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“WE NEED DAWGS!”: Narrative Construction of Athletic Identity Among Black High School Football Players

Victor Dion Kidd

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“WE NEED DAWGS!”: NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ATHLETIC IDENTITY AMONG BLACK
HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PLAYERS

by

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DEDICATION

To Pope Francis Catholic High School, thank you for allowing me to conduct my research. I am forever indebted to you as Pope Francis Catholic High School provided me with high school education propelling me to my doctoral education.

For all of those who have kept me in their hearts and minds and for those we have lost along the way:

To my family, I keep you all close to my heart and mind as you are the motivation for my personal success. Thank you for being my community, my village, serving as my refuge through adversity.

To my friends, thank you for never discarding me as I went away to complete the toughest academic journey of my life. This degree is not only mine, but I share this accomplishment with you and the rest of District Heights.

To my mentors, thank you for serving as my guardian angels along my path of life and academia.

Rest in Peace:

Carl Lomax Kidd

Tolerance, Trust, Eternal Dedication, and Determination

Roland Kidd

My Dearest Uncle Rollie

Nipsey Hussle

The Marathon Continues...All Money In

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ABSTRACT

Previous empirical inquiry of athletic identity (Brewer, Van Raalte, Linder, 1993) and participation has failed to examine how such identities and roles are developed at the high school level of competition. While focusing on salient athletic identities or role sets are important, research literature should target how devotion to athletic identities, roles, and responsibilities are developed and communicated to adolescent athletes by social interactions. Therefore, while adopting Narrative Identity Theory (Loseke, 2007; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1991; Smith 2010) as an appropriate lens, the current study investigated how athletic identity, roles, and responsibilities are developed through complex interaction and temporal lived experiences. Specifically, through ethnographic interviews and participant observation, the current study explored the lived experiences of Black high school football players to investigate salient athletic identity development through personal narrative co-construction (Franck & Stambolova, 2019).

Guided by the purpose of the study, the current study answered two fundamental questions: (1) When engaging with a sample of Black male high school football players, in what ways do personal narratives construct athletic identity? (2) How are phenomena such as salient athletic identification and athletic role engulfment (Kidd et al., 2018) present when exploring the academic enrichment and development of non-athletic social skills of study participants? As a participant observer, the researcher was able to establish the weight room as the narrative scene encouraging salient athletic identification through beastly and savage rhetoric (Hawkins, 2017). In addition, a three-dimensional narrative

approach to data collection was employed to establish four narrative themes suggestive of salient athletic identity and its influence on academic enrichment and non-athletic social skills. The four narratives themes were the (a) youth football as an early interactional-performative narrative, (b) juggling athletics over academics narrative, (c) pre-exposure to professionalism of sport narrative, (d) and social media celebrity narrative. The results provided a fresh and unique inquiry into high school sport, while applying an unfamiliar theoretical and analytical approach to qualitative studies in sport literature. To conclude, implications and other pertinent information will be introduced in the discussion.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIMS	Athletic Identity Measurement Scale
DMV	District of Columbia-Maryland-Virginia
GPA	Grade Point Average
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NCAA.....	National Collegiate Athletic Administration
NFL.....	National Football League
PFC	Pope Francis Catholic High School
PG	Prince George's
PWI.....	Predominately White Institution
US	United States
WCAC	Washington Catholic Athletic Conference

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: ‘WE ARE ALL COGS IN THE WHEEL’

Surveying the history of race and sport in American culture, complexity, nuance, and difficulty mar the presence and position of the Black body. From Jack Johnson to Colin Kaepernick, Black athletes have endured appropriation, misunderstanding, and persecution. In addition, although some modern Black athletes enjoy high salaries and lucrative endorsement deals, they are swiftly reminded their value is inextricably tied to a predominately-White capitalist system. From Jack Johnson, who personified the spectacle of battle-royal matches, in which Black prizefighters fought each other for the pleasure of White spectators (Hughes, 2014), to Colin Kaepernick – persecuted by White men atop the capitalistic ladder for daring to question the existing power structure (Belson, 2018), Black bodies are often viewed as nothing more than entertainment commodities. Within American culture, institutional and systematic racialization has resulted in Black male bodies being commodified and portrayed as savages from the days of slavery to the 21st century (Alexander, 2012).

As the Honorable El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (i.e., Malcolm X) insisted, commodification and savage imagery were cemented in the U.S. Constitution, indicative of a White power structure that instituted laws solely for the benefits of Whites not for the benefit of Black people (ReelBlack, 2018, 32:46). While engaging in a debate in 1963 at the University of California – Berkley, Malcolm X noted:

The constitution classifies Black people as 3/5 of a man, 3/5s of a man!

Subhuman, less than a human being. It relegates us to level the of chattel, hogs, chickens, cows, a commodity that could be bought and sold at the will of the master. (ReelBlack, 2018, 33:05).

Within this social setting, sport has played a long-lasting role in shaping the identity of Black men who have navigated sport spaces (Hawkins, 2010). As Edwards (1979) and Singer and May (2011) have highlighted, American society has maintained a social system in which vast majority of Black men view their occupational value inextricably linked to their physicality at the exclusion of their intellectual capabilities. The intergenerational social reproduction and transmission of Black men's athletic self-identity has maintained their often-vulnerable position in a capitalistic society, perpetuating their physical commodification from slavery to modern US sport. As Rhoden (2006) professional Black athletes may be paid \$40million, but they are still "40 Million Dollar Slave" (Rhoden, 2006). With that being said, Black men have suffered systemic challenges, putting them at a disadvantage when they look to establish positive narratives of their personal identity and family history.

Kalman-Lamb (2019) suggests a subgroup's generational disadvantages (based on exploitation experienced by marginalized populations for capitalistic gain) are the birthchild of social reproduction, defined as the mental, physical, and emotional work needed to reenact the preferred labor-power structure (Brenner & Laslett, 1989; Kalan-Lamb, 2019). Kalman-Lamb (2019) suggests social reproduction, a Marxist concept, ensures laborers understand their roles, thus teaching future generations belonging to marginalized groups to embrace maintaining their prescribed capitalistic societal roles. In

addition, social reproduction “teaches” marginalized communities to “accept” poverty, communicating to generations of individuals from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds that poverty is their life history, and determines their present and future conditions. Doob (2013) succinctly defines social reproduction as “...the structures and activities that transmit social inequality from one generation to the next” (p. 11). Central to this argument, is the existence of an imbalance in the labor-power structure within a society, and that those who perform labor rarely hold power within in a labor-owner dichotomy.

The social reproduction of labor and production within sport is strikingly similar to that found in society at large. Consequently, examining social reproduction within a predominately Black high-school football setting allows for an examination of salient athletic identities of Black youth as products of social reproduction and *norms of understanding* (Singer & May, 2010).

The social reproduction evident in being the “big bad dawg” on an athletic court or field (Sailes, 1996), allows scholars to consider the social construction of a Black athlete’s role in the athletic eco-system. For many Black athletes, subscribing to a salient athletic identity communicated by socioenvironmental factors (Kidd et al., 2018), is a product of the social reproduction process within the athletic labor market. In regard to American football, many Black players willingly view themselves solely as an athlete, believing that as a Black male they most likely will become a superstar athlete.

There is strong evidence many Black men have experienced hyper-socialization to sport careers and cultural athletic representations (Beamon, 2012; Beamon & Bell, 2002) that have been socially reproduced through family (Shakib & Veliz, 2012), peers (Shakib,

Veliz, Dunbar, & Sabo, 2011), school officials, and coaches from youth to high school leagues. Consequently, it is widely recognized Black male athletes are likely to experience salient athletic identities (Beamon & Bell, 2011), being constantly bombarded with athletic imagery (Edwards, 2000; Sailes, 1998a).

Positioning social reproduction as a central factor in people accepting “their place in society”, the current study positions social and cultural reproduction as a historically engrained and broadly accepted narrative of a person or group. *Narrativity* in American culture tends to serve as an “end-all-be-all” for groups, prescribing a set of beliefs and perceptions, along with embellishments that inform society how to view and interact with these groups. In American history, the socioeconomic narrative suggests that White men are the standard for desired well-being across a person’s lifespan, while members of minority communities experience negative life experiences, unsafe living environments, and physiological challenges (Schulz & Northridge, 2004; Viner et al., 2012).

When applying racial narratives to sport, there are sociocultural connections between Black youth and sport participation (Harris, 1994, 1996; Lapchick, 1987), idolization of professional athletes, and sport as the only occupational opportunity for marginalized males from the inner city (Edwards, 1979; Harris, 1996). Narratives of Black males being the “big bad dawgs” on the field and court have a restricting effect on how Black males view themselves and how others view their existence, ultimately shaping the role needed to fulfill social reproduction. Narratives are stories used to develop people’s broad sense of understanding of social order and their own personal existence in society (Clandinin, 2006; Ezzy, 1998; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Sailes (1996) contends Black male football players embrace narratives of gladiatorial allure

because of the subconscious connection between their cultural past and a present that formulates a commodification life narrative. Studies that examine the development of athletic identity must encompass the cultural setting in which young Black boys make the decision whether to be an active conformist, a passive conformist, a nonconformist, or an overt resister (Polite, 1994) and accept or reject the athletic narrative as the confining structure of their personal agency and imagination. This study examines a 21st century high school football setting within which Black players make daily decisions to either resist or reinforce the societal norm of being the next superior Black athlete.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Historically, the secondary-education experiences of students of color are characterized by low academic achievement, expulsions and suspensions, and high dropout rates (McGee, 2013; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015). Racial inequity in school environments results in Black students being culturally stereotyped and positioned as invisible students, incapable of academic maturity (Brooms, 2014). In particular, Black males enrolled in secondary education face various impediments to academic success, including the need to develop resilience factors to confront the negative perception that Black boys are predisposed to engage in thuggish behavior and have low academic achievement.

McGee (2013) suggests that Black male high school students recognize the disadvantages associated with their capabilities being stereotypically framed, faced with making a daily decision to either accept or reject such stereotypical characteristics. Hope, Skoog, and Jagers (2015) highlight the significant consequences of discriminatory stereotypes and suggest need for Black youth to develop more balanced personal

identities in academics, personal values and ethics, and social relations. Smith and Harper (2015) suggest the personal identity of Black males enrolled in K-12 education is hampered by egregious behavior reprimands, as 1.2 million Black students were suspended from school in 2015 across the United States. The high occurrence of suspensions is a major component of the School-to-Prison pipeline plaguing the Black community, as Black youth experience an early introduction to physical restraints and mandatory minimum suspensions, eventually leading to enrollment push out (Elias, 2013). While Black males are 18 percent of the US student population, 46 percent of the 18 percent of Black students have been suspended at least once, which is extremely alarming (Elias, 2013).

Given this school environment, a number of Black male students attend school solely for sport participation. In addition, for many Black male students, their secondary education narrative ties their academic experience to surviving rather than thriving (McGee, 2013). For Black males who choose sport as the pathway to a “decent” high school experience, there are other perils.

While recognizing the broad academic landscape for Black male high school students, Black males seek various resilience factors (McGee, 2013) to co-exist in an often-volatile learning environment. For many Black males, sport (both participation and consumption) is an accessible and encouraged resilience factor or coping mechanism, which serves as a social pathway to a positive self-concept and peer acceptance within community and school settings. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), approximately 14,100 high schools offer football as an

extracurricular activity including approximately 1,037,000 male participants (see The National Federation of State High School Associations, 2018).

While some scholars contend sport participation by Black males leads to higher occupational wages, enhanced human capital, and academic self-confidence (Ewing 1995; Harper, 2015; Jordan, 1999), recent research suggests otherwise. Interdisciplinary explorations of high school sport participation point out a multitude of sport socialization challenges facing today's young Black male athletes (Goldberg & Chandler, 1989, 1995; Lapchick, 1987; Manuel et al., 2002; May, 2005), including: early exposure to sport professionalization, unhealthy eating behaviors, and toxic masculinity in sport spaces (Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010). Such challenges can potentially lead to young Black males experiencing identity foreclosure (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), resulting in an elevated desire to participate and perform in sport, and prioritizing their athletic self to the detriment of their academic and non-athletic social development (Kidd et al., 2018). While media accounts frequently focus on Black adolescent males' athletic prowess, there is a gap in the literature examining the nuances behind young Black males accepting and socially reproducing the narrative of Black boys as the "biggest and baddest (sic) dawgs."

Within this setting, the current study summarizes the lived experiences of nine Black males attending a private, parochial high school in an economically robust urban enclave in Washington, D.C. The participants' often contradictory narratives describe personal worldviews in conflict: between being a student or an athlete.

1.3 PURPOSE OF STUDY

Nearly four decades after Dr. Harry Edwards' article: *Sport Within the Veil: The Triumphs, Tragedies, and Challenges of Afro-American Involvement*, the phenomenon of Black male athletes' salient athletic identity development has yet to be fully understood, especially within Black communities situated in newly-gentrified culturally-distant urban enclaves. Questions of mental health, sport retirement, athlete career transition, and non-sport related occupational development are all impacted by an athlete's athletic-self (Beamon & Bell, 2011; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004). For many, the persistence of the narrative of black male athletic superiority is alarming (Beamon, 2008; Edwards, 1979, 2000). This persistence has resulted in young black bodies focusing on athletic participation and accolades, and college/professional athletics being viewed as the most likely path to upward socioeconomic mobility.

Smith and Sparkes (2009) argue for the use of narrative identity theory and narrative inquiry to investigate sport experiences among various populations (McGannon & Smith, 2015; Smith, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2009; Smith & Weed, 2007; Stride et al., 2017). This study utilized a narrative inquiry approach (Hammack, 2008; McAdams & Mclean, 2013; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007) to examine how social representations, sport participation, and academic settings shape salient athletic identities and associated narrative identities among Black high school football players in a US urban enclave. The current study implemented a narrative inquiry approach to (a) delineate how athletic identity, roles, and responsibilities are symbolically interpreted within and through social institutions, personal interactions, and the historical context of subjects' lived experiences (Ezzy, 1998), and (b) interpret the narrative construction of a salient athletic identity,

along with pre-collegiate hyper-devotion to an athletic role set, contributed to a lack of academic and non-athletic social development. Specifically, the current study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. When engaging with a sample of Black male high school football players, in what ways do personal narratives construct their athletic identity?
2. How are phenomena such as salient athletic identification and athletic role engulfment present when exploring the academic enrichment and development of non-athletic social skills of study participants?

Furthermore, this study was a recent and in-depth application of narrative inquiry, designed to extract the nuanced identity development of Black male athletes in a secondary-education setting. To conclude this chapter will be a discussion of the study's delimitations, limitations, and assumptions.

1.4 STUDY DELIMITATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND ASSUMPTIONS

Though the purpose of the current study was to investigate the narrative construction of a salient athletic identity among Black high school football players, there was a need to acknowledge the intentional delimitations. First, the current study focused solely on Black male high school football players. Therefore, findings from this study will not inform other studies that may examine high school football players from other ethnic or cultural backgrounds. My positionality as a Black man and my singular interest in understanding narrative construction among Black adolescent males the reasons for this delimitation. Another natural reason for this delimitation is the research setting selection process. The research setting was selected because of the researcher's personal connection with the high school and the student profile of those who attend the high

school. In addition to race/ethnicity, gender has been found to be a delimitation of the current study. The eligibility requirement for the study requires participants to be males; therefore, female students were excluded from the study. Acknowledging the challenges female athletes (and specifically Black female athletes) face (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Wollenberg, Shriver, & Gates, 2015), the current study did not provide any new information concerning female athletic identity.

In addition to race and gender, the selection of a singular sport was another delimitation. Narrative construction and athletic identity can be viewed differently for Black male athletes in other sports, but the current study was interested in these concepts in relation to football. In regard to geographic location, the current study did not intend to encapsulate findings generalizable to other school districts within the country. The geographical location was selected based on the researcher's familiarity with the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region and understanding of the nuanced culture among the Black community. The final delimitation was the methodology used for data collection and analysis. The current study is not intended to provide generalizable results, but rather a rich description of the participant's experiences associated with athletic participation. Guided by this goal, chosen methodological approaches were congruent with the overall vision for the research process.

There are four significant limitations to the study. The first limitation is the utilization of qualitative research design to understand the development of narrative construction. The qualitative research design did not allow replication of the study results (Wiersma, 2000), a shortcoming that will impact the generalizability of study findings. The next limitation is the geographical location of the research setting. The research

setting is placed in a socioeconomically-thriving city, not indicative of the totality of high school settings within the United States. Simply put, a football player from Anderson, South Carolina, may experience a high school football setting vastly different from Washington, D.C. The third limitation involved research boundaries between the researcher and participants. Based on the dialogical process of narrative construction (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), the researcher assumed an interactional role throughout data collection. This became challenging, as the researcher experienced a salient athletic identity as a player, former-player and coach. This shared experience may have affected the interpretation of study results, potentially suppressing the “true” meaning of participant’s stories. The final limitation was the number of participants included in the data collection process. The in-depth nature of Narrative Inquiry only allows for a small number of study participants. As a result, some voices were excluded from the data collection process.

