend and you know, she kind of graduated a year earlier, so it was like, this is what I'm going to do. I want to spend my time with her and be with her and this and that. So, it just kind of you know, my grades come out or what not, I find myself ...I find myself and got all F's... So...I find myself with all F's. So I said, well you know what? I got all F's

whatever, you know. And , you know at the time my wife you know, we had Desire which is our oldest daughter and , I was just like well you know what, I'm done with it anyway, so what you know, I'm just going to continue to do what you know I'm saying, I've been doing which you know like I say, at the time, I didn't never take school serious. For real, I just went for Basketball and then you know, I was still and at that time, I was out here selling drugs too. So, you know because like I said, my older brothers you know, I lost one. I lost one, he passed away and I just found myself you know, just being out here and next thing you know, I just kind of looked up and you know , like I said my mentor, [coach] and [coach] they just was like, man what are you doing? You know you talented enough you know, to make it up out of here and to do this. So, I end up going to Junior College. That's when I, you know once I got to college, that's when I really you know, well my first year. I didn't know anyone for real, so it was like, I was just basically like okay, you know, I mean I know I don't want none of that. It's like okay, I will just kind of stay to myself and , once I stayed to myself and I focused on basketball or what not I ...And I was you know like, first semester I was ready to come home. I was like, man I'm ready to come home. They was like, no no you aint. I'm like yeah, I'm fittin to come home. So, I end up you know, just kind of making it through that. And then after that I just, I got hurt. ”

Although Lawrence had a dream of playing in the NBA one day, he did not have a plan to accomplish his goal. Lawrence acknowledged that he did not take academics seriously and only did enough to stay eligible to compete in athletic events. Lawrence's situation was unique because he had a high 2 point GPA because he did take extra courses, not for

the benefit of taking them, but because he wanted to spend more time with his girlfriend. However, Lawrence was still able to reap the benefits of taking the classes by earning all the credits he needed for graduation before January of his senior year. Unfortunately, being eligible for early graduation placed Lawrence in a situation where his academic disidentification cause him to become ineligible to be an NCAA qualifier. In terms of his academic disidentification, Lawrence recalled,

“Academic part of it because you know, like I say I was real good at the athletic part, but you know, academic part I was smart, but yet I didn’t really take it as serious because I didn’t really have no one to just kind of , you know just kind of , tell me about you know, how important it is and just kind of sit down and just explain to me. You know, until after the fact. You know, I had important people in my corner. In you know, it was you know, was very supportive of me just making it and just kind of tell me you know what I’m saying, out of line you know like hey, you really need to take this serious, but yet you know, really you know, just kind of, I didn’t really just think of it as, okay, this is me you know , this is how it’s going to be and this is how your future going to be if you know, if you just kind of you know, BS around or what not and if I had..If I had a chance to just kind of look at , what I had you know in front of me or what I was facing or what not, I think I would have probably taken it more serious than anything. But like I said, the lifestyle that I just you know, living or what not it was not okay. You know, father wasn’t really there you know, to tell me. I mean, I’ve had a couple mentors, but you know, they can only you know what I’m saying, just kind of you know, let me know what’s going on. They could and you know, and

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push me to you know, to be successful, but yet you know, to me, it was up to me to actually you know , do what I had to do in order to be successful.”

Although Lawrence did not focus on academics, he stated “I loved school. School was the best for me. Like I said, I was just flat out it’s like you know, I was just, you know I was the man in school all the way.” Lawrence stated that his best achievement in high school was leading his team to the league championship and winning the scoring title. In addition Lawrence stated that his best athletic accomplishment was,

“Man, my best athletic accomplishment, I scored a few thirty point games. I did have you know, you know double doubles. I mean I led the whole lead in like three years in a row. Scoring and rebounding so you know it really you know that was like you know my biggest accomplishment.”

Lawrence was asked about his best academic achievement, he admitted,

“...I don’t know. I couldn’t tell you. I couldn’t even tell you because it was like I just had , I just had the mentality to where I just needed to do enough to get over the hump and get by. So, it was never no, I mean, I always took a you know, a liking in math. I love math. So it’s like, by me loving math you know, why I loved it, it’s like you know, I was always a curious person you know, to know you know, about numbers and where it can take me because like I say you know, by me you know being real good in math it was obviously because I was a little young drug dealer out here too. So, it was like, hey I mean, I need to know how to count. So, you know and I started learning how to count and being I started

learning how to do other things you know and really just kind of took a liking in geometry and stuff like that and you know it be like man, how you get an A out this class and you know, learning formulas and all that, but you know like I say, I was out here doing other things to where you know, it takes you know a skill in order to you know have it done or what not so.”

Lawrence initially could not recall his best academic achievement but stated that he really enjoyed math. When Lawrence was asked which accomplishment he was most proud of, he stated, “...wasn’t my academics.” Lawrence was asked if he received praise from his academic achievements, he recalled, “No, not for real you know. Like I said, I was just a person to where you know, I just kind of you know, looked up to you know, you know just being out here. I didn’t even worry about the academic part and I really didn’t you know wasn’t you know looking for praise for that because I was out here doing other things like I say, I just wanted to play basketball.” When asked if he looked to receive praise for basketball, Lawrence stated,

“Was I looking for it, naw because I knew how good I was. You know, I knew how good I was at the time and it was like well you know, I know I’m going to get praise because when everybody come to the game and they see me hit twenty-five, thirty points a game and they be like, man you know, this dude you know, he can’t be stopped and all of that. I knew that you know, I knew that. I was in the paper and everything so you know, for my achievements. So, it was like I really you know, I didn’t trip off of it because I was just you know cocky enough and so

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arrogant enough to where you know, I really didn't need nobody to praise because I knew how good I was.”

Although Lawrence did not look to receive praise for his athletic accomplishments, he was aware that the praise was there and would be given regardless. However, the academic praise was not his focus and therefore, he never worried about the academic part. Lawrence did not consider himself to be a student athlete. He considered himself to be an athlete. While Lawrence did not consider himself to be a student athlete, it is important to understand if racial and athletic identity created an environment that was not conducive for learning.

Lawrence recognized that he developed a strong athletic identity in high school. All of his goals and dreams were based on his athletic achievements with basketball. Lawrence stated that,

“You know what, I never gave college a thought. I never thought about college... I never thought about college you know. I mean, I just you know, kind of just like you know, just the type of person where hey, I'm going to go to school. I'm going to go to the NBA and that was it... Right. Right. So, that's why you know like I said, I never gave college a thought because I just knew what I had to do to go. I was like you know what, I'm going. I'm going. I just need to get to the NBA that's it. You know, I never knew that you know, I was going you know, get hurt.”

Despite the fact that Lawrence knew that he wanted to play professional basketball, he admitted that he really didn't have a plan for his life beyond basketball. Lawrence admitted,

“I aint never know I was going to hurt myself. You know, I never knew that. You know what, I never had you know, a plan. I never sat down and you know had a plan just have my life mapped out knowing that you know, this is what I'm going to do , you know if like I said, what if I get hurt. I never had that in front of me, so you know I never thought of it and I never gave it a thought so...”

Lawrence's athletic identity foreclosure put him in a situation where he only focused on athletic activities; however, with hind sight being 20/20 Lawrence stated,

“You know, I never looked at it on the other you know, on the other side of, okay what if I get hurt? You know, I never looked at it like that because you know just you know, if you get hurt knowing that you know you don't have another plan which I didn't. I didn't have you know what I'm saying, a plan if you know, when you got that big if. Okay, what if? You know, I never had that plan, so like I say you know, I mean, what I know now. If I knew what I knew now back then, it would have been totally different. It would have been totally different like you know academic wise and school wise, it would have been totally different. But like I say, I can't you know, I can't go back and change and turn back the hands of time, but I just got to you know, just I got to keep going. Which you know like I say, I turned out you know, my life turned out very well. You know, I'm happy where I'm at today. Very happy you know with my life, but you know, like I say,

I know kids out here nowadays that you know, got the same dream that you know, that I had. They want to go Pro-Basketball and they want to go to the NBA you know, they want to be successful on the basketball court, but yet you know, it's not all about basketball. It's really not you know, so yeah.

Lawrence stated that he was not aware of the NCAA requirements as a high school student. Although he mentioned that his coaches would occasionally say that they needed a 2.5 GPA and that they had to pass the ACT. Lawrence elaborated further about his knowledge of the NCAA requirements, he stated,

“I mean you know what, my coach just...all he told me was hey, you just keep , at least a 2.5 and pass the ACT. You know, it wasn't really just you know. It wasn't to a point where you know, they would actually sit down or he would actually sit down and just kind of tell me what you know, what they going to expect of me you know or i need to set my standards at a high expectation. He never you know, told me that you know like I say, my mentors and you know my uncle you know, they just basically just trying to you know, explain it to me you know, what imma need. Because I didn't know that you know, at first you know, and coming out of high school I didn't know you know, there's colleges out here that you gotta maintain a 3.0 just to you know be you know eligible to stay in their school not just you know a player in the program or what not. So you know, it's like and then once I finally you know, started seeing what was going on and once I actually took it serious it was like man, like you know it's like, it kind of, it kind of taste more on the inside, but then again it's like you know what, I can't really

do nothing about it, but what I can do is you know, like I said I had a mentor you know, two of them. I mean, I can be mentor to you know others you know also well as my sons and just kind of let them know that man, it's not you know, it ain't no joke out here. Like I said its hard work. Its hard work. You got to you know, you got to set your standards high. You know you got to have high expectations just in life in order to you know, be successful you know, so yeah.”

In addition to the lack of communication about the NCAA qualifying standards, Lawrence noticed a system that favored athletes in his school. Lawrence spoke of “if it ain't broke, don't fix it”, this is how he explained it,

“Okay, just saying if I didn't go to school and I had two, three F's like I said, I had all that right? my senior year. Now let's say if I had all F's because I was the type of person I had all F's like my junior year or something like that. I mean you know, I could just be like man, I can get a report card on all F's on it and find myself eligible to play. You know, for that next semester you just be like man, how it you know how did that happen? You know, you just kind of sit back and you just be like, well you know what? Hey, closed mouths you know, hey...If I don't know then you don't know, so and then that's how it really was at the time. They did, it's a dirty game. It's a really dirty game how certain people you know , can do a kid and just mess a kids life up like that because you know, you can go through your whole life you know what I'm saying, with a person just kind of giving some, giving, giving, giving and you expect to not to do just nothing, but you know what I'm saying, you do one thing you love and they going to

constantly give it to you. I mean, you know, what if you know , you come to a point in time where you can't even you know, you just can't do that. You can't do what you love. You can't you know, produce for a person or give a person you know , twenty, thirty points on the basketball floor. So you know, if you can't give a person that then what they going to give you. Nothing you know. They going to look at you crazy, so now I just went you know, a whole a long time with a person giving me something and now I can't produce what they want. Now I have nothing, so that side of me you know, I'm at a point of time where I don't know nothing. I don't know what to do and I couldn't hard read my name. I could hardly spell it, but yet you know, I'm eligible to play basketball and I just kind of feel like that that's wrong. That's really wrong for a person to you know, put a kid in a situation for them to you know, not know nothing you know. I think that's terrible...Because like I said, they just want to win you know, they just want to win on that basketball court you know. On the floor. They just want to be you know, just oh okay, label us you know, the best team or such and such got the best team which some coaches are like that. Not all coaches. You got some coaches that are like that and I feel like you know just some coaches that are like that they shouldn't be able to coach but just I'm going to pass you along because you good in basketball, so but once you know, your time is up with me and okay, then what I got? I can't go back and say, oh coach you just going to take care of me the rest of my life? Hell no, he aint going to take care of you the rest of your life. You just find yourself out here wondering and then just like the rest of these

guys that you know, that's better than Michael Jordan that's playing on the playground today, you know?"

The system that Lawrence noticed in high school created an environment that contributed to Lawrence's academic failure and positive athletic identity. Lawrence recalled never being called a "student athlete" by his high school coaches instead he recalled athletes being referred to as either "basketball players or football player". This representation was solely based on their sport of choice.

Lawrence stated that he did not think much about racial stereotypes during his time in high school. Although he was able to recall how he felt when his school would visit predominately White schools in his area, he stated,

"Is like you know just kind of looked at you know like their schools. So, I mean we go to other schools and it's like man, like you know I know for a fact that they you know, they got lunch today. They eating you know, for real lunches. We eating [nasty lunches], so I just kind of just knew that. I just kind of figured that. You know , they probably getting a better you know education because of the lifestyle of you know what they had and what they were given."

Lawrence was aware of the disparities between his predominately African American school district and the predominately White districts that his team would visit for competition. Additionally, Lawrence also felt that the White students received a better education based on their facilities and the quality of food being offered to those students.

Lawrence was asked about what it meant to “act white” and how African Americans were treated in his neighborhood who were considered to be “acting white”, he stated,

“I mean you know just the way you know they just kind of carry they self. How they, when they talk proper because you know what, when you been from the hood, it’s kind of different. It’s kind of different when you from the hood and you from the ghetto for real because you know, when you in the ghetto you talk this slang and you know want to walk around and you know, with your pants sagging down which some kids do it. I mean you know, I never done that you know you just you know, dusty little kids eating ramen noodles and things to that nature, but yet you know, when you see a kid that he got his pants pulled. Got his shirt tucked in you know, got a sweater on his shoulders and you just kind of like, oh wait a minute, hey how you doing and you know got a certain you know personality and the way they talk. I mean, it’s like you know what are you doing? Like nah, he can’t be from around here. And the only people we even see you know do this or even act like this is the white people. You know... (Laughing) Were they accepted? Nah, none of the kids that was always beat up and picked on. You know, like the nerds... Yeah, they were the people that you know was beat up and picked on and just kind of bullied and what not. You know just things of that nature.” (Personal communication

Lawrence was aware of some racial stereotypes of that plagued the African American community. After Lawrence spoke about “acting white” and how those kids were normally bullied, I asked him if it was outside the norm to be black and to be smart, his

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response was “Yeah, it was really kind of like...Yeah, it won’t normal for that. For me...Like to me, it wasn’t normal.”