Previous literature (Beamon, 2010; Beamon & Bell, 2011; Singer, 2004) and personal experience assisted in forming the researcher’s assumptions about the current study. The researcher’s familiarity with study participants, subject matter, and research setting informed how the researcher and participants constructed their narratives. With that being said, the researcher assumed participants would display markers of a salient athletic identity because of the nature of the high school and associated athletic conference. Since the high school is a private institution, participants will be pre-exposed to the professionalized (Kidd et al., 2018) nature of college recruiting and the dispensing of grants-in-aid (e.g., scholarships) to play sport in a premier high school athletic conference. In addition, another assumption of the current study is participants likely

believe they are “going D-I” even when their playing ability, statistics and film suggest otherwise. Even though the institution is a private school, the school is faced with unique economic and resource challenges when attempting to provide a flagship academic and athletic experience. The high school is a part of the Washington D.C. Archdiocese, lacking the traditional alumni support experienced by competitive high schools. Therefore, participants were tasked with mitigating other structural factors concerning their academic, athletic, and social experience while enrolled in high school. Finally, it should be noted these identified assumptions do not convey the totality of assumptions that may have impacted the research process, instead they serve as the main assumptions that informed the research process.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTERDISCIPLINARY EXAMINATION OF ATHLETIC IDENTITY

Examinations of phenomena associated with athletic identity (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Brewer et al., 1993; Grove, Lavalley, Gordon, & Harvey, 1998; Sparkes, 1998) and athletic role engulfment (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991; Kidd et al., 2018) have received empirical attention across various academic disciplines, with psychology scholars being an essential proponent to the conceptual development of athletic identity, identity foreclosure among athletes, an athletic identity measurement scale (AIMS), and investigation of challenges associated with athlete career transition. Brewer et al. (1993) introduced an early definition of athletic identity, while developing the AIMS to measure levels of athletic identity foreclosure in order to identify athletes at risk of psychosocial challenges when exiting sport. Though the early contributions to athletic identity were significant, the AIMS (Cornelius, 1995; Groff & Zabriskie, 2006; Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004; Martin, Eklund, & Mushett, 1997; Martin, Mushett, & Eklund, 1994; Tasiemski, Kennedy, Gardner, & Blaikley, 2004; Visek, Hurst, Maxwell, & Watson, 2008) would become the first and widely accepted scale used to determine someone's athletic identity.

According to Brewer et al. (1993), athletic identity is a social role determined by "...the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role" (p. 237) and "looks to others for acknowledgment of that role" (Martin, Mushett, & Smith, 1995, p. 114). The AIMS, initially based on a unidimensional (then multidimensional) concept of athletic

identity, sought to identify depressive symptoms in athletes (Brewer et al., 1993; Martin et al., 1994). Martin et al. (1994) utilized the AIMS with adolescent swimmers with disabilities and conducted an exploratory factor analysis to determine four athletic identity factors. These factors were (a) social identity, (b) exclusivity, (c) negative affectivity, and (d) self-identity.

Social identity explains the connection between an athlete and their athletic self within a social environment, while negative affectivity explains a negative response when an athlete is unable to participate in sport related activities (Martin et al., 1995).

Exclusivity occurs when an athlete begins to view themselves in athletic roles and responsibilities, while neglecting other non-sport roles and responsibilities, often to referred to athletic role engulfment (Adler and Adler, 1991; Kidd et al., 2018).

Differentiating from social identity, self-identity explains the interpersonal connection between the athlete and their athletic identity, roles, and responsibilities (Martin et al., 1995). Building upon the 1994 study, Martin et al. (1997) examined athletic identity among international swimmers with disabilities. The results determined the four factors were appropriate for the AIMS and supported a multidimensional scale.

Foundational research conducted by previous scholars (Good, Brewer, Petitpas, Van Raalte, & Mahar, 1993) along with Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer (1996), examined college athletes' identity foreclosure. Identity foreclosure occurs when an individual assumes an identity or role without exploring alternative identities (Good et al., 1993; Murphy et al., 1996). Specifically, athletic identity foreclosure occurs when athletes focus on their athletic identity, roles, and participation while neglecting essential academic and social development (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). In addition to identity

foreclosure, athletic identity, and athlete career transition have been investigated by scholars exploring athletes' experiences with sport retirement (Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1997), athletic identity exacerbating negative experiences during sport retirement (Sparkes, 1998), and career planning and life satisfaction of retired college-athletes (Perna, Ahlgren, & Zaichkowsky, 1999). Lally and Kerr (2005) also examined athletic identity and career planning, finding college-athletes with low non-athletic career aspirations displayed salient athletic identities, and experienced athletic role engulfment.

Previous studies have examined athletic identity pertaining to sport retirement (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998) and how sport participation can stunt the social and academic enrichment of young Black males who fixate on football and basketball (Adler & Adler, 1991; Edwards, 2010). Scholars have noted how broad social contexts result in particular communities fixating on sport (e.g., football and basketball) as a pathway to a "better life" (Edwards, 2000; Gaston, 1986; Harris, 1996; Harrison, 1998; Hartmann, 2000; Hoberman, 2000; Lapchick, 1987; Lawrence, 2005; Lomax, 2000; Murty & Roebuck, 2015). Gaston (1986) contended organized sport participation and media propaganda lead to salient athletic identities in Black youth, disadvantaging Black adolescents since they limit their occupational aspirations. In 1986, Gaston found through sport-induced media consumption and fixation, Black youth "diminished" the significance of a high school diploma as a method of gaining entrée to higher education. In addition, Lapchick (1987) found youth athletes who went to college single-mindedly focused on their sport had difficulty graduating (Lapchick, 1987).

From Lapchick (1987) to Kidd et al., (2018) there is strong evidence Black college football players are not only less likely to graduate from college, they are

clustered in less rigorous majors (Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987; Fountain & Finley, 2009; Fountain & Finley, 2011). For many Black males, their athletic capabilities and organized sport seemed to be the best route for equality, or social mobility (Harris, 1996). While conducting a study investigating high school basketball players' perceptions of professional sport occupations as the most viable opportunity for socioeconomic mobility, both Black and White participants viewed sports as the best way for Black high school athletes to become wealthy (Harris, 1996). Such a finding can be attributed to proliferating representations in American media and culture, of Black people as athletes or entertainers. Harrison (1998) suggests that many Black youths “buy” into the myth “...that sport leads to a path of success for many” (p. 66). The myth of Black equality and social mobility being achieved through sport participation, is deeply rooted in the milieu of American culture (Edwards, 2000; Harrison, 1998).

Today, the Black community is replete with salient athletic identities and athletic role engulfment, with many people (athletes and their families) chasing the allure of college scholarships and professional careers (Edwards, 2000). Such a narrow focus on sport participation has shifted non-playing sport career development (e.g., sport managers, athletic trainers, sport agents) to the vocational periphery (Lomax, 2000), due in large part to an intergenerational “racial folklore” (Hoberman, 2000, p. 55) that represents Black athletes as brainless bodies, only suited for gladiator sport (Hartmann, 2000; Sailes, 1996). The relationship between this racial folklore and sport participation is highlighted in Lawrence’s (2005) examination of race and its relationship to sport. Black participants reported race played a significant role in their athletic experience.

Athletic identity and athletic role engulfment have received a good deal of scholarly attention (Beamon, 2008; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Harrison, Stone, Shapiro, Yee, Boyd, & Rullan, 2009; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003; Melendez, 2010). Previous literature exploring challenges associated with athletic identity and educational attainment have examined former college-athletes' difficulties with selection of academic majors (Beamon, 2008), pre-collegiate socialization of sport and academic enrichment (Beamon & Bell, 2002), academic resiliency among Black college-athletes (Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010; Southall & Weiler, 2014), college sport economics and academic welfare (Lanter & Hawkins, 2013), as well as the effects of faculty-athlete interactions on socialization of revenue generating and non-revenue generating athletes within higher education (Comeaux, 2008, 2010, 2011). Bimper (2014) examined racial and athletic identity among Division-I football players. His results indicated players with a salient athletic identity had lower grade point averages (GPAs). Additionally, Hawkins (1999, 2010) and Southall and Weiler (2014) examined oscillating migrant patterns of college-athletes within research settings situated in higher education. They found salient athletic identity is prevalent in individuals who migrate to *Predominately White Institutions* (PWIs) to play sport with the intention of exchanging labor for wages (i.e., grants-in-aid) as well as the opportunity to get one step closer to a professional-sport career (Hawkins, 1999; 2010; Southall & Weiler, 2014).

Within high school research settings, athletic identity, roles and responsibilities, and participation have been occasionally examined. While exploring athletic identity and high school athletes, Wiechman and Williams (1997) investigated levels of athletic

identity based on athletic ability, length of high school participation, and race and gender. Building upon the Wiechman and Williams' work, Sabo, Miller, Farrell, Melnick, and Barnes (1999) examined the relationship between athletic participation and risky sexual behaviors among high school athletes. Athletic identity and perceptions of non-athletic activities received attention in a study conducted by Ryska (2002), guided by a study aim of distinguishing "...the manner in which the motivational goals of student-athletes moderate the effect of athletic identity on global competence perceptions" (p.114). In one of the very few studies related to athletic identity in high school research settings, Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt (2010) conducted a study examining socialization of toxic masculinity among high school football players.

Notably, sport management scholars have also investigated athletic identity, providing management implications for sport organizations, examining issues associated with athletic identity and athletic role engulfment within sport organizations (e.g., National Collegiate Athletic Association – NCAA; National Football League – NFL; National Basketball Association – NBA). Singer (2008) investigated the benefits and detriments of athletic participation among Division-I college-athletes, finding athletes struggled to balance their academic, athletic, and social roles. Participants viewed themselves as "athlete-students" (Singer, 2008, p. 403), which resulted in their academic responsibilities being reduced to the periphery. In addition to Singer (2008), sport management scholars have examined college sport as a *total institution* that often results in college-athlete role engulfment (Southall & Weiler, 2014), mitigation of identity foreclosure through career counseling (Heird & Steinfeldt, 2013; Kelly & Dixon, 2014; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004), difficult transitions of first-year college-athletes (Kelly &

Dixon, 2014), and negative relationships between athletic identity and academic achievement (Bimper, 2014; Foster & Huml, 2017).

Southall and Weiler (2014) utilized contemporary metaphor theory (CMT) to portray the National Collegiate Athletic Administration (NCAA) as a hegemonic institution in which college-athletes often migrate from lower socioeconomic enclaves to PWIs. Southall and Weiler (2014) contend PWIs systemically deny “workers” access to both a meaningful education and market compensation, providing only grant-in-aid “scrip,” while stripping college-athletes of individual agency. Southall and Staurowsky (2013) contend athletic identity plays a significant role in maintaining big-time college sport’s commercial institutional logic, since college-athletes often come from communities that emphasize athletic success over academic achievement. This encourages a dominant athletic identity, making college-athletes less likely to “revolt” against an oppressive collegiate model (Southall & Weiler, 2014).

In addition to exploitation of college-athletes, sport management literature has contributed theoretical and practical considerations about sport management functions (e.g., sport marketing, sport finance, sport economics), sport management curriculum (Humphreys & Maxcy, 2007), and issues within big-time college sport (Bimper, 2014; Singer, 2008; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013; Southall & Weiler, 2014; Yan, Pegoraro, & Watanabe, 2018). Bimper (2014) suggests PWIs should invest in “robust” Afrocentric development of Black college-athletes. Specifically, Bimper (2014) insists, “...the sociocultural environment in college athletic programs should permit Black student athletes to shape robust, healthy meanings about being Black in the subculture of sport and within society” (p. 805). Certainly, it is clear sport management scholars and

practitioners are equipped with a unique lens through which to investigate and address myriad issues within the landscape of sport.

A survey of interdisciplinary examinations of athletic identity, highlights the challenges associated with salient athletic identity and hyper-devotion to athletic achievement. Ranging from hyper-socialization sport-related career paths (Beamon, 2010) and athletic role engulfment (Adler & Adler, 1991; Kidd et al., 2018), salient athletic identities present an array of challenges for youth belonging to low socioeconomic and/or minority sociocultural environments. However, the stigma associated with a salient athletic identity also extends to White athletes, who also believe the only occupational promise Black athletes possess is within athletic and entertainment career fields (Harris, 1994). Such social pathways are detrimental to the development of adolescents from challenging backgrounds faced with communal pressure (Kidd et al., 2018) to make it to “da league.” Therefore, based on the previous literature and empirical benefit of utilizing a nuanced theoretical lens, narrative identity theory and narrative inquiry were appropriate epistemological and ontological modalities to examine athletic identity development within a high school research setting (Loseke, 2007; Smith, 2000).

2.2 ATHLETIC ROLE ENGULFMENT: THE CONDUIT TO ATHLETIC IDENTITY

Athletic identity is constituted through assigned roles and responsibilities within social environments, serving as the conduit guiding many athletes to a salient athletic identity. Roles and responsibilities are assigned through historical contexts and lived experiences of a community or group (Clandinin, 2006; Loseke, 2007). Appropriate role sets are communicated through family and cultural history, potentially restricting how an individual’s self-concept, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Kalman-Lamb, 2019).

Previous literature demonstrates through hyper-socialization of sport, sport media images, and parental support of athletic pursuits (Beamon, 2010), Black youth are more likely to identify with lifelong thematical triggers centered around sport participation (Edwards, 1988; Gaston, 1986; Harris, 1994). For Black youth, the narrow focus on sport participation is deep rooted in the generational narrative of systematic and institutional discrimination (Gaston, 1986). Roles and responsibilities construct meaning for Black youth across the landscape of America, demonstrating how lived experiences and social influences inform the narrative of athletic identity development and maintenance. Though athletic identity is essential to the current study, the concept of Athletic Role Engulfment (Adler & Adler, 19991; Kidd et al., 2018) informs how salient athletic identities are socially reinforced and reproduced (Kalman-Lamb; Singer & May, 2009). Investigations of former athletes leaving their athletic roles and responsibilities (role exit) in hope of adopting another dominant role (role entry) (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kidd et al., 2018; Ritcher, 1984) are relevant to the current study. In addition, *role theory* (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Goffman, 1959) serves as the underlining theory of athletic role engulfment (Adler & Adler, 1991). Ultimately, role theory explains how an individual's role set, which consists of status, role, and identity) serves as a bridge "...between the individual and the social environment" (Eagly & Wood, 2011, p.460) to existing expectations "...in the minds of individuals and also shared with other people, producing the social consensus from which social structure and culture emerge" (Eagly & Wood, 2011, p.460) (See Adler & Adler, 1991; Biddle, 1986; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Simon 1992).

In its truest form, role theory shares theoretical characteristics with narrative identity theory, which acknowledges historical, cultural, and social narratives are

intertwined. Since within a social setting, appropriate roles are communicated to groups or individuals, "...role theory may be said to concern itself with a triad of concepts: patterned and characteristic social behaviors, parts or identities that are assumed by social participants, and scripts or expectations for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers" (Biddle, 1986, p. 68).

Biddle (1986) identified four concepts present throughout various role theory orientations: *consensus, conformity, role conflict, and role taking*. Consensus occurs when various actors in a social space, learn and accept how they should act in their social environment (Biddle, 1986). Applying consensus to sport, youth and high school athletes are likely to accept athletic roles and responsibilities as a social norm, causing athletes to confirm and support a possibly unhealthy social environment. Simply put, athletes are more likely to experience identity foreclosure (Murphy et al., 1996) due to their willingness to submit to a consensus of how to act and make meaning of being an athlete.

Once the consensus of proper actions is established, groups or individuals are inclined to conform to a particular role set because "persons know what they should do, and all persons in the system can be counted on to support those norms" (Biddle, 1986, p.76). Conformity is achieved when groups or individuals act out a social environment's prescribed behavior (Biddle, 1986; Kalman-Lamb, 2019). Youth and high school athletes are pressured and socialized to value sport excellence, without applying the same rigor and focus to academic achievement. Adopting a salient athletic identity, along with intense sport participation, ensures role conflict (Goldberg & Chandler, 1995) when a young person is deciding between academic enrichment and athletic pursuits (Singer, 2008). Biddle (1986) insists role conflict occurs when two conflicting roles are present in

a social environment, displaying characteristics of ambiguity, malintegration, discontinuity, and overload. College athletes often experience role conflict, mitigating the expectations of being an “student-athlete” (Beamon & Bell, 2011; Singer, 2008). Lapchick (1987) suggests this role conflict may occur as early as an individual’s involvement in youth sport. The final concept, role taking, occurs when self-concept and social interaction are aligned, leading to conformity (Biddle, 1986). During this process, athletes totally abandon other roles and responsibilities, narrowly focusing on the pursuit of athletic achievement. Through the process of role taking, athletes are inclined to become athletically role engulfed (Adler & Adler, 1991), a phenomenon that illuminates how roles and responsibilities shape identity.

Within the athletic role engulfment framework, status is an individual’s “position in [an] organized group or system...related to other positions by a set of normative expectations” (Adler & Adler, 1991, p. 28). Normative expectations are also viewed as “...a cluster of social cues that guide and direct an individual’s behavior in a given setting” (Solomon et al., 1985). Essential to an athlete’s systemic indoctrination (from youth sport through high school) is the recognition of elite athletic status from social support systems (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991; Beamon, 2010; Southall & Weiler, 2014). Even during youth sport, athletes are potentially granted a *gloried self* athletic status, which becomes salient because of societal cues and social reinforcement from family, schools, and athletic staffs. This intense devotion to athletic roles and responsibilities causes athletes to become athletically role engulfed through role domination, or what Biddle (1986) considers role taking (Adler & Alder, 1985, 1991; Biddle, 1986; Brewer et al., 1993; Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000; Hogg et

al., 1995; Murphy et al., 1996; Stryker, 1987). To compensate for possible role conflict, athletic role engulfment causes athletes to role take, relinquishing non-sport identities and roles (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1987, 1991; Hogg et al., 1995). Adler & Adler (1991) suggest the process of athletic role engulfment includes temporal events where athletes “progressively detach themselves from their investment in other areas and let go alternative goals and priorities” (p. 27-28).