As a youth, Lawrence had several role models. His role models consisted of Scottie Pippen and his uncle. Lawrence added,

“My uncle you know was my role model for real. You know , and you know other than you know, just you know setting out you know standards of being a basketball player you know I mean, just like my uncle he was a doctor and he worked and he was like a doctor at state hospital and he was like a, he was a teacher. He was a teacher at [local] School District and you know like I say, it was like man, every time I looked up you know it was like, he was never you know, he was that person that was never broke. It was like man, I want to be like this man because he aint never broke like you know, you ask him for like whatever and the dude was like never broke ever and it’s like you know, when it’s time that you know, od things like go school shopping an all of that you know, like I said before you know, got myself caught up the streets you know, he was that person that you know, made sure that you know, yall got stuff for school , you know just things of that nature and whatever we needed you know, he was the person that was there to you know, make sure we had it.”

At this time, Lawrence definition of success was “money”. Although his Uncle was a doctor, Lawrence considered him to be successful because he “always had it” (money). Over the years, Lawrence’s definition of success has changed, he revealed,

“Because you know what, I feel that you know, academics is the key to success. And in order to be successful you know what, you got to know ,you know you got to know what’s going on. You got to be smart. Don’t nobody want no db person or a person that don’t no nothing I mean you know, on a job sight. They really don’t. I mean, you know like I say, I would change it highly. I would try my best to you know, I would try my best not only you know or do my best or accomplish myself instead of just you know playing basketball, but be more of you know, a person that is involved in school. I would be a nerd all the way around you know because I know you know in the long run where I would end up being the nerd in order to you know what I’m saying, gambling and taking you know fifty-fifty chance on being a drug dealer in life. You know, because like I say, you know it’s easy. You know what I’m saying...I mean, when you selling drugs that’s fast money you know, but you know just you know, just it’s the fast money. That the money that you know what I’m saying, basically worth it and it isn’t and it’s really not because you know, just getting the fast money you know, it’s just not getting it. It’s just not making it. It’s just that you know, I got to look over my shoulder and I got to you know watch my back and I got to you know, do things of that nature verses me you know knowing that I just can go home and can sleep peacefully and wake up peacefully without a care in the world. You know... So how about you just be successful in life and you know go to school. Get you a wonderful education knowing that you know that education that you have can take you forward. You don’t even have to have you know... education to where you go to school for four years. You can go to school for two years and you know

like hey, at least you got some type of you know educational background to where you know can get you started to where you know you want to be in life. You know I mean, there are opportunities out here you know. It really is, but it's in order to...In order to be successful and in order to you know, be a part of those opportunities they offering I mean, you got to you know, hey you got to do what you got to do to be a part of that.”

Aaron the Point Guard and Youngest brother

Aaron the point guard is a 38 year old African American male who attended several high schools in the Midwest. Aaron attended a predominately White high school freshman year, a more diverse high school sophomore and junior year and a predominately African American his senior year. Aaron is the younger brother of Henry and Joseph. His mother was a single mother who worked nights to support the family. Aaron's father was a professional baseball player but was not present his entire life. Aaron's first experience with basketball was at age 5. Aaron played basketball his entire high school career and has a very unique experience because he attended multiple high schools and at each school Aaron's academic and athletic experiences were different and unique. Aaron was offered several Division I scholarships but was unable to accept because of his grades. As a result, Aaron was offered a scholarship to attend a Junior College instead of a Division I University. It is important to understand how Aaron developed his identity and what life experiences played a part in Aaron becoming the man that he is today.

Aaron was the youngest of three boys. His older brothers also participated in basketball and received several Division I scholarship offers to play basketball but were

unable to accept those scholarships because of academic disidentification. Aaron recalled spoke about why he began playing basketball, he stated,

“I never thought about that. But I’ll tell you why I chose basketball. It was the most common game that everybody was playing...I had two brothers playing it, you know what I’m saying? It was the most common game. Everybody plays it. You could play it year round. When I would go somewhere- you can’t play baseball year round. You know what I’m saying? It was a year round thing. So that’s why I started playing. And then, like I said, I had two brothers playing...Whole neighborhood’s going. That’s why I started playing ball.”Anonymous personal communication, August 2016)

Aaron also played football and baseball for a little while in high school. He stuck with basketball but admitted that baseball was his favorite sport. He also stated,

“If I had to pick a sport—If I had to do it all over again, I would play baseball...I would rather do baseball. You know, the way... the way it is in our area and at that era baseball wasn’t cool, you know what I’m saying? So, it was like... Baseball was more of a natural talent thing. And a lot of people wasn’t really playing it. The ones that could play... So it wasn’t really cool to play. Once my brother quit playing baseball, I quit playing baseball. And that was my best sport. I was playing baseball and then I wasn’t any more... Nobody played it. Nobody played it. Nobody played baseball. Nobody played it. Nobody liked it. You know what I’m saying? And that—it happened. It just—wasn’t it. You know what I’m saying? Maybe it’s just my luck or era, but before my era, it was. My older brother played. In our era... nobody cared about it. Basketball, every dude.

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It was everybody's on it. So, I guess you know, I got caught in everybody ...
Plus, I was good at it."

Early on Aaron knew that he had a greater love for baseball but because it was not the popular thing, he decided that he would just focus on basketball. He went on to state, "Basketball in the ghetto, man, was your life. You know what I'm saying?" Aaron continued to elaborate on why basketball was life in the ghetto, "For as your life. It's how you took it, you know what I'm saying? It's like any sports you played in the ghetto, man, that's like your escape route. That's like your exit that can get you out. You know what I mean?" Aaron believed that basketball could give him an escape from the ghetto that academics could not. When asked about his academic accomplishments, Aaron stated,

"That ain't what we- Naw, that ain't what we do. My mama was a good mama, and she wanted you to do your homework. But that ain't what it do...Remember, they ain't gonna give us a scholarship for our brain. They not gonna give us a scholarship 'cause we got a 4.0."

During his elementary years, Aaron recalled that his grades were pretty decent. He stated,

"I ain't never been no "A" student, you know what I'm saying?" When asked to describe what he called "decent", he stated,

"It was just natural. I ain't never take it serious. You gonna sit there all day, you gonna hear something. You gonna hear the answer. I could pick up on shit real easy. I just wasn't focusing on it. You know what I'm saying?"

However, after leaving elementary and entering middle school, Aaron saw a drop in his grades. He stated, "...They started getting worse, they started getting worse." Aaron simply described his grades in high schools as "terrible". Aaron began to describe why he saw a shift in his grades from decent to worst to terrible, he recalled,

"I can't speak for everybody, but I'll say in my eyes, it was me. I ain't really like that shit. I was never, I was never no school bubba. I didn't do homework. I didn't like the shit, you know what I'm saying? I wanted to ball every day. I wanted to play ball every day. And then I wasn't doing no homework. ... It just ain't what I did. So what made it hard for me was the dislike for that shit anyway. You know? I never liked that shit. You know? And I still don't like it to this day. I ain't big on reading and I ain't... I always had in my mind that shit wasn't going to come into play in my life and truth be told, ain't none of that shit came to play in my life! Not none of that shit I learned in school! So it's like...some of that crap bullshit for real man. But you got to have it if you want to... Basically they teach you all this shit for nothing man, 'cause... none of this applies to none of us. In our area! Look at all the people that got good grades in our area. They end up right in the ghetto, ain't doing nothing."