2.3 ADOLESCENT RESEARCH SETTINGS: ATHLETIC IDENTITY AND ATHLETIC ROLE ENGULFMENT

There has been a good deal of scholarly exploration of the positive and negative consequences of athletic identity and sport participation within college sport settings. The majority of research examining issues concerning athletic identity among college athletes suggests challenges associated with a salient athletic identity are fostered as early as junior high school (middle school) sport participation. As far back as the 1980s and 1990s, Lapchick (1987) and Goldberg and Chandler (1989, 1995), noted some youth athletes were being pressured to reclassify or “stay back” an additional year in junior high school in order to gain additional athletic development before high school. In 2018, this notion is more prevalent as American sport culture has experienced increased media coverage of “revenue generating” (e.g., high school/college football and men’s basketball) sport (Elchlepp, 2018), athlete ranking and recruiting services (e.g. MaxPreps, ESPN 300), oscillating migration patterns of adolescences from culturally and geographically distant neighborhoods to private schools (Hawkins, 1999, 2010; Parker & Giannotto, 2016), and athletes as young as 12, receiving “scholarship” offers from big-time college sport programs (Rollins, 2018). Such events cause athletes to succumb to

social expectations of high-level athletic activity and sport achievement. Previous examples prove the importance of studying athletic identity utilizing a narrative identity theoretical lens within adolescent sport research settings to establish an investigative record of how these factors influence development of healthy identities.

Recently, sport research investigating high school football has fixated on sport injuries (Abbas et al., 2015; Collins et al., 2002; Cournoyer & Tripp, 2014; McCrea, Hammeke, Olsen, Leo, & Guskiewicz, 2004; McGuine, Hetzel, McCrea, & Brooks, 2014; Talavage et al., 2014). In addition, athletic identity, sport participation, and athletic role sets have been examined in youth and high school sport settings (Handley, Harris, & Simon, 2018; Head & Iannarino, 2017; Manuel et al., 2002; Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell, & Sabo, 2005; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005; Snyder, 1985; Schnell, Mayer, Diehl, Zipfel, & Thiel, 2014; Snyder & Spretizer, 1992, Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010; Thirer & Wright, 1985). In 1985, Thirer and Wright examined the relationship between social status and sport participation, finding female adolescent athletes did not gain an increase in social status through involving themselves in sport. Though this has changed somewhat with the implementation of Title IX, in the context of American culture, young women have traditionally been socialized into roles associated with domestication, therefore lived experiences and communicated expectations of young girls may have significant impact on how they view themselves as athletes. Snyder (1985) provides an understanding of academic and athletic roles, suggesting commitment to certain roles are encouraged by socializing agents (Goldberg & Chandler, 1995), with the level of commitment to sport participation being a significant factor in athletic identity development in high school students. Sport socialization along with the fragile

emphasis on being a “student-athlete” communicates competing role sets to athletes, causing role confusion.

Recognizing the social ramifications of pressuring youth to adopt salient athletic identities, Lapchick (1987) stated many youth “...have lost their chance at a meaningful education because they have bought the dream that they will beat the 10,000 to 1 odds and become a pro” (p. 104). Supporting Lapchick’s (1987) claims, Wiechman and Williams (1997) conducted research at nine high schools with results suggesting male athletes experienced stronger athletic identities and expectations to play in college or professional ranks than their female counterparts, with Black participants having the highest expectations of playing professionally. Such findings are reflective of American culture, as Sabo, Melnick, and Vanfossen (1993) indicate educational mobility of White and Black high school athletes is blanketed in the broad context of mobility of White and Black communities, with White positioning an individual to succeed in high school sport, as well as life.

According to Lapchick (1987), society communicates roles and formulates identities of youth through sport participation, a dire process for Black youth (see also Beamon, 2010). In addition to community and parental pressure, peer-group influences have a relationship with a salient athletic identity. Goldberg and Chandler (1989) investigated social status acquisition of adolescent athletes and found popularity among males was significantly related with being viewed as an outstanding athlete. Pertaining to social status, young male athletes were viewed as leaders, with “scholar athletes” viewed as superior leaders (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992). Therefore, constant interaction with sport constituencies, thrust adolescent athletes into peculiar

social positions, determining how they approached and interacted with the high school athletics eco-system. From academic attainment to socially-deviant behavior among high school athletes, there has been little recent research concerning athletic identity and high school football, making the current study appropriate and timely as we continue to experience the previously mentioned uptick of athletic glorification in high school athletes.

There has been little research regarding athletic identity in high school research settings (Head & Iannarino, 2017; Manuel et al., 2002; Martin, 2005; Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010). Therefore, a qualitative examination of athletic identity development among high school football players provides an opportunity to fill a gap in the sport literature. In one of the few studies that have examined athletic identity and attitudes associated with sport participation, Manuel et al., (2002) investigated mood disturbances and social support during an injury. Utilizing a quantitative approach with a predominately White football player sample, Manuel et al.'s results suggest those with a salient athletic identity suffered from depressive symptoms following an injury. In addition, Manuel et al., (2002) suggest that healthy coping mechanisms and social support had a positive relationship with decreased depressive symptoms. The sample included White high school football players with parents who had obtained a college degree or higher (Manuel et al., 2002). Based on the sample, parents were more capable and equipped to provide healthy support because of their ability to view their children as more than just an athlete. Their level of education possibly shaped how they socialized their children to maintain academic, athletic, and social identities.

Social support and coping mechanisms are essential when young athletes decide to take part in risky behaviors (Grossbard et al., 2009). Within high school sports, American sport culture communicates to high school athletes the need to “win” or “succeed” at all costs (Head & Iannarino, 2017; Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010). Head and Iannarino (2017) examined eating behaviors of high school football players, suggesting the culture of high school football forced football players into risky eating behaviors to “bulk up.” Seemingly ignoring the high possibility that many high school football players will never play college (let alone professional) football, the football social environment (including coaches, parents, friends, and fans), communicates toxic masculinity to adolescent athletes, which motivates many players to gain weight and evade the social stigma of being “soft” or “weak” (Head & Iannarino, 2017). Parents, who are also socializing agents of a salient athletic identity (Lally & Kerr, 2008), provide many of the meals for participants, “blinded to the negative health side effects” (Head & Iannarino, 2017, p. 141) that leave former athletes with unnecessary weight and health maladies. Highlighting the importance of socializing agents and their ability to influence youth athletes to engage in unhealthy behaviors, Head and Iannarino (2017) suggest “Coaches, parents, siblings, teammates, opponents, and the communities within which these football players live contribute to a culture where football success is a noble goal” (p. 139). Viewing sport success as a noble goal contributes to a narrative of athletic role engulfment, with socializing agents ensuring the *total institution* (Goffman, 1961; Southall & Weiler, 2014) of a high school football program.

Socializing agents are important during an adolescent’s developmental years (Coakley, 1992; May, 2009; Shakib & Veliz, 2013; Shakib, Veliz, Dunbar, & Sabo,

2011). May (2009) examined the role models of Black high school basketball players, investigating the relationship between language and professional basketball role models. Study participants indicated that selection of basketball role models was predicated on the language used in mainstream media (May, 2009). In other words, Black youth are more likely to identify with the cultural representation of a Black professional athlete disregarding the bad or good perceptions accompanying a particular athlete. In a study examining race, sport, and social sport, Shakib and Veliz (2013) determined that Black youth receive social support and encouragement for sport participation from family and non-family socializing agents more than other ethnic groups. Results also indicated that though all ethnic groups receive parental encouragement for sport participation, Black youth are more likely to receive intense encouragement and social support for sport participation from coaches, school officials, peers, and other actors within their community (Shakib & Veliz, 2013).

The notion of coaches as “non-kin” (Shakib & Veliz, 2013) proponents for sport participation, shows the influence such actors have on adolescents. Steinfeldt and Steinfeldt (2010) conducted research with high school football players, examining gender role conflict, masculinity, and help-seeking behaviors. Gender role conflict occurs when men are unable to meet the expectations of communicated masculine norms. With high school sport serving as a breeding ground for toxic masculinity and understanding the behaviors and expectations of being a man, Steinfeldt and Steinfeldt (2010) reported participants with high levels of athletic identity showed high levels of gender role conflict. Steinfeldt and Steinfeldt (2010) suggest “...the more a student-athlete thinks of himself as an athlete, the more gender role conflict he may experience when athletic

demands interfere with attempts to meet expectations in other domains of his life” (p. 269). Based on this information, male athletes, particularly football players, experience challenges with gender role conflict when they are no longer able to use sport themes to construct how a man should operate in society.

2.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: NARRATIVE IDENTITY THEORY

Previous empirical inquiry of athletic identity and participation has failed to examine how athletic identities and roles are fostered in high school sport. While focusing on salient athletic identities or role sets is important, research should target how devotion to athletic identities, roles, and responsibilities is developed and communicated to adolescent athletes by environmental and social mechanisms. Through the lens of narrative identity theory (Loseke, 2007; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1991; Smith 2010), this study investigated how athletic identity, roles, and responsibilities were developed through complex interaction and temporal lived experiences that assist in constructing a person’s self-concept (Nasco & Webb, 2006) and ultimately their identity (Ezzy, 1998; Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1992).

Identities are shaped and formed by stories and events that guide how individuals view themselves, give meaning to their life, and construct social agency (Clandinin, 2006; Singer, 2004; Smith & Weed, 2007). Therefore, identities are not constructed within individuals, but through narratives consisting of social interactions and personal interpretations that provide fluid truths and conceptions of self (Clandinin, 2006; Ezzy, 1998; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Singer, 2004). Polkinghorne (1991) defined narrative as “...the cognitive process that gives meaning to temporal events by identifying them as parts of a plot” (p. 136). Constituted as narrative, such stories and events help shape both

short and long-lasting understandings of how society views individuals, often applying positive or negative connotations to groups within cultures and/or sub-cultures (Clandinin, 2006; Ezzy, 1998; Singer, 2004; Smith & Weed, 2007). Fundamentally, narratives are developed through behaviors, lived experiences, stories, folklore, and historical events across time, often referred to as *scenes* (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1991). Members of a particular community or group engage in the human process of indoctrinating group members (especially children and adolescents) into social norms, rituals, and expectations embedded in the group's culture (i.e., plots) (Ezzy, 1998; Polkinghorne 1991).

In a broad societal context, narratives are shaped by characteristics, connotations, and labels placed on communities and groups during various social interactions (Ezzy, 1998; Diaute, 2014). Recently in American culture, police brutality (Lee & Park, 2017; McVeigh, 2012; “Trayvon Martin Shooting Fast Facts,” 2018; Watson-Vandiver, 2017) and a divisive political climate (Rubin, 2017) have produced a narrative that has influenced police and race relations during the second decade of the 21st century. The current sociopolitical climate has led to a contentious time within American culture (Rubin, 2017), with the narrative construction and lived experienced of Black people, structured by police brutality and the governmental-sanctioned murder of Black citizens, the increasing visibility of racist political figures, social unrest, and calls for social justice. Connecting the past (e.g., slavery, Jim Crow, and Civil Rights) to the present (e.g., Black Lives Matter and “hands up don’t shoot”) is essential to developing narratives; a connection George Herbert Mead refers to as a the “social structural past” (Ezzy, 1998, p. 242).

Narrative identity theory is prevalent within philosophy (Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1992) and other social sciences (Loseke, 2007; Somers, 1992, 1994), psychology (Hammack, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1996), as well as education (Casey, 1995; Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca, 2010; Farquhar, 2012). Within sport and entertainment management, narrative identity theory and narrative inquiry have failed to receive significant theoretical attention and methodological consideration (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, 2009; Stride, Fitzgerald, & Allison, 2017). Consequently, there is a gap in the sport and entertainment management literature regarding the lived experiences of high school athletes, along with utilizing a unique theoretical and analytical approach.

The search for meaning and understanding of who we become is essential to constructing identity (Clandinin, 2006; Ezzy, 1998; Hammack, 2008; Loseke, 2007; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean, 2005; Nelson, 2003; Singer, 2004; Thorne, 2000). Narrative identity theory recognizes how identities are constructed through individualized behavior in various social environments (Clandinin, 2006). According to Ezzy (1998), constructing a narrative identity is the praxis of integrating various components to form an individual's "sociological conception of self" (p. 239). Therefore, McAdams & McLean (2013) define narrative identity as "a person's internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose" (p. 233).

As a praxis, such integration occurs across three dimensions: (a) personal and social interactions, (b) temporality, and (c) events occurring within or during a particular space or event (Clandinin, 2006). Personal and social interactions communicate to an individual and groups how they should act or view themselves in sociocultural spaces,

while providing an understanding of how others come to understand their position in society (Clandinin, 2006). Personal and social interactions are the parameters for identity formation, constructing identity through extrinsic actions and influences (Polkinghorne, 1991). Narrative construction events occur across a timeline or plot (Polkinghorne, 1991), comprised of the past, present, and future (Clandinin, 2006). Such plots have also been viewed as an individual's life story composed of life narratives and autobiographical meaning making (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Nelson, 2003). Temporality has proven to be a theoretical strength of narrative identity as Ezzy (1998) suggests narratives “configure the events of the past, present and future into a narrative whole” (p. 245). The setting where interactions take place is important to narrative construction because they provide social cues and representations that spread across life stories (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Thorne, 2000). The setting where events or scenes occur (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1991) assist in the configuration of temporal events that take place in the past, present, and future. This process that Ricoeur (1983, 1984) and (Polkinghorne, 1991) refer to as *emplotment*, guides individuals and groups through the meaning making process (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Singer, 2004) during which they come to understand their identities and roles in society. Furthermore, the mentioned dimensions, and process of emplotment, lend meaning to process that allows individuals and groups to determine “Who am I? How did I come to be? Where is my life going?” (p. 235).

To understand the process of answering the necessary questions about one's existence, stories and lived experiences give shape to how individuals see themselves in the world (Singer, 2004). Narrative identity theory provides researchers with a lens through which the human process of identity formation is examined and investigated,

while receiving empirical prioritization when establishing identity (McAdams, 1995). Ezzy (1998) proposes narrative is “sustained and transformed” (p. 250) by symbolic interpretivism of interactions that take place in what Loseke (2007) considers cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal capacities. The cultural narrative develops a broad understanding that life shapes one’s cultural identity (Loseke, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2001). Culture, among other broad social constructs, communicates to individuals and groups their self-worth, establishing their self-concept of their academic, vocational, and social capabilities. Of importance, Hall (2014) suggests that *Cultural Identity* is an ever-elusive journey in which identity becomes a “production which is never complete, always in process, and always constitutes within (p. 222). Hall (2014) reminds us that we should not treat cultural identity as a finished product but acknowledge and embrace the fluidity of identity. In relation to athletic identity, narrative identity gives voice to cultural influences that inform how adolescents view themselves as athletes.

Gaston (1986) and Edwards (1988) advocate for Black communities to discard the single-minded pursuit of athletics by Black youth. Loseke (2007) suggests the institutional capacity of narrative identity reflects an individual or group’s agency when constructing their narrative identity through a meaning making process. Institutions structure broad sociopolitical interactions, such as rules and regulations controlling societal operations and behaviors (Loseke, 2007). Through policy, individuals and groups are assigned access to quality of life and the agency to change undesired social conditions (Loseke, 2007). In other words, institutional narratives provide symbolic codes (Loseke, 2007, p. 668) that denotes who are the poor and rich, who has access to resources to ensure a better quality of life and provide causality that explains why things are the way

they are. Institutional narratives shape access to quality education and healthy living environments (Allison, Davis, & Barranco, 2016), and are related to the likelihood of taking up sport versus academic aspirations (Edwards, 2000). Institutional narratives, coupled with organizational narratives, shape the way various populations are viewed within society (Loseke, 2007). Within the sport context, organizational narratives are developed through interactions among sport managers such as coaches, athletic directors, and trainers. For instance, if institutional narratives suggest Black football players come from academic backgrounds of less rigor, this can communicate to organizational actors the need to pacify athletes throughout their athletic career, ultimately buying into the “dumb jock” motif. Simply put, organizations such as the NFSA and NCAA implement and communicate differing organizational structures and procedures for dealing with a White, female equestrian team and Black, football team.

Cultural, institutional, and organizational narratives ultimately determine personal narrative construction through the process of *life autobiographical reasoning* (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) and memory (Nelson, 2003). Through the autobiographical functionality of narrative identity theory, personal narratives are socially and culturally constructed to provide individuals and groups with “self-definitions for their own lives” (Nelson, 2003, p. 127). Hammack (2008) agrees with this notion as he states, “It is through the construction of personal narrative that the life course achieves its coherence, its continuity in social, cultural, and historical time” (p. 232). How these components shape historical events that impact the development of identities, gives meaning and purpose to narrative identity construction (Clandinin, 2006). Considering the cultural, institutional, and organizational components of narrative, a discussion of previous research suggesting

a Black youth football player's personal narrative is structured by his involvement in the high school athletics will be introduced, followed by a section that outlines how narrative and the process of meaning making shape the identities of adolescent football players.

2.5 PERSONAL NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ATHLETIC IDENTITY

Polkinghorne (1991) suggests we construct our identity through narratives, answering the question: "Who am I?" (p. 136). Narrative is developed through cognitive structures that develop a story with meaning for individuals and groups (Polkinghorne, 1991). When discussing athletic identity, Polkinghorne along with other narrative theorists would view athletic identity development as a cognitive structure where athletes develop a sense of who they are, a way of constructing a sense of meaning from temporal events along a timeline of sport participation. Athletic identity as a cognitive structure is evident as Brewer et al. (1993) states "...in its narrowest sense, athletic identity is a cognitive structure, or self-schema" (p. 238). Situated in sport literature, Ballie and Danish (1992) provide an understanding of athletic identity, discussing how athletic identity is developed through youth sport participation. Ballie and Danish (1992) suggest that at a young age, youth sport participation introduces individuals to high pressure expectations set by sociocultural norms, encouraging youth athletes to aspire to be "sport heroes" while restricting achievement to "narrowly-based" sport roles.

Narrative construction (Polkinghorne, 1991; Singer, 2004) is pivotal to identity foreclosure because social environments communicate appropriate behaviors and expectations to individuals, which results in a restrictive focus on a particular identity or role-set (Murphy et al., 1996). Murphy et al. (1996) found college-athletes who possess salient athletic identities and experience identity foreclosure, exhibit a lack of career

maturity in non-sport-occupations. Good et al. (1993) investigated identity foreclosure and college sport participation and found identity foreclosure increases as athletes reach more elite sport levels. In other words, elite athletes who are narrowly focused on athletic development, view themselves only within parameters of athletic thematical schema, and institute a personal athletic narrative are more likely to have challenges securing a job in non-athletic career fields.

Grove, Lavalley, and Gordon (1997) examined athletic identity in relation to coping behaviors of retired athletes. Results indicated athletes with a salient athletic identity at retirement, denied their new status as a retired elite-athlete (Grove et al., 1997). In addition, athletes with a salient athletic identity were less likely to engage in pre-retirement planning, a process essential to a healthy career transition (Grove et al., 1997; Kidd et al., 2018). Coping mechanisms and athletic identity have been examined by Lavalley, Gordon and Grove (1997), who positioned sport retirement as a “major loss,” while participants who displayed a salient athletic identity experienced significant emotional difficulty during post-athletic transitions.

Sparkes (1998) used a narrative approach to examine athletic identity. Findings highlighted athletes’ difficulties in re-establishing a new concept of self after the loss of their athletic identity. Utilizing a qualitative approach, Sparkes’ (1998) found athletic identity was often an athlete’s “Achilles Heel,” resulting in a lack of post-athletic life satisfaction. Commonly, athletic identity studies have examined overall life satisfaction (Perna et al., 1999), finding an initial negative relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction upon sport retirement. However, Perna et al. (1999) did not find athletic

identity resulted in a long-term lack of overall life satisfaction (Kidd et al., 2018; Webb et al., 1998).

Previous literature has linked athletic identity and role engulfment (Adler & Adler, 1991; Kidd et al., 2018) to athlete career transition and sport retirement (Beamon, 2008, 2012; Beamon & Bell, 2011; Cummins & O’Boyle, 2015; Giannone, Haney, Kealy, & Ogrodniczuk, 2017; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Lally, 2007; Martin, Fogarty, & Albion, 2014; Singer, 2008; Stankovich, Meeker, & Henderson, 2001). Athletic career transition and sport retirement experiences are events or stories inclusive of narrative construction, as athletes are tasked with reestablishing their personal identity without athletic roles and responsibilities. If former athletes are dependent on their athletic identity to make meaning of their existence, removing competitive sport participation from their daily lives can prove to be problematic. Current and former athletes bask in the “glory days” of personal and team sport achievement, with the glory days comprising most of the events and stories that help them weave personal and social meaning together, developing their narrative identity.

Stankovich et al. (2001), provided a model for assisting with healthy transitions from sport retirement. The “Positive Transition Model” supports college-athletes by establishing a career plan outside of professional sport, provoking participants to view themselves outside of their athletic identity and role-set. Non-sport career aspirations and plans were also important in Harrison and Lawrence’s (2004) study examining transition perceptions of college students. In addition, results indicate the necessity of balancing athletic and academic responsibilities for healthy career transitions. This balancing act is often unrealistic for those who exhibit a salient athletic identity and athletic role

engulfment (Adler & Adler, 1991; Feltz, Schneider, Hwang, & Skogsberg, 2013; Foster & Huml, 2017; Huml, 2018; Lally & Kerr, 2005).

Black participants in Singer's (2008) investigation of benefits and setbacks to participating in college sport, noted the balancing act of being a Power-5 conference college football player. They recognized their status as *profit-athletes* (Southall & Weiler, 2014) within a multi-billion dollar, and acknowledged the difficulty of balancing academic and athletic responsibilities (Singer, 2008). Participants suggested survival in a big-time college sport setting is predicated on prioritizing athletic participation, ascribing this role a position of prominence on the *hierarchy of salience* (Adler & Adler, 1991; Kidd et. al., 2018). Singer (2008) proposed prioritizing athletic roles and responsibilities was also influenced by athletic departments' organizational narratives (Loseke, 2007). According to participants, their vignettes – established from interview questions – “...suggest that their coaches and other stakeholder groups of intercollegiate athletics expect these Black males to identify first and foremost with the athlete role” (p. 403). Organizational and culture narratives (Loseke, 2007) are instrumental in understanding athletic identity, as non-revenue generating athletes from Canada were able to disengage from their athletic identity and role-set prior to retirement (Lally, 2007). Both studies are indicative of how sociocultural connotations effect how athletes engage and disengage with their athletic identity.

Along with Singer (2008), results from Beamon's (2008) study of exploitation among Division-I college-athletes suggests organizational and cultural narratives restrict participants' meaningful experiences to those of an athlete. Participants experienced cognitive structuring and meaning making through athletics as they “...were socialized

by family, the community/neighborhood, and the media toward athletic achievement” (Beamon, 2008, p. 360). These athletes constructed a salient athletic identity through their athletic roles and responsibilities (Adler & Adler, 1991), which were solidified by community pressure for athletic achievement (Kidd et al., 2018), as well as other organizational and cultural influences across a lifetime (Clandinin, 2006; Ezzy, 1998; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Singer, 2004; Smith & Weed, 2007). McAdams and McLean (2013) suggest such “meaning making” is the processes of reliving personal events that “...articulate what they believe their stories say about who they are” (p. 236).

Furthermore, studies examining athletic identity and athlete career transition suggest college-athletes are prone to exclusive athletic identity and identity foreclosure (Beamon, 2012), depression and suicidal ideation when exiting athletic roles (Beamon & Bell, 2011), retirement intentions and life satisfaction (Martin et al., 2014), alternative identity development and pre-transition preparation when disengaging from the athletic identity and role-set (Cummins & O’Boyle, 2015), and anxiety symptoms during sport retirement (Giannone et al., 2017).

Previous research points to a strong relationship between athletic identity and sport retirement difficulties, but there are other settings in which athletic identity, roles, and responsibilities have received research attention (Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016). Scholarly work examining athletic identity and disabled sport populations has taken place within various research settings (Brewer, Cornelius, Stephan, & Van Raalte, 2010; Martin et al., 1997; Martin et al., 1995; Nagata, 2014; Perrier, Sweet, Strachan, Latimer-Cheung, 2012; Shapiro & Martin, 2010; Tasiemski et al., 2004; Wieczorek, Wilinski, & Sadziack, 2017). Martin et al. (1995) investigated athletic identity and found

disabled swimmers did not prescribe to a salient athletic identity, suggesting participants were able to develop a broader self-concept. Broad self-concepts result in less salient athletic identities among adult males who have experienced a spinal cord injury (Tasiemski et al., 2004). Shapiro and Martin (2010) examined athletic identity, highlighting that social influences are essential to disabled athletes' athletic identity. In addition, previous studies of athletic identity within disabled sport populations found individuals with a temporary disability are more likely to diminish their athletic identity as a coping mechanism (Brewer et al., 2010). In addition, Nagata (2014) found a relationship between athletic identity and marital status, but no relationship between levels of athletic identity and type of disability (Wieczorek et al., 2017). Along with disabled sport populations, the relation between racial and athletic identity has garnered research consideration.

Athletic and racial identities share a theoretical and empirical relationship, as both are essential to an individual's self-concept and self-schema. Previous literature establishes a significant relationship between the two constructs (Beamon, 2010; Beamon & Bell, 2006; Bimper, 2014; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Fuller, Harrison, Bukstein, 2017; Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002; Harrison, Salies, Rotich, & Bimper, 2011; Steinfeldt et al., 2010). Understanding the importance of sport in developing a narrative identity, Harrison et al. (2002) suggests Black youth are influenced by the "bombarding" of media images that shape their salient identities and role sets. This cultural narrative influences Black children to select sport and entertainment careers to the detriment of other occupational pathways. Also, Beamon (2010) identified a cultural narrative (Loseke, 2007) in its purest form in which Black college-athletes describe experiences of sport

hyper-socialization being transmitted within the broad context of Black culture and community: parents (See Beamon & Bell, 2006), identified role models, neighbors, and the media. The constructed narratives encourage Black college football players to intensely focus on sport aspirations because of the belief their social position and self-concepts are only valid when viewed through an athletic lens (Harrison et al., 2011). Therefore, as Bimper (2014) suggests, college and universities need to create spaces for Black college athletes to foster a robust cultural identity outside of athletics, an occurrence that is prevalent on HBCU campuses (Steinfeldt et al., 2010).

Other issues concerning athletic identity have received less research attention (Altintasa & Keleceka, 2017; Cosh, LeCouteur, Crabb, & Kettler, 2013; Gustafsson, Carlin, Podlog, Stenling, & Lindwall, 2018; Gustafsson, DeFreese, & Madigan, 2017; Gustafsson, Martinent, Gauthier, Hassmen, & Descas, 2018; Petrie, Deiters, Harmison, 2014; Proios, 2017; Woolf & Lawrence, 2017). Issues of sport participation burnout are associated with athletic identity (Gustafsson et al., 2018; Gustafsson et al., 2017; Gustafsson et al., 2018). Among young Swedish athletes, performance-based self-esteem was found to have a significant relationship to burnout (Gustafsson et al., 2018). In addition, athletes who determine their self-worth by accomplishing performance based-goals, are more likely to experience burnout when they fail to meet identified goals (Gustafsson et al., 2018).

Narrative construction through lived experiences will serve as an appropriate lens to understand how environmental causes and influences affect high school football players' identity development, self-concepts, and self-schema. Mentioned studies show that sport, society, education, occupation, and mental health are interconnected and

shaped by the daily events and stories we experience throughout our life time.

Purposefully, the current study examined how participants constructed a narrative of their lived experiences as a means to answer the question of who they are. Significantly, the previous research highlighted in this section exemplifies how Black youth develop a personal narrative of salient athletic identification and the challenges that arise from athletic participation.

2.6 MAKING SENSE OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY: MEANING MAKING

The narrative process of meaning making is essential to understanding how adolescents tell stories (McLean & Breen 2009), attempt to ensure well-being (McLean et al., 2010; Reese, Bird, & Tripp, 2007) and engage in identity development (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Outside of sport spaces, youth meaning-making processes are tasked with developing salient self-identities (Erikson, 1968; McLean & Breen, 2009; McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010). Meaning making is initiated when a person reflects on past events in an effort to learn something about their current self (McLean & Breen, 2009; McLean & Pratt, 2006; McLean & Thorne, 2003). Meaning making is also viewed as the “...mechanisms through which identity is constructed” (McLean & Breen 2009, p. 702). McLean and Mansfield (2011) state the meaning-making process can manifest in two ways. First, it gives adolescents the ability to select narrative scenes or events to include in their “larger life story” (McLean and Mansfield, 2011, p.2). Second, meaning making affords adolescents the opportunity to practice developed narrative scenes, but not include them in the totality of their life story (McLean & Mansfield, 2011). Therefore, this experience of reflexivity assists with adolescents’ attempts to establish their life narratives (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McLean & Mansfield, 2011).

Attempting to understand gender differences in meaning making, McLean and Breen (2009) found girls are more likely than boys to share their memories in order to develop stronger relationships with friends. McLean et al., (2010) concluded that the meaning making process is a relational interaction among adolescents. McLean and Mansfield (2011) found a relationship between parental scaffolding and meaning making. McLean and Mansfield (2011) indicated that as a result of parent-child conversations, adolescent girls appear to have stronger narrative foundations than boys (McLean & Mansfield, 2011). Results also suggest mothers significantly influence the meaning-making behavior of girls, and that girls most often develop their narrative identities before boys (McLean & Mansfield, 2011). Consequently, research suggests adolescent males are more likely to experience challenges when attempting to make sense of meaning making and develop a narrative identity.

Implementing a meaning-making perspective, Krok (2015) examined meaning making in relation to religiosity and spirituality and found the meaning making process consists of two components: global and situational meaning. Global meaning is an individual's narrative identity, because of its "basis on personal experiences" (Krok, 2015, p. 197). Based on a person's beliefs, goals, and subjective feelings, global meaning making shapes "actions and emotional responses" (Krok, 2015, p. 197), giving meaning to an individual's life. Developed early in life, narrative identities are shaped through adolescent interpretations of temporal events. Therefore, narrative identity theory gives life to understanding the identity construction experiences throughout adolescence, holding a particular relevance when examining narrative identity construction of high school football players. Applying a narrative inquiry approach will bring a humanistic

approach to understanding high school football players as male adolescents first, and athletes second.

2.7 NARRATIVE INQUIRY FRAMEWORK

Implementing a narrative analytical approach for this study answered a call within sport and tourism for scholarly inclusion (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Smith, 2010; McGannon & Smith, 2015; Smith & Sparkes, 2006, 2009; Stride, Fitzgerald, & Allison, 2017). Previous sport studies have applied narrative inquiry to sport, (Douglas & Careless, 2009, 2013; Ronkainen et al., 2016; Orta, Sicilia, & Fernández-Balboa, 2016; Sparkes & Smith, 2002; Tsang, 2000) but overall sport literature lacks application of narrative inquiry to a high school research setting. Tsang (2000) applied a narrative approach to examine her own academic and athletic identity through her personal experiences. Utilizing the narrative approach allowed her academic and athletic voices to be heard. Through her process of creating a narrative around her participation in high-performance sport (Olympic rowing), Tsang (2000) also became aware of racialized, gendered, socioeconomic, and embodied identities. Applying narrative inquiry to examine the writer's own narrative, Tsang (2000) cautions, "to experience all facets of one's selves along with all their tensions and antagonisms might be, at the very least, uncomfortable and confusing, at most, frightening and destructive" (p. 57). Tsang's (2000) examination of identity showed two facets that future narrative research should accept: (1) sport participation not only communicates to athletes how they should view their athletic selves, it also serves as the foundation for how they understand masculinity, sexual orientation, and social class; and (2) athletic identity is a nuanced meaning-making

(Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Nelson, 2003) process that is essential to identity development in athletes from various cultural and sport backgrounds.

Following Tsang's (2000) application of narrative inquiry, Sparkes and Smith's (2002) used of narrative inquiry to examine athletic identity of rugby players who had suffered a spinal cord injury. In this study, narrative inquiry was used to understand how spinal cord injuries of male rugby players affected their athletic and masculine self-images (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). Results suggested participants viewed themselves as athletic and masculine individuals prior to their disability, experiencing challenges when renegotiating their athletic and masculine selves (Smith & Sparkes, 2002). Losing part of one's self is a present theme in Douglas and Carless (2009) study of two elite golfers. Examining athlete career transition of two elite women's golfers, Douglas and Careless (2009) applied a narrative approach to discover salient athletic identification in both participants. Results also suggested that subjects' inability to transition to the next phase in their lives was due to the lack of an established narrative identity outside of sport participation, leading to participants experiencing "narrative wreckage and considerable personal trauma" (Douglas & Carless, 2009, p. 213). For whatever reason, there is not an example of narrative analysis in a high school sport setting. The current study sought to address this gap, with the intention of understanding how Black male high school athletes construct their own personal athletic narratives.

Narrative scholars have failed to adopt a singular definition or consensus describing narrative analysis (Bamberg, 2012; Riessman & Quinney, 2005), which is often referred to as narrative inquiry (Phoenix et al., 2010). Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003) suggest narratives are social actions: "People do things with words and

they do things with narratives. People use biographical accounts to perform social actions. Through them they construct their own lives and those of others” (p. 117). Performative social actions including practice, film sessions, workouts, and games are help football players construct their narrative identity and also determine how others within their school, family, and community settings view them. Carless and Douglas (2013) note performative social actions within elite sport expose athletes to a praxis of preferred *identities, expected behaviors, and developmental trajectories* that occur between various actors. Within this praxis researchers are situated to tell the stories of study participants.

The power of storytelling is important as narrative inquiry has always sought to illuminate the voices of the disenfranchised or muted within society. Langellier (2001) identified narrative inquiry’s role in this liberation suggesting: “Personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and get a life by telling and writing their stories” (p. 700). This is significant, since most athletes do not view themselves as a vulnerable or marginalized population but actually display many characteristics of those belonging to communities with little or no social power.

Reissman (2005) suggests there are many ways to implement narrative analysis to provide a voice to those who go unheard. Reissman and Quinney (2005) insist that all words, conversations, or dialogue are not narratives when they attempt to differentiate narrative from daily social and dialectical transactions. Remaining true to the proposition of narrative as a “sacred” and skilled theoretical and methodological mainstay, Stride et al. (2017) contend narrative analysis is an appropriate umbrella under which to conduct

qualitative inquiry, since possesses an analytical synergy with data collection methods such as “ethnography, autoethnography, interviews, journals, diaries...and field notes” (p. 34). In agreement with Loseke (2007) and Polkinghorne (2001), Reissman and Quinney (2005) acknowledge narrative inquiry allows for an understanding of the sociocultural nuances of the meaning making process. The meaning making process along with Loseke’s (2007) four levels of narrative construction, are needed to inform the implementation of the study’s methodology.