Aaron felt strongly that education was not the ticket for him to escape his situation or the ghetto. He viewed academics as a waste of time. He felt that academics were useless information that he did not need then and has not used in his adult life. However, he had higher expectation of basketball and his athletic talent. Aaron recalled what he expected from basketball, he stated,

“... Honestly, I don’t... It took, it took me far as it can go. That’s what I will say. Basketball took me far as it can go as a player. When I first got into it, I thought basketball was going to take me into the Hall of Fame... Without injuries, I thought I was going to be the nigga who takes his shoes up and goes—Like I thought I was going to be the best ever. That’s where I thought basketball was going to take me. You know what I’m saying?”

Aaron recalled that, “I never wanted to attend college. I always wanted to go pro”.

Aaron developed a strong athletic identity beginning in middle school and his academic identity began to suffer because of how he viewed education in the “ghetto”. Aaron also recalled his best academic achievement, he stated, “Yeah, I wrote a poem and they (college) published that motherfucker, you know what I’m saying? I was never dumb, I just wasn’t on that, you know what I’m saying?” Aaron was asked did he have any K-12 academic accomplishments that he was proud of and he simply stated, “No, no”.

However when asked about his athletic accomplishments, Aaron recalled the first time that he dunked a basketball in 9th grade. He also stated that, “You know, as far as I got so many awards and shit at home. You know?” Aaron was referring to all of his athletic awards he received during his time as a student athlete. Aaron began to describe why he was proud of his athletic accomplishments, he stated

“Cause I was better than everybody. And I stepped on the floor with it, at all times. At all times when I stepped on the floor, I was the best. And it wasn’t that—It wasn’t that I mentally told myself that. It’s because I proved it to myself. Every time I stepped on the floor. That alone, no matter where I went... ‘Cause at

that time we were traveling and doing all kinds of shit. And no matter where I did it at, I always stepped up to the challenge.”

Aaron believed that he was the best in basketball and that his work ethic and time commitment to basketball would pay off in the long run. His commitment to academics was not there because he did not see academics leading him to success. Aaron was proud of his athletic accomplishments and recognized the attention that he received for his athletic abilities. Aaron recalled some of the attention that he received for athletics, he stated,

“From the women, we got a lot of pussy! From the niggas we got a lot of envy and hate. From the grownups we got a lot of ass-kissing and talking.

Motherfuckers wanted to be you, you know what I’m saying?! When you that type of athlete, when you that type of athlete. When you just an old nigga that can shoot the ball? Yeah, you get a little bit, but you feel me? When you are that guy, it’s totally different. Everywhere you go, man.

Okay, I’m 37 now. I’m giving my age up. I’m 37 now—they still talk about that shit. They ain’t got no life either, you know what I’m saying?”

Aaron was asked whether he believed people would still discuss his academic accomplishment as well as his athletic accomplishments if he had performed well in both areas, he replied,

“People don’t—Fuck naw! They don’t talk about Einstein, do we? Naw. So, why would they talk about—naw, man. No one cares. You want to know the saddest part behind all that, man? Just like the sports world, right? The sports world. No

one gets the grades for it in high school. No one ever gets the grades for it, but they idolized, man. They idolized ‘til the day that they die.”

Aaron’s pride in his athletic accomplishments was not merely by chance. Aaron admitted that he identified solely as an athlete. When asked about his dedication percentage to academics and athletics, Aaron stated that his percentage was 100% athletics. He stated,

“I wasn’t a scholar... I was an athlete. I was an athlete, man. You hear me? My brothers and them might have seen it a bit different. That athletics was important. You know? Me, I understood that, but I also thought that being a superior athlete will get you through anything. That’s why I worked so hard at ball. Because I wasn’t taking the cheap route out, with having to balance homework and social and finding time to study. I wasn’t cheating myself. I just literally thought that, being an immaculate basketball player, you wouldn’t have to do those other things. That’s what I thought, you know. I heard a couple guys before me didn’t have to do school work. You know what I’m saying? So, I thought, shit... I was one of those lucky guys that wasn’t going to have to do schoolwork.”

While Aaron believed that basketball was his way out of the ghetto, at some point he heard that athletes were not held accountable for their own academic success. Aaron did not believe that all athletes received that privilege, just a select few of standout athletes. He stated,

“Here’s a Catch-22: All male athletes, just ‘cause you play basketball doesn’t make you... that you got it. ‘Cause everybody you play with ain’t trying to make this as a living, you feel me? Some of them trying to have it on their resume to say “I’m cool.” You know what I mean? The athletes are going to lack some

requirements. They gonna lack in some kind of aspect. They gonna slack and lack, you feel me? Whether he doing good in grades, but he don't go to the gym enough, you know what I'm saying? It's always something. It's very hard to balance. You know what I'm saying? 'Cause you always going to feel like you taking away from something. You feel me? And something's going... to be missing some sustenance. One of them. There's no way you're going to go to school and be... a Harvard genius and be Michael Jordan. There's not enough time in the day, you feel me? I ain't know there to be no ... people like that No super smart dude that can really shoot some ball. You know? No. That's something sad too, ain't it? That's fucking sad cause, if you want to think about it, nope, nope. That was just super smart and could play ball? No. And I been all over. I never met no one who takes academics, you know, takes their academics so seriously and was real good in ball. I never met no one like that.”

Since Aaron believed that he fit the category of being a standout athlete, his academic identity continued to suffer and he completely foreclosed on his athletic identity.

However, Aaron's did not completely lose sight of his academic self until he attended a predominately Black high school. Aaron attended a predominately White high school his freshman and sophomore year. During this time, Aaron stated that the expectations were different and there really wasn't much to do so he went to class and did his school work.

While he admitted that he still was not an A student, he did maintain his academic eligibility.

“And I would say when I was at (PWI), it was different, though. It was different. We always grouped up more often, every day at practice, you know what I'm

saying. We discussed things. It was different at (PWI), you know. Talking about school and the programs, did they homework, did research. He actually used to talk to me schoolwork, ask about grades. Yeah, he was decent. He was one of them coaches that said, “yeah, take care of your grades” and all that. Yeah, he was decent. He was different. I will give him that.”

Aaron was asked did he do his work in the PWI to gain acceptance there, he replied,

“ I did that work there because I was bored as a motherfucker and I didn’t have nothing else to do! ... And besides, and... in these places, you have time to do you homework in the room.”

Aaron believed that not only were the academic expectations different for the athletes at the PWI but also the expectation of basketball were different. Aaron stated,

“they [White athletes] don’t take this seriously. ‘Cause remember, half these guys in [Predominately White High School], basketball meant nothing to them. They like to go play college ball. But they didn’t have no aspirations to do that. They wanted to go to college to become lawyers and doctors and shit. Know what I’m saying? That shit don’t hold no weight in the White schools. It don’t hold no weight in the White schools. Shit, they didn’t need it. They didn’t need it. They was well-off. So when a Black motherfucker say he’s going to the NBA, he’s going to take care of his family and every other family around him, you feel me? It’s like trying to win the lottery. Shit! Take care of your family. They look at the NBA like, shit. Because it’s just different with White people and Black people when it come to that. We need it. ...At that time, when I was playing, White motherfuckers was thinking that the nigga was better than them anyway,

you feel me? That's a nigga it was becoming a Black person's game. Then, the White people that do make it, they don't really need it. They just play ball. They not betting on it. They just went to college, played ball, and if they get drafted, they gonna play pro. They make a living out of it. When we search the ghetto, man we trying to seek that shit. We count our eggs before they hatched. Then you find out that this ain't—You find out that basketball ain't basketball...It's everything else.”