The current study utilized an integrated narrative inquiry framework comprised of an interactional and performative approach (Riessman, 2005) that utilized Connelly and Clandinin’s (2006) three-dimensional approach to data analysis. In an informative take on narrative inquiry, Reismann (2005) introduced readers to various typologies that present narrative analysis literature. The four typologies include thematic, structural, interactional, and performative analysis (Riessman, 2005). Thematic narrative analysis is concerned with discerning both the meaning of and how stories are told (Riessman, 2005). Researchers conducting a thematic narrative analysis, collect stories from study participants, engaging in a grounded theory approach to developing the meaning of field notes and interviews. This approach would have proved to be appropriate for the current study, but due to the researcher’s connection with football and research setting, an interactional approach allowed for a natural co-construction of participant’s narrative. Another shortcoming of a thematical approach to narrative lies within the assumptions and elements of colonization (Neimeyer, Herrero, & Botella, 2006) of each study participants’ unique narratives. Reismann (2005) suggests an individual must assume that each thematical category is a representation and that “Everyone in the group means the

same thing by what they say” (p. 3). Following a thematical approach, Riessman (2005) discusses the structural approach to narrative analysis. The structural approach, viewed as the earliest approach to narrative (Barthes & Duisit, 1975; Labov, 1982), is concerned with the way a story is expressed. The application of the structural approach leads to the prioritization of linguistics and is typically used with extensive narrative inquiry. The shortcoming of this approach is the decontextualization that occurs during data analysis, neglecting the cultural, institutional, and organizational components of narrative (Loseke, 2007).

Due to the nature of the current study, an interactional-performative approach to analysis was selected to examine the data collected through interviews and participant observation. The interactional approach ensures the narrative co-construction process between the researcher and narrator. Riessman (2005) states this approach is appropriate within unique social settings, where data collection becomes conversational. This dialectical approach is essential to understand how high school football players explain their narratives through temporal events and life histories. The researcher has a significant role in helping the respondent shape their narrative accurately to give the reader the true sense of how a Black high school football player describes markers of salient athletic identification. Since the researcher and participant “create meaning collaboratively” (Riessman, 2005, p. 4), this approach considers the context in which narrative identity is constructed.

Since the current study involved unique power dynamics between coaches and players, the interactional approach would only capture the interpersonal context of narrative construction, ignoring the presence of other actors who are essential to the

narrative construction of high school athletes. Reissman (2005) and Carless and Douglas (2013) suggest the performative approach is appropriate when examining identity construction of athletes because their narrative construction is significantly impacted by winning or losing sport competitions as well as the participants' athletic celebrity. Specifically, Carless and Douglas (2013) suggest performative narrative in sport spaces exposes the winning at all cost mantra and philosophy, which comes to "infuse all areas of life while other areas are diminished or relegated" (Carless & Douglass, 2013, p. 702). This infusion can lead to salient athletic identity, which has been found to cause transitioning athletes' personal trauma (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). With that being said, the performative approach informs the reader of the actors and the social transactions that help inform narrative identity construction. Since athletes spend a majority of their time with their teammates, coaches, and school officials, this approach was included within the narrative analysis framework.

2.8 RESEARCH SETTING: CULTURAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND ORGANIZATIONAL NARRATIVE

Loseke (2007) suggest that narrative construction consists of various levels of social interactions and settings. Therefore, with the current study informed by such a thought, the cultural, institutional, and organizational social factors shaping the research process, must be discussed for readers to understand how such factors set the "plot" within which athletes developed their personal narratives.

The study's research setting was the District of Columbia-Maryland-Virginia (DMV) region. This region has several unique socioenvironmental components, including: the presence of the federal government infrastructure and its own music genre

named “Go-Go” (Lang, 2019). Also, there is a constant cultural difference/tension between people from the DMV region and the city of Baltimore. Baltimore City is in the state of Maryland (adjacent to the District of Columbia), where there is a dwindling socioeconomic infrastructure. Black Baltimore City natives refer to one another as “Yo” which connotes a wildly different experience than that experienced by a Black from DMV. A Baltimore City native will often view Black DMV natives as spoiled because of the District’s budding infrastructure, referring to one another as “Jo” or “Mo”.

Following, a macro understanding of the socioeconomic climate of the Washington, DC region, a cultural narrative of growing up during the 21st century as a Black male in Washington DC will be discussed, followed by the institutional narrative of the current Judiciary and Law Enforcement relationships with Black Males, concluding with a discussion of the organizational narrative of how communities such as neighborhoods, academic settings, and youth and high school sport leagues shape participants’ personal narrative construction of their salient athletic identities. These explanations are needed to highlight the intersectionality of race, culture, and sport, illuminating the daily challenges faced by Black male athletes.

The DMV region is a unique setting to study sport. In the DMV, it would stand to reason that sport achievement would be lower on the priority list for Black families who have experienced educational and professional advancement. However, this does not seem to be the case. In 2015, Prince George’s County (PG County), Maryland was identified as the wealthiest majority-Black county in the US (Brown, 2015). PG County adjacent to Washington, DC, is often referred to as Ward Nine, an extension of the proper eight wards. PG County is home to many Black lawyers, doctors, and high-ranking

government officials, who live “outside the beltway” – the location of the wealthiest neighborhoods. PG County residents have a median annual household income of \$81,240 (Data USA, 2019) a stark contrast the median income level of other top producing areas for Black football players (Allison et al., 2016). For instance, in 2019, the top five football talent producing states for high school athletes were Georgia, Texas, California, Florida, and Mississippi (Crawford, 2019). Of the top 5 producing states, none of the median household income levels are within \$8,000 of the DMV median income level, Mississippi as the lowest (\$43,500) and California as the highest (\$71,800) (Data USA, 2019). While the overall standard of living is favorable, 40% of Black people “inside the beltway” (a nod to the undesirable cities in PG County), live in improvised environments, a 35% difference from their white counterparts (Data USA, 2019). In addition, over 62% of Black people living in PG own their homes and have earned their bachelor’s degree (Data USA, 2019). Even with the healthy outlook on life trajectory and advancement, many of the participants in the current study were still fixated on sport as the preferred vehicle for occupational advancement and success.

In Washington, DC, the economic trend has been one rooted in upward mobility for its residents. In 2017, the median household income was \$82,372, but home ownership is less likely with only 39% of their residents purchasing homes, an occurrence that is indicative of the current “transplant” nature DC has transitioned to due to Gentrification. Though the city is still home to a large Black population, scholars have suggested that cultural displacement of Blacks will reduce the population in years to come (Richardson, Mitchell & Franco, 2019). Similar to PG County, 65% of Black people live in the most impoverished areas (Data USA, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). Such

demographic statistics express that even though Black athletes in the DMV grow up in economically-diverse conditions, the most dominant reality is poverty, similar to other top football-talent-producing regions in the US (Allison et al., 2016). Based on the investigation of the socioeconomic terrain for Blacks in this region, a large constituency of Black people are not getting their piece of the American Pie. Richardson et al. (2019) noted DC has experienced intense gentrification, with over 40% of gentrification-eligible communities being revitalized. Such revitalization/gentrification has moved impoverished individuals to the margins. In addition, though the region is experiencing an economic boom, today more Black youth live in economically marginalized communities than in the past.

Washington, DC is home to players in the major professional sport leagues. The region has produced professional basketball players such as Kevin Durant, Michael Beasley, Victor Oladipo, and Markelle Fultz, as well as professional football players such as Arrelious Benn, Marvin Austin, Darnell Dockett, Cato June, Eddie Goldman, Navarro Bowman, and Dwayne Haskins. In the early 21st century, superstar high school athletes Arrelious “Regis” Benn and Marvin Austin changed the football landscape in DC. In 2005, these two DC natives were superstar football players in the District of Columbia Interscholastic Athletic Association (DCIAA). Regis and Austin both became “5-star” football recruits, ranked among the Top-10 in Washington DC football history. Prior to this time in high school sport, DC was known for its summer basketball leagues (Pell, 2019), being the home of great players such as Victor Page, Stevie Francis, and Len Bias.

For the first time, Black youth in Washington, DC, experienced hyper-social celebrity for playing football in the Nation’s Capital. This first-hand experience

structured a cultural narrative of DC's athletic focus being *Friday Night Lights* and not the Goodman Summer Basketball League.

The 21st Century DC cultural narrative also included a technology boom and gentrification. For youth coming of age during this era, these elements have shaped a cultural narrative of instant digital gratification. In 2004, Facebook was invented, gaining momentum within the social media landscape, with Twitter and Instagram following shortly after. Social media companies were reestablishing how communities received information. Within this media shift creation of Hudl occurred in 2006. Hudl allows youth athletes to upload and disseminate media content (such as game highlight videos) to the general public – and especially college coaches. This technology has allowed Black Youth who may not receive positive reinforcement in other facets of their lives, an online platform for instant gratification, the first wave of sport-centric social media reinforcement for athletic achievement.

During this social media renaissance, a more covert cultural renaissance was taking place in Washington, DC. This cultural renaissance resulted in intense gentrification, sweeping away the nation's capital's overwhelming Black presence. Gentrification is a process of renovating and “improving” a deteriorated urban neighborhood/district, so it conforms to middle-to-upper-class tastes. This gentrification occurs through an influx of more affluent residents. The resulting increase in property values forces the relocation of current and/or historical residents, many of whom are minorities and lower class. A report by Richardson et al. (2019), documented the intense gentrification of many DC neighborhoods that began over twenty years ago. Richardson et al. (2019) defines cultural displacement as a process in that occurs when “minority

areas see a rapid decline in their numbers as affluent, white gentrifiers replace the incumbent residents” (p. 5). Strikingly, Washington, DC accounted for the majority of gentrified neighborhoods from 2000 to 2013 (Richardson et al., 2019). Gentrification essentially eliminated a good deal of positive and robust black imagery that had earned DC its longtime nickname: “Chocolate City.” Furthermore, this cultural displacement led to Black people being marginalized in spaces once representative of Black progress and positive cultural reinforcement.

In addition to the cultural narrative present in Washington, DC, there is an institutional level narrative not exclusive to the region in question. The institutional narrative is structured by the systemic effects of predatory minimum sentencing of overwhelmingly black offenders, coupled with a narrative that Black males are prone to anti-social, criminal behavior, making this group susceptible to exploitation. Mass incarceration has moved to the forefront of a national debate about civil right violations, challenging the morality of a country with an engrained history of disenfranchising Black and Brown people (Alexander 2012). On a national basis, Black males have been subjected to hegemonic incarceration legislation. Mass incarceration is part of DC’s legacy, with the district’s Department of Corrections having incarcerated approximately 50,000 people since 2015, with 93% of these inmates being males and 89% (approximately 44,500) Black males (DC Department of Corrections Facts and Figures, 2019). Strikingly, at least 45% (approximately 22,500) of these male inmates were under 30 years of age (DC Department of Corrections Facts and Figures, 2019).

Coupled with the cultural narrative of diminishing neighborhoods of healthy racial representation, the institutional narrative of mass incarceration and socially-deviant

behavior often results in a destructive self-concept among Black males. Due to factors such as gentrification and mass incarceration, Black males begin to feel alienated in the Nation's capital, seeking to gain personal footing in a region they perceive is moving forward without them. When investigating athletic identities of Black males, it is easy to see societal factors that influence them to seek the deceptively-warm confines of sport participation.

With such societal forces as gentrification and mass incarceration affecting the quality of life for Black people in DC, the organizational narrative of which organizations benefit should be discussed and highlighted to show why Black boys seek athletic success. Youth and high school sport leagues benefit from this vulnerability and exploit Black males' athletic talents. This exploitation creates an organizational-level narrative of commodification, in which youth no longer "play" sport for social development and connectedness but take part in sport so that capitalistic coaches and other individuals can profit off of their athletic talents. Coaches who double as handlers for Black males who come from overwhelming single parent households, stand to reap financial and social rewards for having the biggest "dawgs" on the field.

Even in the high school ranks, football coaches are under immense pressure to perform. The pressure comes from the school administration's desire to win and provide a winning football product, from parents who entrust coaches and football programs to usher their children to the Division-I football "promised land" and want to take care of their "boys" by showing them what "manhood" looks like. Regardless of their motivations, coaches benefit from recruiting the top talent, maintaining a winning record and establishing a track record of recruiting success. Coaches play a pivotal role in

presenting this narrative to youth athletes, in particular Black youth athletes as they cling onto the idea of a comfortable opportunity to develop positive self-concepts about themselves while validating the bombarding social media imagery of athletic superiority.

Coaches see this as an opportunity to insert themselves as the gatekeeper between the youth athlete and the athletic promised land. Coaches hold players' futures in their hands, often ensuring young athletes accept and engage in the appropriate social behavior that results in benefits from the players' labor accruing to the coaches. Subconsciously or consciously, coaches engage in predatory behavior, since the system within which they operate demands it. This social setting produces an organizational narrative that Black boys are commodities bought and sold, as early as 13 years of age, by private secondary education institutions. They are only included in the student body because of their athletic status, a phenomenon that has long-lasting effects as the Black youth matriculates into the college ranks.

When you bring together all of the identified levels of narrative shaping the social reality of the participants included in the study, it paints a picture of athletic participation as a means to an end, a vehicle out of immense desperation to make something of one's self. Black youth have a unique racialized experience shaped by gentrification, mass incarceration and disenfranchisement, as well as the exploitation of their athletic resources by secondary and higher education institutions. What makes this possible is the position of deficiency in which Black youth operate due to their sociocultural and economic handcuffs. Sport seems to be a safe haven for Black youth looking for communities and institutions that do not remind them of the daily persecution and ultimate disadvantage they experience for being a Black male. Therefore, encouraging

personal narratives solely attached to how they perform on the field rather than in the classroom, positions the classroom as another space for persecution.

Ultimately, after reviewing previous literature and narrative identity theoretical frameworks, still remains a need to understand how athletic identity is created and reinforced across one's life history. In particular, within today's Black community there is a relentless desire for children to excel in sport and develop sport-related careers. Since adolescents have access to sport through portable digital devices and social media platforms, the cultural narrative of being a superstar athlete is becoming engrained in today's youth as soon as they are able to hold a cell phone or digital tablet. In fact, the narrative of today's athlete is being shaped in a more robust and readily accessible manner. This requires a new approach in order to understand athletic identity and sport participation. Narrative identity theory is a framework well situated to chronicle the nuances, social interaction, and behavior surrounding Black high school football players' development of their athletic identity.

Through social interaction, narrativity and meaning making cement identity. In both sport and broad social settings, youth learn who they are and challenge their lived experiences in order to inform their current and future social positioning. This study's examination of why Black boys wanting to be the "big bad dawg" on the field but lack the same tenacity in academic settings, serves as an opportunity to suggest that more than ever the Black body needs to appreciate forms of excellence, not vested in the cultural lineage of commodification.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PARADIGM: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

A research paradigm is the structure within which we research phenomena and extract truth while applying value to results. A research paradigm guides the research process, informing the researcher's values and approach(es) to data collection, and provides context for the researcher's interpretation of the results. In addition, a research paradigm connects scholars across the academic terrain by adopting a train of thought and set of assumptions connecting communities of scientists who prescribe to the "...commitments, beliefs, values, methods, outlooks" of a particular paradigm (Schwandt, 2001, p. 183-184). Research paradigms are essential to understanding scholars' goals and guiding motivations, while also establishing the landscape within which problems will be addressed and solved. Therefore, I will discuss five major research paradigms that are often utilized, the assumptions of each research paradigm, and this study's adopted research paradigm.

A research paradigm is guided by a set of philosophical assumptions (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012) structuring an approach to the research process. Philosophical assumptions include four categories: (1) ontology, (2) epistemology, (3) axiology, and (4) methodology. An ontological assumption includes what the researcher believes about the existence of reality. A researcher may posit the existence of a single reality or may

content a social context may consist of multiple realities. This ontological assumption serves as a framework or lens through which a researcher examines phenomena. Such socially-constructed realities are the result of epistemological assumptions regarding how such realities are constructed. The ultimate epistemological question is, “[H]ow do we know what we know?” (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012, p. 1). Epistemological assumptions guide research questions in both qualitative and quantitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The third assumption (axiology) involves the establishment of values and an ethical or axiological framework. The establishment of a study’s axiological assumptions is often based upon previously established individual, group and societal values and ethical truths. Axiology is a difficult assumption to navigate, since a researcher’s adopted axiological framework may affect his/her interpretation of research participants’ realities, values and truths.

The first three assumptions are essential in developing a study’s research approach and methodology application(s). These assumptions serve as a researcher’s toolkit: appropriate ways to engage with participants. Since some paradigms are indeed commensurable, integrating assumptions allows researchers to work within and across appropriate paradigms and adopt different methods of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In addition to these philosophical assumptions, there are five major research paradigms: Positivism, Post-Positivism, Critical Theory, Constructivism/Interpretivism, and Participatory. Researchers operating within a Positivist paradigm, seek truth and reality through experimental research designs situated in objectivity. Such researchers look to answer “yes or no” research questions through quantitative research methods, assuming there is one reality based on study results insinuating the generalizability of

research results (Creswell, 2007). Positivist researchers believe truth is based on quantitative observation and measurement that can and must be verifiable. Research methods prevalent in this paradigm are questionnaires or surveys that include objective questions, that are analyzed through quantitative analyses.