During Aaron's time at the PWI, he maintained academic eligibility. However, Aaron moved to another state which caused him to become ineligible because his move was not viewed as a hardship. Aaron found himself in a situation where he could not compete in athletics. As a result, Aaron had to fight to regain athletic eligibility. He stated,

“I had to write letters. I moved from (home) to (new state). And you ain't supposed to be able to play unless you got a hardship. I had to write, I had to go to court. I had to go through a lot! I missed football. I was actually going to play football down there. I was going to play football. I missed football season 'cause I wasn't eligible yet. You know what I'm saying? I had to write these letters. I had to—they had to understand my hardship on why I moved from (home city) and by the time I finally—once I won them over, and they finally granted me... basketball season about to start and I became eligible. So I know it was... I had to go through a whole lot, though. It was strenuous, it was an everyday process. And they granted it to me.”

During this process, Aaron admitted that he maintained his academic standing for eligibility purposes in order to play basketball, he recalled,

“So, this shit about ball...it’s about ball. I’m doing my school work, you know what I’m saying? I got to get grades. So, it’s different. Coming back to Predominately Black School (PBS), it was a culture shock because everyone around there was a snake and I wasn’t mentally prepared for it. I didn’t even know what I was getting myself into.

Once Aaron returned to his hometown, his beliefs of how athletes were expected to perform academically changed. Although Aaron maintained eligibility at the other two schools, Aaron found himself ineligible during the 3rd quarter, 2nd semester of his senior year. Aaron stated, “Too late when I found out I was ineligible. ‘Cause when I was in junior high, we didn’t have to go to class. You feel me? Everywhere else I been, I been able to get good grades in high school. The grades wasn’t the best, but I was able to pass with “Cs”. Shit. You feel me? When I got to (Predominately Black School), I just automatically figured that they gonna give me the grades to play ball, you feel me? But not just that—I wasn’t a ball player my senior year in high school. I did so much other shit. That’s the first time in my life where I didn’t work out every day. ...I didn’t work out every day. I did so much other shit. Every day, riding around, drinking, and just did everything else different. I got lost my senior year, you know what I’m saying? Not just lost... too far to come back. But see, the difference was- between me and majority of kids that get lost, I was an immaculate talent. I was going to have another chance, and plus I had two other brothers in school too. So, the door was going to be open in that regard, you know what I’m saying?”

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Despite realizing that he was ineligible to finish the basketball season his senior year, Aaron felt that athletic opportunities would still be there to compete. As a result of his athletic ineligibility his senior year, Aaron found that he also was no longer a NCAA qualifier and could not accept the 3 pending Division I offers to play on the collegiate level. Aaron believed that athletes could get away with murder, he stated, “I’mma put it to you this way here: in the urban community, athletes get away with murder. So, why you gonna put your all in when you can get a “C” paper? And probably can talk her into giving you a B?”

Although Aaron recognized his own athletic identity foreclosure, he did not believe most racial stereotypes that typically plague the African American community. He believed that African American were smart if not smarter than any other race. He stated,

“Hell yeah. I think we’re smarter than anybody. Know what? I think Black people are smart because we’re cunning. You know what I’m saying? A Black motherfucker gonna figure it out. You leave him alone long enough, he gonna figure it out. You know what I’m saying? I think Black people were smarter than all races. But then again, I’d be biased to say that. I think we all smart. I think Black people adjust and adapt quicker. I think that we take adversity and adapt. You know what I’m saying?”

Aaron was asked also talked about his experience with racial stereotyping during his time at the PWI, he recalled,

“I thought we were smarter just like them. Shit, I can’t really say, ‘cause them niggas applied themselves up there. Hell yeah. I was the only db nigga in that motherfucker. You know what I’m saying? [It was about] 6 or 7 of them

motherfucking niggas. Majority of them was from decent Black homes, anything, two-parent homes. Black kids was smart, you feel me?

Aaron believed that the Black students that he encountered at the PWI applied themselves and the expectations were different in their homes. In terms of how Aaron believed academic success or failure was viewed in his own neighborhood, he stated, “Was it accepted? Most of the time... motherfuckers might say shit to you now and then, but they didn’t really care. They knew you weren’t going to be no motherfucking doctor or lawyer no way.” He also stated that his environment contributed to his athletic identity foreclosure and academic disidentification because he came to this realization,

“Man, it helped you realize this: man fuck them books, man. I need to get this skill off the ground so I can get me some money and get a check to go to college. Our environment, your environment so terrible, man, said ‘fuck your academics, you got to get your skill set up so you can get a college education. And the only way to get a college education is to play basketball or football or baseball. ‘Cause nobody kicking down doors, offering a full ride scholarship to kids from (hometown) for academics.”

Despite believing that African Americans were as smart or smarter than any other race, Aaron felt that racial stereotypes gave justification for African American to fail academically. He said, “Because, man, a nigga was going into it to-- A nigga already think he was gonna lose anyway, he couldn’t do it no way. A Black kid from the ghetto, I always say he can’t be recognized for his academics no way. ... You feel me? Then you have some guys, man, that worked hard, but at the end of the day, where did it get them? You know what I’m saying? ...Same with

basketball. It's all hand-in-hand. It's all the same. You feel me? It's who you know, who you know. Either they want to pick you or they don't want to pick you. You could be prepared with all the education in the world. If they don't want to give you no job, you ain't going to have no income. You could be the smartest broke dude in the world. You know what I'm saying?"

He also recounted what he saw as racial stereotyping in the PWI, he recalled,

"As far as they thinking that a nigga ain't nothing but an athlete? Ain't nothing but athletics. ..."Oh he's black. He's from the ghetto, so he can play sports" He can't read, can't write, can't think. He can't do nothing. The stereotype was so bad they wouldn't even have a Black quarterback, the stereotype was so bad. You know what I'm saying? Yeah, it's—You can't get mad, though, because it's kinda good when you stereotype. Because now you're an underdog and have a chance to beat them. Show 'em different. It's not proving no one wrong, just show 'em different. They wouldn't think a Black quarterback think under pressure. They don't think he's got upstairs ... mentally. ... Don't ask me why. They still believe in some type of criteria that White people do some things better than Black folks. And it's not meant for a Black dude to do it. You know what I'm saying? ... Quarterback always been a White thang, always been a White thing. So, it's a White thing. You feel me?"

Aaron also discussed his views on whether Black athletes were considered to be better athletes when he was in high school, he recalled,

"Yes, because Black athletes... Black athletes... believed that they got to be athletes. ... So it's different. You know what I'm saying? It's like they got to be.

‘Cause how else we gonna get anything? How else you gonna get to college? Our athletics open doors. Our athletics open doors. Without it, the door wouldn’t be open.’