While Positivist researchers believe there is one objective truth and every phenomenon should be view from a causal orientation, Post-Positivist researchers reject this notion and operate within an ontological assumption of critical realism. Critical realism accepts that all research likely contains errors and researchers should be self-. The epistemological assumption is that knowledge is “somewhat” objective but that true objectivity cannot be established or maintained. Simply put, as Positivist researchers act as see all and know all beings, Post-Positivist researchers operate as skeptics of objective truths, acknowledging possible biases based on cultural beliefs, ethics, and values. Post-Positivists often still utilize quantitative research methods but are also opened to including qualitative or mixed-method research designs.

Researchers adopting a Critical Theory research paradigm, operate with the ontological assumption that reality and truth are constructed through the crystallization (Richardson, 2000) of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values. This crystallization process is historical in nature, often situating social institutions as structures of meaning and reality for various populations. For a critical theorist, epistemological assumptions are transactional, with truth and reality a collaborative effort between a researcher and participant. The truth extracted from such transactional interactions is subjective in nature, a major difference from the objectivity of Positivism/Post-Positivism paradigms. Since critical theorists are often both researchers

and social change agents – their research often reflects an axiological dualism, with their research rooted in their ethical framework. Their methodological orientation is almost exclusively qualitative, consisting of dialogical processes to experience reality and truth, and allow for a reflective discourse between researchers and study participants.

The participatory research paradigm situates truth and knowledge acquisition as essential components of social action. This paradigm's ontological assumption is similar to that of constructivists in that reality is co-created and bounded by transaction and social context. Since researchers within this paradigm assume reality and truth are contextual, truth should inform social action to improve social conditions of various populations. Since constructivist researchers utilize participant observation and field notes, interviews, and dairies to collect data, they utilize triangulation to reduce the likelihood of personal bias impacting the interpretation of collected results.

The Constructivist/Interpretivist paradigm takes up the task of understanding reality through the lived experiences of others. Its ontological assumption is that reality is socially constructed through personal accounts and lived experiences, making such inquiry incapable of replication and unable to provide generalizable results. Realities form at the micro and macro levels of social interaction, making reality and truth subjective. The constructivist/interpretivist paradigm's epistemological assumption is that truth emerges from a transactional interaction, within the human experience. Within this hermeneutical approach, researchers and participants work together to construct meaning, truth, and reality within the research setting. Consequently, data collection takes place within a natural setting in which researchers and participants seek to understand

phenomena through methods such as ethnography, grounded theory, and case study analysis.

For the current study, the researcher operated within a Social Constructivist paradigm in collecting and examining the narrative construction of Black high school football players and their athletic identity. Since qualitative research calls for the researcher as the primary research instrument during the research process, the current study encouraged the researcher's role of constructing participant's lived experiences through participant observation and semi structured interviews (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Specifically, the current study adopted a *Vygotskian* approach to social constructivism, in which the researcher viewed the learning process situated in social interaction: "Thought develops from society to the individual" (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p. 10). Joining other narrative scholars in the thought of identity developing through interpersonal and intrapersonal social interaction, Vygotsky (1978) proposed cognitive development is dependent on cultural, institutional, and organizational social pathways that are interconnected with historical and temporal accounts of individuals or groups. This intellectual synergy shared with narrative inquiry is a natural fit since this study's main goal was not to offer objective truths but to give voice to the developed narrative identities. Fosnot (1989) provided four principles that guide the learning process through the paradigm of social constructivism: (1) learning is based on what a person already knows, (2) social adaptation leads to construction of new knowledge, (3) learning is an interactive praxis, and (4) meaning making is established through the retelling and reliving of temporal social interactions informing new knowledge construction. In addition to Vygotsky (1978) and Fosnot's (1989) conceptual framing, adopting a social

constructivist approach, utilizing interactional and performative typologies, allows for the acceptance and acknowledgement that identity is developed through transactions between human beings and their social environment. In this study, I understood “cognitive growth occurs on a social level” (Amineh, & Asl, 2015, p. 13; See also Vygotsky, 1978).

Guided by the hermeneutical nature of narrative inquiry, my ontological assumption is that reality is developed from various vantage points, usually constructed by social interaction. This assumption is congruent with Amineh and Asl (2015) and Kim’s (2001) assumption that reality does not exist until it is developed through human activity. From an epistemological (how do we know what we know) standpoint, the current study constructed identity and truth from the subjects’ retold stories constructed narratives. Narrative construction, informed by the social constructivist paradigm, views knowledge as being situated within the surrounding sociocultural environment (Amineh, & Asl, 2015; Ernest, 1999). The social environment of being entrenched in a high school football program shaped how participants viewed themselves. The epistemological assumption of this paradigm is the expectation that truth is subjective, while being situated within the human experience. Therefore, the subjects’ truth and meaning were co-created through interactions between the researcher and participants. In regard to methodology, such truth is based in hermeneutical practices of interpretation of texts, verbal and non-verbal communication, and symbolic interaction through qualitative methods such as ethnography, semi- and unstructured-interviews, participant observations, personal journal diaries, and video recordings. Within the constructivist paradigm, the axiological assumption of truth is that its value is connected to the social

inquiry itself. Consequently, I had to remain aware that my own biases and personal values affected what information I deemed valuable throughout the research process.

This approach was best suited for examination of athletic identity among Black high school male football players. My position as a participant observer and active member of the research setting ensured truth and reality were co-created, subjective, and transactional. I was able to understand the subjective nature of how football players shaped their identity within the research context. My ontological assumption afforded me the opportunity to analyze data with an open mind and understand that each player's truth and reality looked and felt different. The complex components of narrative inquiry provided an understanding of how athletic identity was shaped by the social context in which these athletes operate. The social constructivist approach allowed me to develop an understanding of the participants' lived experiences. In addition, as a social constructivist researcher, remaining aware of my own biases and personal values that may affect what information was valuable throughout the research process. Awareness and examination of such biases and personal values, subjectivity and reflexivity will be discussed through a positionality statement.

3.2 MY WORLDVIEW: BLACK INTELLECTUALISM AND THE CONSTANT STRUGGLE

Growing up in Washington, D.C. presented unique opportunities for sociocultural expression as I constructed my personal narrative identity (Loseke, 2007). Such representations, or performances (Holman-Jones, 2005) constructed how I viewed myself as a black man (more likely to be killed at the hands of cops or experience incarceration than graduate from college) (see *When They See Us*, 2019), attempting to become the

first person in my family to earn a doctoral degree. For blacks, Washington, D.C. can serve as an environment of empowerment or a constant tease of what could, but never will be. As I have embarked on my professional journey as an activist scholar, I have been constantly reminded that there is a fine line between being a distinguished black intellectual or a “nigga,” (Ironically, a social relationship I have experienced my entire life.).

The exhausting act of juggling these dual realities has been recounted by Stevens, Bell, Sonn, Canham, & Clennon (2017), who discuss transnational perspectives on subjectivity and blackness. Stevens, a black South-African psychologist and race scholar, recognizes how such duality can lead to personal alienation in *spaces dominated by whiteness*:

Even today, I have moments when I question my place in spaces that are dominated by whiteness; I am anxious about my competence as an academic in other instances; and I am sometimes ambivalent about my blackness inside the ‘new’ South Africa where my class position has enabled me to leave behind the structural and economic constraints associated with poor, working class, Black South Africa (Stevens et al., 2017, p. 463).

Stevens provides an example of how he enacts reflectivity of his own subjective social position in relation to daily and human social phenomena (Stevens et al., 2017). Through self-reflexivity, he explains his own subjectivity of being a distinguished Black academic in contemporary South Africa, while also acknowledging that his current professional and social position has removed him from the economic disparities experienced by the majority of Black South Africans (Darawsheh, 2014; Peshkin, 1988).

Simply put, as Stevens acknowledges his position as a Black intellectual, he recognizes his own subjectivity and how it effects his emotions and self-image concerning his race, professionalism, and social position. This process, in which Stevens is aware of his social position, is reflexivity.

Like Stevens, since starting my journey as a PhD student (e.g., intellectual), I have experienced similar challenges, often experiencing *Imposter Syndrome* (Griffin, Ward, & Phillips, 2014). In 2016, I was accepted and enrolled in the sport and entertainment management program at the University of South Carolina. Thrilled at the opportunity to earn a terminal degree, I swiftly recognize how my new academic, cultural, and social surroundings were different. In contrast to my academic experiences at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Black faculty and staff were sparse outside of the custodial staff. In fact, I was the first Black PhD student in the program's short history. It was immediately apparent I had entered a social environment that mirrored the black community in Washington, D.C. Like Stevens, it was in this moment that I felt a personal tug of war between my old blackness and perceived new blackness here in the South.

Recognizing the lifestyle change from attending HBCUs in the North to a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South, I also became aware of the lack of opportunity for Black people within the region. Black people held majority of menial jobs on campus and neighboring businesses, Black students represented a small subset of the general student body, and the collective Black identity was constructed on different values than mine. Concisely, within sport, I recognized that for many Southern black athletes' they view sport as their "way out." The Black athlete at the University of South

Carolina does not have the same access cultural representations of Black people in developed non sport occupations as a Black athlete in Washington, D.C. In a geographical demographic where federal and state government has been essential to black socioeconomic upward mobility, I learned that Black people from cities such as Abbeville and Bamberg, South Carolina, must be exceptional athletes since opportunities to be successful in other occupations were infrequent or simply unavailable. Therefore, as a Black man, I learned that blackness was not universal, but a complex racial and social phenomenon that looked different depending on one's vantage point. When focusing on sport, I learned that black boys in the South are more likely to participate in sport out of necessity, rather than out of a desire for "play" or social connectedness.

During my first year as a PhD student, I published an article exploring sport retirement and athlete career transition experiences of former Division-I athletes (Kidd et al., 2018). Results highlighted numerous challenges associated with athlete career transition, with the most important finding being the pressure to perform as an athlete from members of one's community (Kidd et al., 2018). The communal pressure to perform caused me to reflect upon my sport experience. I began to question whether I had experienced some of the same pressures. With majority of my sample coming from the Southeastern United States, I wondered if athletes in other sections of the country experienced the same pressures. Curiosity sparked my interest in understanding how athletic identity is developed through social interaction.

Applying an *Athletic Role Engulfment* (Adler & Adler, 1991) theoretical framework to understand athlete career transition, I also started to become curious of how roles are placed upon athletes across all competition levels. Within the athletic role

engulfment framework (Adler & Adler, 1991; Kidd et al., 2018), an athlete's identity is indicative of the status placed upon them as superstars and the roles needed to mitigate such social status. Accepting a social status conferred by a social environment, while also adopting a role set to maintain such social status was a phenomenon, I knew all too well. This informed my decision to explore how athletic roles and responsibilities, and social status shape the identity of Black high school football players. Being a Black high school and college football player, informed my approach to studying this unique research population. My personal experience of transitioning from being a Black athlete to a Black intellectual also informed the current study because my narrative identity was an essential component of my athlete career transition. My subjectivity foreshadowed how the study participants constructed their narrative identity.

As the son of a college educated, single mother, and an often absent, music-legend father, my upbringing was filled with moments of identity confusion and wavering self-confidence. During my childhood, my mother did not allow me to play football, instead I was a “latch key” kid from the age of five (later doubling as after school caregiver for my younger brother). Early on, I was thrust into being the “man” of the house, subscribing to adult male characteristics and duties, something many Black boys in the US face. I did not consider myself poor, but as an adult, I have come to understand my family experienced socioeconomic hardship. Eventually, I would learn my mother safeguarded us from socioeconomic despair. Almost subconsciously, I still felt the need to “provide” for my mother and family and identified sport as the method to do so. Providing a snapshot of my upbringing is important as athletics was not of my

mother's primary focus; she believed education was the key to success. She provided many other forms of enrichment other than sport.

My mother, like many Blacks in the Washington, D.C., was college educated and worked for either the federal or local government. Historically, the influx of government jobs helped cement the legacy of the D.C. as "Chocolate City." As an economically thriving metropolis for Blacks (Kotkin, 2018), while growing up, I saw Black doctors, teachers, police officers, politicians, or coaches. In hindsight, being raised in D.C. was a daily representation of "black excellence," a utopia nestled in the heart of the nation's capital. Black representation also served as positive reinforcement that I could achieve my wildest dreams, even if I did not have the proper tools to do so. Either way, this was an example of the times where I aspired to be something other than a professional football player. I aspired to be a lawyer until I turned 12, when my lifetime devotion to sport replaced all other academic or occupational aspirations. My mother attempted to shield me from this constructed reality, but I adopted an athletic-identity narrative.

My mother's shielding began when I was young. Youth football coaches begged my mom to allow me to play for the local Boys and Girls Club football team. My mother, guided by her own thoughts on how to raise her son, did not give in to the community demands for her son to play football. In my neighborhood, where from a young age low-income kids often viewed sport as a means of survival, my mother believed I had other options: sport was not at the top of her list. Instead, my mother enrolled me in baseball and basketball as leisure activities (mainly to run me ragged throughout the week so I could fall to sleep when I returned home). I attended summer camps, mandatory Sunday school, and her infamous academic boot camps, which need additional explanation.

For her academic boot camps, my mother would purchase supplemental learning activity workbooks, flash cards, composition notebooks, and reading books. As children, my brother and I would return home from school, and my mother would have us complete our “chores,” which included supplemental learning task to be completed before she returned home from work. Day in and day out, I had a mountain of homework assigned from my mother and on top of that assigned by my teachers. I hated the extra work, but now I understand what motivated my mother to instill such a regimen. Intentionally or not, my mother was safeguarding her son from the unrealistic allure of viewing himself as a superior athlete, fighting against Black male athletic supercity social reproduction. Interestingly, this social reproduction an effective tactic that assisted me through my sport retirement and athlete career transition.

My upbringing was a constant struggle between abiding by my mother’s household rules and my own desire to engage in socially-deviant behavior. My mother provided me with everything I needed to be successful in life, but I was enticed by things that could land me into serious trouble. This propensity for bad behavior was the sole reason why my mother started to entertain the possibility of me playing football. She saw football not as a means out of our current living environment, but a method of using all of my energy, so when practice was over, I would not think about dabbling in socially-deviant behavior.

When I turned 12, my persistence paid off and my mother allowed me to play football. The moment I put on a football helmet, I lost a part of myself and my mother knew she could no longer keep her young boy safe from the perils of playing football. My mother accepted football’s violence and high injury rates, but she did not tolerate an

inflated ego or lack of attention to other areas (i.e., academics) on my part. For me, football not only exemplified my rebellion my mom's values, it also signified my giving in to communal pressures about the importance of playing football. My involvement with youth football was the first instance in which sport was part of my narrative. Through the coming years, my athletic identity became a salient representation of how I viewed myself.

During that time in my life, I was so focused on preparing for my first football camp that I failed to realize I was undergoing my own narrative construction of a salient athletic identity. Culturally, playing sport was a part of the collective identity of my surrounding environment. While I also played baseball and basketball, football was my sport. In my neighborhood, if you did not play for the District Heights Chiefs football team, you were less of a "man." As a youth, I learned masculinity was connected to my participation in football (Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010) and in order to beat your chest as the "top dog" you not only had to participate, but you also needed to be "damn" good. Along with masculinity, playing football was synonymous with sociocultural "coolness," peer acceptance and celebration. Though, I loved reading and writing, I knew playing football was the coolest thing in my life.

Regarding the current study, the epistemological underpinning of constructionism, along with my personal athletic experience, reflected a subjective relationship between my study participants and me. As they began to construct their narrative of their athletic self, they were exposed to a gloried-self personification (Adler & Adler, 1989) due to roles and statuses placed upon them as youth athletes. Study participants were encouraged and rewarded by community stakeholders to view their athletic self as an

individual whole. I knew this process first hand as most of these community stakeholders continue to celebrate my athletic pursuits and accomplishments more than my current pursuit of intellectualism. Outside of my mother, extended family, friends, and school officials communicated to me that being an athlete had its perks and I would receive preferential treatment. When I started playing football, the narrowing of my personal narrative commenced. This narrowing involved coddling by coaches, teachers, and school officials who pushed me through my adolescent years without holding me to the same standard as other students. This diminished personal narrative identity was exacerbated by a cultural emphasis on sport within the Black community, another parallel between me and study participants.

Minimizing capacities of Black high school football players have occurred through different levels of social interaction. Culturally, youth sport has reduced the desire and minimized opportunities for Black youth to view themselves outside of athletic characterizations (Edwards, 1988; Gaston, 1986). Growing up, Black youth are more likely to be indoctrinated into sport, with sport imagery and constant sociocultural representations than their white counterparts (Beamon & Bell, 2006). Like study participants, I was less likely to see media representation of Black males as doctors, engineers, politicians. However, my saving grace was my daily interaction with Black people in such roles. As stated, my teachers, policemen, firemen, and politicians were all Black, offering an alternative reality to the more pervasive restrictive media representation of Black people. Still, I was culturally prone to viewing myself as an athlete, momentarily disregarding other social interactions that were part of my narrative identity. In fact, when I started to operate within the research setting, my perceptions of

shared knowledge rang true as I saw the same lean face of young Black male football players, jumping at the chance for a Division-I football “scholarship,” disregarding the historical cautionary tales suggestive of identity foreclosure disadvantages.