Academically Aaron felt that he did not apply himself and athletically, he believed basketball was a “Black thing” and the ticket out of the ghetto. Aaron found himself in a situation where he could not accept the Division I scholarships; however, he still attended a Junior College. In terms of how Aaron viewed success then as an adolescent was,

“Athletes, man. Dope boys. Successful is making money. You know what I’m saying? It didn’t make no difference how. Success is that, you feel me? Having something. Don’t matter how you got it. Just having it, you feel me? Was success. Being good at something was success. Motherfucker graduating high school to me wasn’t it, ‘cause I knew after that I wasn’t going to amount to shit no way. You hear me? I don’t know if the definition...I got the “I can achieve whatever mentality” you feel me? A lot of athletes don’t have that no more.”

How Aaron views success now shows a shift in how he now views basketball, the game that he loves. Aaron stated,

“Without injuries, I thought I was going to be the nigga who laces his shoes up and goes—Like I thought I was going to be the best ever. That’s where I thought basketball was going to take me. You know what I’m saying? To a large extent, that monumental next [NBA]. That ain’t the case, though. ‘Cause when I found out that it wasn’t basketball, it was everything that came along with it. I knew I wasn’t going nowhere... I wasted my time. I knew it then and there, I should have paid more attention to high school. ...I should have taken my education

more seriously. Because it wasn't about basketball. When you learn that, it hurts you..."

He continued,

"If I knew what I know now back then, I would have done my homework, man. I would have never been ineligible. But I'm thinking in the back of my mind that I... I don't know what I was thinking, man. But I was mistakenly wrong. I was wrong—That's probably the worst decision I made in my life—not doing my work. You feel me? Work be so easy, man. I should've... I don't know what I was doing, man. I don't know what I was doing. I was... I don't know what the heck I was doing."

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative study examined how the African American male student athlete develops his identity and how racial and athletic identity impacts their athletic identity. Data from the interviews with the former athletes produced several themes. These themes are balancing athletic and academic identity, acceptance of academic failure and the school culture, career aspirations and racial beliefs. A summary of the findings of the study based on the data analysis will be covered in Chapter Five. Also, the conclusions, implications, and recommendations will be discussed.

Findings

In order to develop an identity, individuals undergo a process of selecting roles (Mead, 1934) as they derive meaning from this role; they gain a deeper understanding of what it means socially and culturally (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). Identity development theory was central to understanding how the athletes began to evolve into strictly athletes and completely forgoing any other identity. As stated by Goffman (1959), the individual must rely on others to complete the picture of himself. This completion came in the form of praise for the participants. The positive responses from others increased the continued development of an identity which impacts the overall self (McCall & Simmons, 1966). All participants constructed a self, relying heavily on the identity that received positive accolades (athletic praise). As a result, all other aspects of identity were less significant (academics, career exploration) because they were not important to the participants overall development.

While searching the literature, I found that Theory of Identity Development, stereotype threats, athletic identity, and the family's role in developing athletic identity were relevant to the participant's identity development. While the Theory of Identity Development provided a framework to view how the participants began to develop their identities, the racial stereotype of African-Americans being superior athletes while academically inferior helped fuel a stronger athletic identity. Steele (1995) stated knowledge of the stereotypes can mentally intimidate African Americans, provoking a response that impairs both academic performance and mental engagement with academics. It must also be noted that parental involvement also played a role in the participants athletic identity development because all participants were encouraged to not only play sports by family members but they also knowingly or unknowingly provided a platform for the athletes to overly identify as athletes because of the praise and recognition that they bestowed on them. Elite athletes receive heightened levels of social reinforcement for their athletic abilities; subsequently, much of their individual formation of identity and self-based upon athletic performance; therefore, their self-identity is composed solely of athlete and social identity is defined by others view of them as athletes (Beamon, 2012).

The overarching question for this study was "Do racial and athletic identities create an environment that is not conducive to a positive academic identity for the African American male student athlete who participates in football and basketball." Initially, this study was viewed through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT); however, it became apparent that the Theory of Identity Development was the guiding theoretical framework. Although the participants were aware of racial stereotypes and

discrimination, actual counter-stories were not provided. The supporting questions for the study were:

1. Does the African American male student athlete identify as a student athlete or an athlete?
2. Does racial and athletic identity create an environment that is not conducive to learning for African American male student athletes?
3. Are there lasting implications of disidentification of the African American male student athlete's future in collegiate institutions?

Does the African American male student athlete identify as a student athlete or an athlete?

Five out of 6 participants overwhelmingly identified as athletes. In order to develop an identity, individuals select roles (Mead, 1934), slowly developing an identity begin to understand the meaning of their culture and its social meaning (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). The athletes found that their athletic experiences defined who they were. These experiences were deeply ingrained in forming their identities that they did disassociate with academics. As a result, the academic identity receives less time because the athletic identity receives greater acknowledgment (Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Hoberman, 2002). As a result, an individual becomes immersed in one identity and embraces it (Goffman, 1959). However, this academic disassociation was only to the extent to where the participant was eligible to compete in their sport of choice. One participant stated,

“...Grades was more of an encumbrance. You know what I’m saying? Like, I got to do this bull just to get out of here. It was like that. I didn’t see myself conditioning my mind...It was never that I felt like I had to learn. It might be some make up work- I gotta be eligible. This teacher getting mad at me. I got to do this... But no, I didn’t pursue academics nowhere near—I don’t even know if I pursued it. I did what I had to do, but the way I did, I pursued athletics, though”

(Anonymous personal communication, May 2016)

The student athletes saw academic achievement as a necessary evil to stay eligible to participate in their sport. However, they did not view academic achievement as a way out of their current situations which included living in areas with a high crime rate, single parent households, and poverty. Another participant stated, “... any sports you play in the ghetto, man, that’s like your escape route. That’s like your exit that can get you out...” (Personal communication, August 2016) This mind frame resulted in the participants foreclosing on an athletic identity because they did not see success coming from academic achievement.

The participants did not view themselves as being “dumb” academically, they actually saw themselves as very capable academically; however, they did not try to push themselves to achieve academically. One participant stated that he believed he was one of the top five smartest people in his graduating class but he knew that he did not focus on academics at all. While an individual is developing an identity, a strong emphasis is placed on the identity that receives positive accolades causing other areas to be neglected or not developed at all because they are not relevant in their current view of self (Stryker, 1980). The majority of the participants felt that they were smart; however, they decided

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to focus on athletics. This focus on athletics seemed to coincide with the lack of parental involvement which was no fault of the parents. The majority of the participant came from single family homes. The mothers of the participants spend significant amounts of time working to provide for their children. Therefore, the participants felt that they didn't have anyone to push them academically. No one sat them down to explain the importance of academic achievement and how athletics and academics could work together to give me an advantage in life. At some point, the participants had someone try and steer them toward academics; however, they had already begun developing strong athletic identities and saw an advantage for being athletes instead of academically inclined.