3.3 STATEMENT OF POSITIONALITY

Qualitative inquiry requires researchers to be active components of the research process (Darawesh, 2014; Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009). To include oneself as an active participant, a researcher must acknowledge how their personal life history including religious background, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and biases towards other groups inform their approach to conducting qualitative research. Subjectivity is the process in which “the circumstances of one’s class, statuses, and values” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17), influence the research process. Bykova (2018) describes subjectivity as the awareness of consciousness, self, agency and relationship with others in the world. Subjectivity allows for dialectal (or co-constructed) knowledge (Caretta, 2015).

Previously, subjectivity has experienced an arbitrary application to qualitative research (Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Peshkin, 1988). Peshkin (1988) suggests scholars who simply acknowledge subjectivity, may still lack the skill to activate subjectivity within their research. If researchers do not consciously activate their subjectivity, they not explicitly identify the subjective “I” (Peshkin, 1988). In contrast, when researchers consciously acknowledge their subjectivity, they become “attentive,” wearing subjectivity “...like a garment that cannot be removed” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). In addition, when activated, subjectivity should be addressed throughout the duration of the research process with constant self-monitoring (Peshkin, 1988). Therefore, continuing

Peshkin's (1988) push to move subjectivity away its arbitrary nature, researchers must implement self-monitoring activities to remain aware of how subjectivity affects the research setting.

The current study utilized researcher journaling and "subjective I" self-reflection and discussions, to ensure active monitoring of subjectivity throughout the research process. Peshkin (1988) suggests techniques such as journaling in order for feelings to move from subconsciousness to consciousness. Self-monitoring techniques also serve as reminders of actions and preconceptions that may "cloud" a researcher's interpretation of interaction within a social environment. Darawsheh (2014) suggests researchers potentially bring their personal biases to a research setting, affecting "...data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (p. 561) (See also Finlay, 1998; Finlay & Ballinger, 2006).

During his 11 months of fieldwork, investigating community, Peshkin (1988) used flashcards to document his feelings whenever they arose. In addition, Peshkin (1985) proposed qualitative research has a unique relationship with researchers and participants' personal dispositions, since neither can predict when such dispositions will reanimate during the research process (See also Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Personal dispositions that can evoke themselves during the research process. Therefore, a researcher's subjective I should be actively addressed actively through the research project in order to "...consciously attend to the orientations that will shape what [is made of what is seen]" (Peshkin, 1985, p. 21).

The process of how we shape what we see recognizes the power of subjectivity, but the power of what we make of what we see highlights the significance and need for reflexivity (Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity is the process of actively and constantly reflecting

on subjective I's during the research process (Darawsheh, 2014; Finlay, 2002; Jootun et al., 2009). Berger (2015) suggests reflexivity is the process during which the researcher's focus should "carefully self-monitor[ing] the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain[ing] the balance between the personal and universal" (p. 220). Where subjectivity is concerned with the epistemological underpinnings of knowledge, reflexivity is tasked with the ontological praxis of locating in what ways a researcher's subjectivity is present and influencing the research process. Finlay (2002) states reflexivity shifts the researcher from "what I see and what I make of what I see" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 21), to a liberating praxis (Freire, 1972) of active knowledge construction. The following current section discusses how my own subjectivity and reflexivity influenced the study's data-collection process.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN: THREE-DIMENSIONAL NARRATIVE APPROACH

The current study adopted Labov's (1982) modified approach to narrative structure. Though the current study did not adopt a structural narrative approach, narrative structure assisted in understanding the narratives structured through ethnographic (Alexander, 2005) interviews. The current study examined transcribed interviews from study participants based on the following factors of narrative structure:

[T]he abstract (summary and/or point of the story); orientation (to time, place, characters and situation); complicating action (the event sequence, or plot, usually with a crisis and turning point); evaluation (where the narrator steps back from the action to comment on meaning and communicate emotion – the "soul" of the narrative); resolution (the outcome of the plot); and a coda (ending the story and bringing action back to the present) (Riessman, 2005, p. 3).

Narrative inquiry presents various methods of interpreting meaning and process, saturation within mainstream and regular discourse, and different typologies that should be used when applying narrative to research (Reissman, 2005; Reissman & Quinney, 2005; Stride et al., 2017). In an attempt to provide rigid parameters to the narrative analysis process, in addition to Labov's (1982) approach to narrative structure the current study constructed narrative data while applying Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional approach to data analysis. Three elements of social and personal interaction, temporality, and social setting (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Stride et al., 2017) assisted in the *retelling and reliving* (Stride et al., 2017) of performative script (Carless & Douglas, 2013). When reviewing transcribed interviews, field notes, and participant observation journal notes, the researcher surveyed the data looking for meaningful stories of interactions with coaches, peers, and family that assisted with shaping subjects' athletic identities (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1991).

Culturally, the researcher considered broad level social interaction, such as media representation of sport along with other socializing agents (Loseke, 2007), while remaining aware of the "continuity" (Creswell, 2007) of stories told during participant interviews. This allowed for an understanding of how past events in the participant's life informed the present and future narrative construction of identity. Finally, these two components were utilized with the analytical awareness of the setting in which personal and social interactions took place.

3.5 DESCRIPTION OF HIGH SCHOOL SETTING

The current study was conducted in a local high school, located in the Northeast corridor of Washington, DC. The student population is comprised of Black and Latino students, with 40% of the school's population receiving some type of financial assistance. The overall population does not exceed 800 students, and the community is close-knit. Creation of the school was motivated by the vision of offering a flagship private education to people who were not able to afford regular tuition. The students come from various parts of the Washington D.C. metropolitan or the DMV area ranging from suburbia to improvised areas within the Southeast corridor of the city. Ranging from various neighborhoods, different levels of socioeconomic status is represented within the student population. Present in the student body, there are your "haves" and "have nots" with some students driving expensive cars to school while others depend on public transposition. Academically, the school has an exceptional education profile, with Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs for advance students. The faculty and staff are comprised of the same racial demographics and a number of faculty and staff are alumni. Along with the academic profile, there is a religious component to the school as it is a part of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. The Cardinal and other Archdiocese officials come to the school twice a year to have mass, but not being of the Catholic faith does not exclude you from being able to apply and attend the institution.

The school's football program has a rich and deep history of winning football and basketball championships. Throughout the 70's, 80's and 90's the high school dominated competition in their conference, sending many players to the NFL. John Thompson II, the

longtime coach for the Georgetown Hoyas, and current New York Jets Linebacker, Jeremiah Attaochu both attended the high school. Recently, while the school has had its fair share of athletic talent, the football team has failed to “produce” on the field. Over the last five years, the football team has barely had failed to have a winning record, with many of their top talent transferring to other schools after their junior year. Left behind, are talented players who believe they can “turn it around” and produce winning seasons. Even in this depressed condition, the football program has continued to “produce” at least one Division I or II athlete every year. This highlights many athletes’ motivation to attend the school: play college football. The school is sponsored by Under Armour (UA), and plays against other high schools who have sports apparel deals. Every year, there is an arms race for talent as schools from within the conference attempt to recruit and offer scholarships to top youth-football players from the surrounding areas. The conference also has a transfer rule to block athletes from transferring to another school within the conference. Athletes who attempt to transfer after their freshman year must sit out a year. This is the high school setting in which the researcher navigated.

3.6 ARRANGEMENTS OF STUDY AND RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

The current study was developed from the researcher’s previous investigation of transitional challenges associated with athletic role engulfment. Upon completing the previous inquiry into athlete career transition (Kidd et al., 2018), the researcher theorized challenges with sport retirement and athlete career transition could be active before an athlete attends college. With this in mind, the researcher proposed a study to examine athletic identity within a high school setting to provide the literature with a recent exploration of phenomena contributing to the challenges faced by retiring college-

athletes. Being from Washington, DC, the researcher contacted the administration at a local high school in Washington, DC to gauge their interest in serving as the research setting for the current study.

Because of the researcher's alumni status with the institution, the school's president eagerly agreed to the high school's participation in the study. Following the agreement, the researcher completed and submitted an Institutional Review Board (IRB) proposal to the IRB office housed at the University of South Carolina (UofSC), and upon its approval, underwent a background check and sensitivity training for the Archdiocese of Washington. After completion of the background check and sensitivity training, meetings with key academic stakeholders were held to discuss the researcher's presence on the school grounds, purpose of the study, and how faculty and staff could assist with facilitating a healthy research setting. Following faculty and staff meetings, the researcher attended football informational sessions, during which coaches, players and family members discussed spring practice and workout sessions, passing-league schedules, and purpose and goals of the current research project.

The researcher presented pertinent information concerning the intent and purpose of the current study and process of recruitment. Consent forms were distributed to parents and football players to encourage study participation. The school's administration allowed the researcher full autonomy while on school grounds, therefore, football players who signed the consent form would be available for interviews throughout the school day. It was the original intent of the current study to include parents within the participant pool, but parents were more concerned with participation of youth football players. The researcher attended two informational sessions, where consent forms were collected,

while also encouraging parents to consider their inclusion in the research process. The recruitment process led to nine football players agreeing to participate in interviews throughout the research process. Regarding participant observation conducted by the researcher, the researcher was included on the coaching staff, as an assistant strength and conditioning coach. The head coach provided time after off-season workouts to introduce the researcher to players, again encouraging participation in the research process. The researcher participated in offseason workouts, and also interacted with study participants during study hall, workouts, and field drills. Ultimately, the research setting recruitment was embraced, met with minimal resistance from academic, athletic, and parental stakeholders.

3.7 SAMPLE SELECTION

To be included in the research process, participants obtained parental consent with the parent and youth participant signing provided consent forms. Prior to signing consent forms, parents and participants were required to attend at least one informational session regarding the current study. Due to the work schedules of some parents, this requirement was difficult to achieve, and the researcher revisited this requirement when appropriate. To participate in the interview process, participants had to self-identify as Black or African-American. Participants were between 13 and 18 years of age and a member of the high school football team. To restrict the amount of interview participants, the researcher limited the sample to the first ten football players who obtained parental consent.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Establishing the research setting and participant demographic profile, the researcher initiated the data collection process, which consisted of ethnographic semi- and unstructured interviews, and participant observation during spring football practices and off-season training sessions. Semi- and unstructured interviews are appropriate to investigate if – and to what degree – high school football players develop a salient athletic identity. Data collection methods allowed for natural responses to questions, mitigating the rigid nature of a high school research setting. Narrative inquiry suggests the need for participants to tell their story as they see it (Smith, 2010) and semi- and unstructured interviews encouraged participants to describe their experiences with a natural and relaxed posture.

Semi- and unstructured ethnographic interviews provided the researcher entrée to temporal events that had previously occurred in the participant's narrative in relation to broad social contexts (Beamon, 2012). Unique access to narratives provided exploration into experiences of high school athletes, adding to the current body of literature concerning athletic identity. Therefore, the initial phase of the data collection process was conducted through 45-to-60-minute interviews that took place during the school day, preferable during participants' lunch period. If the lunch period was not feasible, interviews took place during study hall or free class periods. To record interviews, the researcher utilized an audio tape recorder to document answers provided to research questions. To maintain participant confidentiality, interviews were stored on an encrypted flash drive and external hard drive. Interviews were conducted in three waves since the researcher spent time with the team four to five days per visit. Interview questions

assisted with narrative construction of participants' representations of athletic participation and how daily roles and responsibilities shape athletic identity. Interviews consisted of conversational banter to relax participants and allow them to provide demographic data and information about their life and playing experiences. The interviews would quickly transition to discussions of their narrative identity as football players. Collecting data with a semi- and unstructured interview approach afforded the researcher opportunities to engage study participants in their natural high school athletic setting. Initiating rapport building, the off-season workouts encouraged relationships to be developed with study participants. The rapport building process was important as gaining "buy in" from stakeholders was a challenge at the beginning of the data-collection process.

During the rapport-building process, the researcher inserted himself into the research setting utilizing his previous professional training as a psychotherapist and community organizer. During interactions with subjects, the researcher strategically listened to rap music, followed popular trends via social media, and referred to close community members. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the live experiences of being an adolescent Black male living in Washington, D.C. This process included becoming familiar with rap artists such as *Gunna*, *Lil Uzi Vert*, *NBA Youngboy*, and *Kodak Black*. The researcher also contacted professional colleagues (e.g., community leaders, clinical social workers, and probation officers) to grasp the landscape of social pitfalls associated with criminal behavior and substance abuse for youth across the region. These pitfalls include a high occurrence of Phencyclidine (PCP) and Spice (K2) among youth in communities of color. The researcher also gained data from a colleague

in social work at a local non-profit organization, who told the researcher that many subjects are from the poorest ward in the Washington, D.C. area and come from single parent homes. Having knowledge of these social conditions, allowed the researcher to present himself as a member of their community. This presentation included being able to recite rap lyrics “bar for bar” with study participants.

Throughout the research process, the researcher transcribed audio recorded interviews for data analysis. The interviews were transcribed with an online transcription service: Temi (see www.temi.com). To minimize error, transcriptions were reviewed and checked to make sure the service did not change words or misrepresent information from data collection. After transcription, anecdotal evidence underwent examination for the “personal truth” (Franck & Stambulova, 2019, p. 288) of each participant to construct sport narratives shaping their lived experiences. After completing the transcription process, transcription data were reviewed by participants to confirm or clarify, the tone and contextual meaning of phrases and words used. To conclude the member-checking process, the researcher and two research assistants reviewed data to confirm the accuracy of transcriptions.

After member-checking and reviewing interviews, interviews were examined and coded based on significant social interactions that shaped the participants’ early construction of their narrative self. Transcriptions were reviewed line-by-line, with handwritten notations used to identify various components of the interactional-performative narrative analysis that guided the research process. To allow for visual checking, notations were coded through the use of various colors. Following the initial coding of stories constructing participant’s first personal moment of athletic superiority,

interview data were revisited to identify when significant and defining athletic experiences took place and establishing how such experiences were consistent with interactional and performative narrative themes.

In addition to narrative interviews, the researcher operated as participant observer during off season workouts and practices (Dahlke, Hall, & Phinney, 2015; Tedlock, 1991). Implementing participant observation as an ethnographic data collection tool has gained prominence among anthropology scholars (Tedlock, 1991). Applying participant observation to the research process allows for what Tedlock (1991) states is an opportunity for the researcher to “experience and observe their own and others’ co-participation within an ethnographic encounter” (p. 69). Echoing Dahkle et al. (2015), inclusion of the of the researcher as an assistant strength & condition coach, allowed the researcher to understand the social settings influencing their thoughts and behaviors. Audio-visual recordings and written memo notes, referencing observed coach-to-player and peer-to-peer interactions, informed the construction of narratives during individual interviews. Videotaping was also used to assist with the researcher’s efforts at reflexivity, making the researcher aware of moments of enmeshments potentially influencing the research process. To capture researcher-participant weight-room interactions, the researcher utilized a handheld-video gimbal with an auto-tracking feature. After each weight room session, the researcher would review his notes while listening to and viewing audio and video recordings. In addition, the researcher journaled various interactions displayed on video recordings. Nevertheless, of all of the previous benefits of participant observation, being in the “trenches”, working out with the participants

allowed for rich data collection and swift endearment for the researcher's position in their lives.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

The study's sample ($n = 9$) consisted of Black high school football players who attended a local private high school in Washington, DC belonging to a flagship athletic conference, known as the Washington Catholic Athletic Conference (WCAC). To maintain confidentiality, the high school will be named using the pseudonym, Pope Francis Catholic High School (PFC). Participants were recruited from football information sessions, interactions during workout sessions, and the participant's curiosity in the research process. The researcher's alumni status of the current high school encouraged swift rapport building with participants, mitigating any skepticism of being included in the interview process. The response rate for participant interviews was successful as the researcher sought to include ten participants in the interview portion of the study. In addition, snowball sampling assisted with the inclusion of three participants as other participants discussed their pleasure of being interviewed, minimizing skepticism of other participants.

Prior to inclusion in the interview process, participants completed a demographic data survey, collecting data concerning their playing history, academic profile, and parental education status. Subjects included in the sample provided consent to be included in the interview portion of the study, as they all self-identified as Black or African American, while eight out of nine were natives of Washington, DC or DMV

region. All participants were upperclassmen including sophomores ($n = 2$), juniors ($n = 6$), and seniors ($n = 1$). Academically, participants grade point averages (GPA) ranged from below average to above average with the lowest GPA of 2.0 and highest GPA of 3.7 on a 4.0 scale. Three participants maintained a GPA above 3.0, while two had a GPA above 2.5, finishing with four participants below a 2.5. In addition, all participants disclosed that they received athletic scholarships and financial aid in exchange for athletic labor to attend PFC. All participants indicated their parent's education levels, as six mothers earned college degrees (5 bachelors, 1 masters), with three earning a high school diploma. When discussing the level of education of participant fathers, participants disclosed that four fathers earned a college degree (4 bachelors), while five fathers graduated from high school. Two fathers earned a bachelor's degree, while participating in a Division I football program at a university belonging to the Southeastern Conference (SEC). Additionally, seven participants described living in a single parent household, headed by their mother, while two participants stated that grew up in a married household including both biological parents. Altogether, Table 4.1 summarizes the participants' classification, GPA, financial aid status, and parental education information.