The participants found great pride in their athletic accomplishments. They seemed to reminisce on their past athletic achievements. However, none had academic achievements that brought them pride past elementary school. They spoke of how they were A and B students in elementary school. Some were members of the Beta Club which is an honors society. However, each participant saw a drop in their academic performance as their athletic dedication increased. Some participants saw a slight drop from elementary to middle school. However, all participants saw a significant drop in their academic performance upon reaching high school. This decline in academic identity and pride in academic accomplishments runs parallel with the participants increase in athletic participation, athletic success, and community recognition. The participants received a lot of praise for their athletic accomplishments. Although many participants did receive some praise for their academic accomplishments in elementary school, the lasting praise came from their athletic endeavors. One participant stated,

“...actually High School I had a lot of triple-doubles which was at my time for the point guard was kind of unheard of like I was doing it then. So, I was walking one time and a guy walked up on me. He drove up on me in the car and his girlfriend was waving, I had never seen him in my life. He got out the car and he just went in his pocket and gave me a whole bunch of money. He said, man, my girl like the way you play. I said thanks. He said, get you something to eat. He got back in the car and , I don't even know that girl.”, (Anonymous personal communication, July 2016)

Receiving a monetary gift from a stranger because his girlfriend liked the way the participant played basketball helped to further strengthen this participant's belief that his dream of playing professional sports would be a reality. Positive feedback from peers increased the development of an identity which impacts the total self (McCall & Simmons, 1966). This athletic praise is not typical but it is indicative of the recognition that star athletes would receive in high school. Although each participant felt that they were academically inclined, all expressed that during their time in high school that they considered themselves to be “athletes”.

Does racial and athletic identity create an environment that is not conducive to learning for African American male student athletes?

Most participants acknowledged that they considered themselves to be “athletes” instead of student athletes. With the distinction, the participants completely foreclosed on the athletic identity and did not actively seek out academic achievement. Their athletic identity definitely created an environment that was not conducive to them achieving academic proficiency. Their experiences at school, home, or in their community played a

part in the athletes continued athletic identity development while not stressing the importance of academic achievement. Many participants found that being a stellar athlete afforded them privileges that were not given to average athletes. They did not believe they had to complete homework or actively participate in class. They were in essence given a pass by teachers from academic achievement because they were athletic leaders in their school. One participant recalled that his team was making history at his school and that the teachers were just as excited about the athletic feat as the athletes were. However, because his team was writing history, he was not held accountable for his academic achievement. As a matter of fact, he recalled being the only student to receive make up work from one of his teachers who was hardnosed and stressed academic excellence. His academics were reduced to make up assignments before the end of the semester. That participant stated,

“They [teachers] would give me like a quarter’s worth of work in all subjects. You know, like I gotta go spend all week like making up this and that or whatever. They would do it for students, but like me, I was just so far behind... But so, one teacher, he wouldn’t. He didn’t give make up work but he did to me. He was my guy... he would give me makeup work. He wouldn’t do it for nobody else. But, I was part of a- it was the first time the school went to State. We was making history there before they closed.” (Anonymous personal communication, May 2016)

Most participants viewed school simply as “something to do” or again as that necessary evil that stood in the way of them and their dream of playing professional sports.

Another participant described how even his coaches would make special concession for

the athletes. He recounted how athletes would have F's and then suddenly they would have a passing grade. The desire to win was stronger than the desire to educate the participants.

I was surprised to learn that some of the participants were aware of the requirements to become an NCAA qualifier. However, despite knowing what was required to accept a Division I scholarship, the participants still did not meet the requirements. Most participants recalled that their coaches would mention "getting grade" so that they could stay eligible to play. Unfortunately, the discussion was never geared to maintaining the requirements to accept an athletic scholarship. All participants felt that they lacked balance in some respect. While 5 out of 6 participants overly identified as athletes during this time, all participants recognized that their priorities were not divided equally. Athletics were important and basically consumed the majority, it not all of their time. One participant felt that he must spend a substantial amount of time practicing his craft. That statement led me to believe that this participant believed wholeheartedly that he would have a career in the NBA and would not have to rely on academic achievement. He stated,

"... the athlete is going to lack some requirements. They gonna lack in some kind of aspect. They gonna slack and lack, you feel me? Whether he doing good in grades, but he don't go to the gym enough, you know what I'm saying? It's always something. It's very hard to balance... Cause you always going to feel like you taking away from something. And something is going to be missing some sustenance. One of them. There's no way you're going to go to school and be a Harvard genius and be Michael Jordan. There's not enough time in the day,

you feel me? I ain't know there to be no people like that. No super smart dude that can really shoot some ball... That's something sad too, ain't it? That's fucking sad... [athlete] that was just super smart and could play? NO. And I been all over. I never met no one who takes academics, you know. Takes their academics so seriously.” (Anonymous personal communication, August 2016)

Although 5 out of 6 participants were able to recognize that they were strictly athletes during this time in their lives, 2 out of 6 felt that they did divide their time 50/50 between athletics and academics. Initially, I believed that the participants had cognitive dissonance because if they had indeed focused their efforts, then surely they would have been NCAA qualifiers and would have been able to accept the Division I scholarships. However, I later realized that the later was false and that in fact they may have divided their time 50% academics and 50% athletes. The variance comes in to play when you look at what academic feat they were trying to accomplish. Their academic goal was to stay eligible to participate in their sport not actually delve deep into academics for academics sake.

The racial stereotypes that the participants faced during their K-12 years were the belief that African American males were superior athletes to other ethnicities, African American males were not as smart as other ethnicities, and African American males would not receive a scholarship for their “brain” academic achievement. However, despite having knowledge of these stereotypes, they did not believe that they were academically inferior to any other race. Aronson (2001) states past research suggests negative stereotypes impugning black student's intellectual abilities playing a role in this underperformance. The participant's academic failure was strictly the result of

foreclosing on the athletic identity and not wanting or desiring to pursue academics. One participant stated, “It might have been discouraging, the racism, but it was also me wanting the excuse not to do it [achieve academically]; not to push myself to excel” (Anonymous personal communication, May 2016). Although the participants did not believe that they were academically inferior, it was believed that academic failure was expected because of their environment. One participant stated,

“A nigga already think he was gonna lose anyway, he couldn’t do it no way. A Black kid from the ghetto, I always say he can’t be recognized for his academics no way...then you have some guys, man, that worked hard, but at the end of the day, where did it get them? ... Same with basketball. It’s all hand in hand. It’s all the same. You feel me? It’s who you know, who you know. Either they want to pick you up or they don’t want to pick you. You could be prepared with all the education in the world. If they don’t want to give you no job, you ain’t going to have no income. You could be the smartest broke dude in the world.”

(Anonymous personal communication, August 2016)

Another participant stated,

“We almost made it [academic failure] like a part of the struggle. But that was a part of the struggle that we was creating for ourselves. I didn’t know that at the time. We kinda laughed at it: “Man, I got 4 D’s. I got 2 F’s. It was definitely acceptable.” (Anonymous personal communication, May 2016)

Academic failure was seemed to be acceptable in the participant’s environment. This message was not conveyed directly with someone stating that they would fail

academically but implied by what was observable in their community. Okeke et al. (2009) believe the influence of stereotype endorsement on an individual's self-perception will be especially strong if that individual feels strongly connected to the group for whom the negative stereotype applies (p. 371). A participant recounted how he knew only three people that graduated from high school on his block. This type of negative reinforcement of academic expectation continue to reinforce the stereotype that education is not for Black males and it is then understandable when they do not achieve academic success. This undercover, situational, stereotypical racism shows how racism is permanent as stated in Critical Race Theory. One participant recalled the differences in the facilities between the predominately White high (PWHS) schools and his predominately Black high school (PBHS). He discussed how their facilities were better and how he even noticed the type of food they were given for lunch. Based on these differences, he surmised that they were receiving a better education. Another participant actually attended a PWHS and he felt that the expectations were different from those at the PBHS. He disclosed that he was the only one there with hoop dreams of playing professional basketball. He recalled that their focus was on academics yet they were not stellar basketball player. Their goals were to attend college. He felt that they didn't need athletics the way the he did in order to be successful. He based this difference on their environment. He stated that their parents were doctors and lawyers, so they did dream of playing sports, they dreamed of being doctors and lawyers.

Are there lasting implications of disidentification of the African American male student athlete's future in collegiate institutions?

At the time of this study, all the participants were either in college or had graduated from college. Several had advanced degrees as well. All participants stated in some form that they wished that they would have taken their academics more seriously in high school. This recognition comes from the struggles that the participants incurred while trying to pursue their degrees. The youngest participant has not graduated from college yet but is still actively pursuing education with hopes of playing professional basketball. The other five participants recognized the missed academic opportunities and disclosed that their prioritizes were out of alignment and if they could have the opportunity to do it all over again, they would definitely focus more on academics and less on sports. One participant stated,

“...just as far as understanding and going through, you know, certain things that make you realize, I guess, what’s important, but then as my fear came upon me and not being able to go to those schools that were you know, offering me because of the academics parts, kind of made me understand that I went through college to kind of make sure that I took more interest in the academic part and also making sure that the athletic part was taken care of.” (Personal anonymous communication, August 2016)

Another participant stated,

“...take education serious and find something that you want to do with the rest of your life. Education is highly overrated; you know what I’m saying? If you just getting education without a direction. If you don’t know what you want to do with yourself or what you want to apply yourself, it’s just overrated knowledge to

have. You have to apply yourself properly and find out what you want to do and go for it. As far as athletics, though, try to balance the shit out. Balance it in a way where you getting both sides...Where you getting something out of both sides. When you said rewards and accolades... I'm telling you without it, it's hard, you feel me?" (Anonymous personal communication, August 2016)

Each participant felt that education was the key to being successful. However, this recognition did not occur until after they were deemed not qualified to accept a Division I scholarship and some even after failing out of Junior College. Another participant came to the realization after he was injured in Junior College as he saw that playing professional basketball was no longer a sure path to success. He stated,

"...once I got hurt, I just seen how important it is [education]... academics is basically more important than anything. You use the academic part, I mean you use the athletic part to get you to the next level... academics is the key to success. And in order to be successful...you got to know what's going on. You go to be smart. Don't nobody wan no dumb person or a person that don't know nothing on a job site. They really don't." (Personal communication, August 2016)

One participant knew that he entered Junior college undisciplined because he did not earn his Associates degree because he still identified as an athlete and did not see the value in education. However, the same participant found the value in education a revels in the fact that he did earn his Bachelors degree and a Master's degree. He still received a free education, he stated it just took him a while to come around and realize that the ball would stop and that he would always get a return on his education.

Hindsight being 20/20, all of the participants now has a new found dedication to the importance of education. While initially the participants saw minor implication while maintaining a strong athletic identity when entering college, they all realized that education had become their new priority and that their athletic talents was a means to improve their lives through education.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the African American male student athlete appears to only be in danger of developing a strong athletic identity if he is an outstanding athlete. Although many athletes may dream of playing professional sports, only those athletes who are exceptionally good continue to develop the athletic identity beyond middle school. The athletic identity is reinforced by their teachers, parents, friends, and the community. While none of the athletes believe that they were dumb jocks, none of them resisted falling into the stereotypical role either. Following the dumb jock role allowed them to focus on what they deem more important which was working to perfect their craft, their sport of choice. Because the athletes saw an escape in their athletic abilities, they did not see the value in education and only felt that it was a necessary evil to stay eligible to participant in high school. While parental involvement was low due to them living in a single parent household and the parent working extended hours or multiple jobs to support their families, the participants found that no one was there to push them to academic success. Academics were not stressed but were not ignored either. The participants were expected to pass their classes but not pushed to pursue academic excellence.

All participants believed that they were more than capable of achieving academically; however, because of their own personal goals of playing professional sports; they made the decision to not focus on academic endeavors. For the participants in this study, “A” clearly stood for Athletics until they realized that athletics can only lead you so far. At that point, they shifted their thinking and “A” stood for Academics resulting in 5 out of 6 earning college degrees and one still working toward college graduation requirements. This was one of the findings because all the athletes knew they were capable, they made a choice to not apply themselves academically.

The participants were aware of racial stereotypes and were affected by them. Many of the participants believed that African Americans were superior athletes but did not believe that they were inferior academically; despite not achieving academically. The participant’s community played a role in the athletes foreclosing on the athletic identity as well.

Implications

At some point, many African American male student athletes dream of playing professional sports as a way out of their current situations. Most of the time, these situations include poverty. However, in pursuit of the professional sports dream, they forsake academic achievement. It is necessary for communities to recognize the impact on aspiring youth when they are being idolized and praised for their athletic achievement and not their academic achievement. It is necessary to create a balance between academic and athlete praise. The athlete’s interviewed found that they received an abundance of praise and recognition for their athletic abilities. Unfortunately, these same athletes saw little to no praise for academic achievement. It is necessary to create balance

while offering praise to developing student athletes. This will require parents, teachers, and coaches to be aware of the harmful effects of constantly praising athletic achievement and offering singular praise, if any praise is given at all, for academic achievement. While the participants may have been able to maintain an equal athletic and academic identity, they were never challenged to do so. Instead of providing a safe place for the males to nurture and explore multiple identities, their paths were being paved by the plethora of compliments, attention, gifts, praise, and grade fixing because they were stellar athletes. If we expect to see a change in the African American male student athletes, we must change the culture that surrounds them and produces the athletic identity foreclosure. The adage “it takes a village” must be utilized if we expect to see a shift of identity.

Recommendations for Future Research

After completing this research, there is still a question that needs to be investigated: “How does the coach of African American star athletes feel they contribute to the foreclosure of their athletic identities?”. While it is believed that coaches contribute to the athletic identity foreclosure, it is important to understand why their coaches are willing to sacrifice the future of their athletes and/or do they realize the affect of their actions.

Concluding Overview

This qualitative study examined how the African American male student athlete developed their athletic and racial identity and if it had an effect on their academic

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identity. The findings suggest that the African American male student athlete that engages in potential revenue producing sports does foreclose on an athletic identity if he believes that he is “good enough” to pursue a career in athletics. The community, schools, teachers, friends, and parents unwittingly help support the development of athletic identity foreclosure by praising the athlete’s athletic achievements and ignoring or offering singular praise for academic achievement. Many of the athlete’s have come from single family homes and their mothers’ push them to athletics to get them away from the street life. The athletes were affected by racial stereotypes because their athletic identity foreclosure was the result of believing athletics was the way out of their situation but education was not. The athletes did not believe that education would provide a way out of their situations because they did not see positive examples of males succeeding within the educational setting

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