As mentioned, the demographic data survey provided an overview of participant's playing history and career aspirations. In regard to playing history, participants competed in flag or contact football for an average of seven years, ranging from 0 to 14 years of participation. Every participant indicated that they were being actively recruited by colleges and universities, earning athletic perception accolades and awards during the previous football season. Eight participants earned all-conference honors including first

team, second team, and honorable mention designations for their play. Eight of nine participants started at their position at least one year prior to the study, with one participant starting at least three years, four starting at least two years, and three starting for at least one year. One participant did not have playing history as he recently migrated from Kinshasa, Congo to the US during the winter break between 2018 and 2019. When asked about athletic scholarships offered from colleges and universities, five participants acknowledged offers from college programs ranging from Division I to Division III, with four stating they had yet to receive an athletic scholarship from a college football program. Regardless of their scholarship offer status, all participants stated their football career aspirations were to play big-time college sport and/or make it to the National Football League (NFL). Two participants stated their desire to play big-time college football but did not think playing in the NFL was a part of their future. Even with this declaration, all participants still embodied the thought of getting to the “league” as an attainable goal. Within the sample were high ranking players, receiving national recruiting attention for their athletic abilities. According to the online recruiting service, 247 Sports (see www.247sports.com), the sample included three players with national recruiting rankings, with two earning four star athlete designations and one earning a three star athlete designation. Players included in the sample have received scholarship offers from top college programs including the University of Maryland, West Virginia University, and University of Michigan. To conclude, Table 4.2 provides a comprehensive outlook on playing history, recruiting, and career aspirations.

Table 4.1 Classification, GPA, Financial Aid Status, and Parental Education

Name	Classification	GPA	FA Status	Education Level: Mother	Education Level: Father
Brian	SR	2.4	YES	Bachelors	Bachelors
Jabari	SO	2.0	YES	High School	High School
Kwame	JR	2.0	YES	High School	High School
Lucky	JR	3.1	YES	Bachelors	High School
Maxx	JR	3.7	YES	Bachelors	Bachelors
Nipsey	JR	2.9	YES	High School	High School
Ronny	SO	3.0	YES	Masters	High School
Snupe	JR	2.9	YES	Bachelors	Bachelors
Thomas	JR	2.1	YES	Bachelors	Bachelors

Table 4.2 Playing History, Recruiting, and Career Aspirations

Name	Sport Participation (Years)	Years-Starter	All-Conference	Actively Recruited	Scholarship Offers	Career Aspirations
Brian	9	2	YES	YES	YES	College
Jabari	4	1	YES	YES	NO	College
Kwame	0	0	NO	YES	YES	NFL
Lucky	11	2	YES	YES	NO	NFL
Maxx	10	2	YES	YES	NO	College
Nipsey	10	2	YES	YES	YES	College/NFL
Ronny	8	1	YES	YES	YES	College/NFL
Snupe	5	3	YES	YES	YES	NFL
Thomas	14	1	YES	YES	NO	College/NFL

4.2 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION: THE WEIGHTROOM

The researcher traveled to Washington, DC four times during the months of January and May to collect data, operating as an assistant strength and conditioning coach. In this capacity, the researcher worked out with players, coached players on proper workout technique, and provided encouragement for their success as athletes, students, and young men. During the initial visit, the head coach introduced the researcher to the football team, where team members were able to ask questions about the researcher's personal background, among other questions. During the first workout session, the researcher noticed eagerness of some team members to engage in conversation regarding the researcher's athletic history and connection to the school. The researcher would engage in conversations to learn about team members' goals and aspirations, along with personal information regarding their upbringing and hobbies. From these initial conversations, the researcher developed a bond with team members who initiated intimate conversation during workout sessions. During the following visits, the researcher asked the head coach to put team members who were interested in being interviewed in the researcher's workout group, in an effort for the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of their reality.

Initial conversations began with an understanding that the researcher was present to conduct research as an outsider (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998), but participants were receptive to including the researcher as an insider because of his personal experience as a football coach, football player, and former member of the high school community. At this moment, the researcher was able to develop a setting in which the narrative of salient

athletic identification was encouraged through sensationalism of athletic achievement, often characterized as being a “Dawg”. Throughout the researcher’s time around the program, it was apparent coaches viewed players as dawgs to be trained in the offseason and let off the leash during the upcoming football season.

Players viewing themselves as dawgs was supported by a conscious effort on the part of coaches and players to indoctrinate team members into an environment of savagery and masculinity attached to their athletic participation (Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010). During the first weight room session attended by the researcher, the head coach – displeased with the team’s effort – closed out the workout session with the following speech:

You guys don’t understand how this thing works. If you want to make it to the top, you gotta be a fuckin’ dawg. All of this bullshitting the squat rack and going through the motions, ain’t shit dawgs do. Dawgs are going hard all the time. Y’all niggas Dawgs, and Dawgs gotta eat.

In addition to this blunt language, the head coach referred to New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady (a White male) as a dawg, encouraging the narrative of athletic identity by attaching a reinforcing imagery of professional football players as dawgs, insinuating that his players should view themselves as chattel. Throughout his interactions with players, the head coach reinforced the narrative of Black males as savages, consistent with what Hawkins (2017) calls the “The Brute Nigger” imagery utilized throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to characterize Black men as beastly animals. This initial interaction situated the weight room as the epicenter of participants’ narrative constructions. Specifically, the weight room was the space where the head

coach would serve as a shepherd, herding all of his “dawgs” for the universal message of bestiality.

In contrast to the weight room, study-hall attendance and academics did not receive the same reinforcement. While football players would technically attend study hall, they would invariably find reasons to leave the lunch room where study hall was held. The researcher observed athletes sitting their phones in between their textbooks, to disguise being on social media apps from the monitoring coach. The coach who was assigned to monitor study hall was often inattentive and seldom made sure athletes completed their work. Consequently, players were often on their phones and did not complete their assignments. During three study-hall observations, with no tutor or teacher present, a majority of athletes did not work on their academic assignments. In addition, the coaching staff consistently ignored these player behaviors. In one instance, the the Head Coach pulled the starting quarterback from study hall in order to watch film and discuss the game plan for an upcoming off-season passing-league tournament.

In addition to not using savage (e.g., dawg) imagery when discussing academic achievement, coaches often insinuated that doing the minimum amount of work necessary to remain eligible for sport participation was acceptable. “Taking care of business in the classroom” was necessary for athletic participation but not valued for its own sake. The coaching staff fostered an environment in which academics were viewed as a necessary evil.

In addition to the coach-player dynamic, the researcher was privy to peer to peer interactions. While in the weight room setting, peers instituted their own stratification of groups based on grade classifications, importance to the team, national recruiting profile,

and scholarship offers. The researcher noted the have and have-not nature of the weight room as players who were being national recruiting, receiving accolades from sport participation were acknowledged as the big bad dawgs on the team. Players who received an athletic scholarship to attend the school, were more likely to hang with other teammates who were on scholarship, possessing physiques that were fully developed. Team members who were there for “academics” or because their parents wanted their child to receive a private education, congregated with other teammates fitting the same profile, with a clear distinct between the team’s walk-ons and scholarships players.

Scholarship players seemed to come to the school with pre-developed athletic identities because they were recruited to play football. Players fitting this demographic did not work as hard during workout sessions because they received individualized training from an outside athletic trainer. This was apparent when the researcher asked one of the best players on the team why he did not work out much with other team members. The player stated that he participated in “outside training” that better prepared him than the school’s offseason program. After this conversation, the researcher observed majority of the top players either electing to do parts of the workout or sitting out off-season workouts in its entirety. Lack of participation did not affect their standing with peers, as the scholarship players with pivotal roles on the team were still recognized as the authority among peers. Essentially, these players knew they were the big bad dawgs, neglecting the rest of the team because of their own opportunities of playing big time college sport.

For non-scholarship or non-essential players, workout sessions consisted of trying to become one of those big dawgs. These players rarely missed a workout and always

completed every repetition with the greatest effort. While the researcher observed their workouts, these players were noticeably younger, and outside of the scholarship player in-group that dominated the football program. The researcher noticed that these players lacked the “cool” factor present among the scholarship players but were eager to show they belonged. Showing they belong called for these players to overcompensate in areas in which they lacked, mainly their athletic stature and ability. Not being a part of the scholarship athlete in-group, encouraged players to be devoted to athletic participation because they had something to prove.

The researcher observed other behaviors in the weight room, including the importance of social media presence while working out, music playlists, and other peer to peer interaction. While working out, players would engage with social media by posting videos or live streaming their activity. This infatuation with social media would prove to be a major component of constructing how participants viewed themselves. Players showed a strong attachment to their phones and social media accounts, leading to the occasional topless picture of a group of guys flexing their muscles. The players also shared a common love for hip hop music, which facilitates the savage dawg social environment. Players would get excited listening to Gunna, Young Thug, Young Nudy, and YoungBoy NBA, as the rap artists talked about “Drip” and “Dracos”, a reference to a designer label clothing and guns. The players recited lyrics like zombies as they completed their exercises, often using the word “Nigga” when mentioned in songs. Nigga was also used among players as a term of endearment, along with “Mo”. Nevertheless, all the players shared a common kinship regardless of their role on the football team, as

many players embodied their teammates as their “brothers” and would kill for each other on the football field.

As a participant observer, the researcher was able to ascertain where players received engorgement for their athletic pursuits. The weight room was then treated as the stage or scene where players acted, in an environment directed by coaches and players alike. Particularly, within the weight room, the researcher was able to learn the social order among teammates, while also engaging with players to understand what working out and performing as athletes meant for their overall make up. The weight room also served as a mirror for the researcher, as he saw himself in the lean faces of the players. Included in the players, were young and lean faces chomping at the bit to get to the next level, even if getting to the next level meant sacrificing other components of their lives. This sacrifice included working out after school, while other students were enjoying their after-school walk to the train station or applying themselves to a college prep English class that could increase their academic skill set. This sacrifice was a shared experience between the researcher and participant, a shared reality that joined the two on a journey of co-constructed narrativity. The researcher would learn, such a shared experience would make it difficult for the researcher to maintain his distance as a researcher, calling for constant awareness of the researcher’s reflexivity and subjectivity.

As previously stated, the researcher instituted various methods to remain aware of how he operated within the research setting. Through journaling and consulting with his research advisor, the researcher was confronted with various challenges when engaging with study participants. The first challenge was becoming enmeshed with the research sample, that could potentially lead to confusing relationship and dynamic between the

researcher and the study participants. The researcher retired from college football less than seven years ago, while only being removed from coaching less than five years. While in this environment, the researcher would find himself becoming too entrenched in the social environment, that it triggered his own salient athletic identity. Another challenge consisted of the researcher keeping his distance as a researcher, circumventing a possible dual relationship. After the first visit to the school, players started calling the researcher “coach”, engaging with him as one of the members of the coaching staff. Though an intimate relationship is encouraged, the researcher found this difficult when disengaging from the role of researcher. Finally, the intimacy of the researcher-participant relationship was difficult as the researcher developed strong relationship with various members of the team. When concluding the data collection process, players expressed their sadness about the researcher disengaging from the research setting. In turn, the researcher experienced challenges disengaging as he became worried with some of the challenges the participants would face after graduating from high school. For the researcher, the research process proved to be a journey filled with personal highs and lows when engaging with study participants, a dialogical process that challenged how the researcher approached the delicate and nuance process of narrative construction.

Even with the challenges experienced by the researcher, participant observation was important to the rapport building process needed for rich data collection. While in the weight room, prospective interview participants were able to judge the researcher’s character, to determine his intentions. The researcher and participants were able to develop a bond based on trust, as the researcher assisted with spotting on various exercises, providing solicited advice on life after high school, and life as a Black man in

the 21st century. These efforts made the interview process less pretentious for participants. Without participant observation, interview participants could have met the researcher with some resistance when looking for truthful answers to interview questions constructing their reality.

4.3 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Included in the interview portion of the study were nine football players from the team. These players were eager to engage with the researcher during off season workouts and completed the consent forms to be interviewed. Interview participants consisted of Lucky, a junior Wide Receiver who was from one of the roughest neighborhoods in Washington, DC. Lucky also had an extensive behavior record, as he had been suspended from the school multiple times because of fighting and other discipline infractions. Though embattled, Lucky recently was offered a football scholarship by a local institution named Howard University. Thomas was junior Offensive Lineman, who was large in stature standing about 6'4 weighing about 325 pounds. Thomas did not have the same disciplinary challenges as Lucky, but his grades were below average, and though he was receiving nationally recruiting attention, schools were reluctant to offer him a scholarship. Brian was a graduating senior defensive lineman, who was eager to be included in the study because of a discussion he had with his brother about participating. Brian was excited about graduating but did not receive as much recruiting attention as his brother Snupe. Snupe, was the biggest national recruit the school has had since 2016. As a fringe five-star junior Offensive Lineman, Snupe received offers from many of the top programs in the country. Snupe and Brian both are sons to a father who participated in Division I college football at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss). Ronny, a

sophomore Tight End, was receiving national recruiting attention based on his potential as he stood 6'3 and weighed 190 pounds. When the researcher met Ronny, he received an offer from West Virginia University. Maxx was the starting junior Running Back, who was undersize but one the best runners in the WCAC. Maxx also had a high GPA, placing him on the radar for Princeton's football program. Because of his undersize stature, Maxx embraced the dawg narrative produced in the weight room. Nipsey, also undersized, was an 1st all conference Defensive End with 13 sacks from the previous season. Nipsey was an intelligent player, but lacked the determination needed for his coaches and peers to take him serious about football. The researcher believed Nipsey lacked some of the "dawg" like characteristics the coaches were looking for, making Nipsey the topic of discuss at the conclusion of most workout sessions. Nipsey knew he was undersized but wanted to compete on a Division I level, but he had failed to garner any true national recruiting momentum. Jabari was a sophomore Offensive Lineman, and he was very reserved, often lacking the confidence to excel in workouts. Still, Jabari was receiving national recruiting attention as he stood 6'4 and weighed 340 pounds. Kwame was the last person to be interviewed and also had the most interesting journey to the PFC. Kwame was 6'4 and weighed 290 pounds, which was a major reason for why he was here in the US. Kwame was from the Congo and had only been in the US for five months prior to his interview. Kwame had never played American Football, but without a GPA and playing history, had already went on four unofficial visits to college football programs, with the University of Virginia and West Virginia University offering him full athletic scholarships. To summarize, all of the participants who engaged in interviews during the

study brought unique backgrounds to their own journey as an athlete, making their biographical information important as the stories they tell.

4.4 NARRATIVE THEMES

The current study was guided by the aims of applying a narrative inquiry approach to (a) delineate how athletic identity, roles, and responsibilities were symbolically interpreted within and through social institutions, personal interactions, and the historical context of participants' lived experiences (Ezzy, 1998), and (b) interpret narrative construction of a salient athletic identity, along with pre-collegiate hyper-devotion to an athletic role set, contribute to a lack of academic and non-athletic social development. Specifically, the researcher constructed narrative themes guided by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional approach to data analysis that structures narrative themes by observing personal and social interaction, along with the time and setting in which such interactions occur. Therefore, while applying an interactional-performative narrative approach to narrative construction of lived experiences (Carless & Douglas, 2012, 2013; Riessman, 2005), the researcher and participants were able to co-construct that their athletic identity was constructed by experiences consisting of the following narratives: (a) youth football as an early interactional-performative narrative, (b) athletics over academics narrative, (c) pre-exposure to professionalism of sport narrative, (d) and social media celebrity narrative.

4.5 YOUTH FOOTBALL: AN EARLY PERFORMANCE NARRATIVE

Within the sample, all participants displayed markers for salient athletic identification. Of the four constructs included within athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993), exclusivity, self-identity, and social-identity were constituted by an interactional-

performative narrative of early athletic participation. A performance narrative has been defined as a scene or event where an athlete experiences resulting in pain associated with losing or excitement from winning (Carless & Douglas, 2012; Franck & Stambulova, 2019). Within this performance includes an interactional component of narrative in which the athlete interacts with other people. Therefore, participants explained how interactional-performances of youth football participation were the breeding ground for athletic identity.

The first narrative theme was determined by asking study participants to recall the earliest moment in their playing career, in which the participant felt they belonged on a football field. For Lucky, a skilled junior wide receiver, he detailed this moment of violence during a youth football game as he stated:

Uh, I played defensive end for Beacon House, it was this one play in the championship where I came around the back side and the quarterback was rolling out and then he wanted comeback up through the gap and I spilt his wig. It was there when I was like damn, I can really do this shit.

This sentiment was echoed from study participants, as they discussed the feelings associated with making plays at a very young age. The interactional component of the interactional-performative narrative was highlighted as Ronny, a highly recruited tight end discussed how celebration from his teammates and family members shaped his athletic identity at 11-years-old, when he answered the same question with the following answer:

I want to say when I was 11, I was named the MVP for my little league team when I caught two touchdowns in a game. It was exciting because everyone was

sweating me, saying things like go Ronny, you are really good Ronny, you the man! I started feeling myself, I really started to like that feeling.

In addition, when he was 10-years-old, Thomas could vividly remember earning his first “pancake”, a technique sound block eliminating a defensive player, which sent the opposing player to the hospital, as he described the following:

I was like, Jesus! I actually caused pain. I pancaked somebody, cool, but to send someone to hospital, I was like ok, I got it, I got a pancake, this was football!

Such instances displayed how social and self-identity were developed through nuance connections with friends and other members of their community. Exclusivity was apparent as early as the age of nine, as Ronny was recruited from a rival youth football team to another, an early introduction to viewing himself as an athlete. Exclusivity was also present during their early playing career as all study participants were recruited to play football at PFC, receiving athletic scholarships and financial aid. Furthermore, study participants were able to recall when they got their first taste of athletic superiority. Occurring early in their playing careers, events consisting of blocks, sacks, and scoring touchdowns constructed an interactional-performative narrative of athletic identity centered around athletic participation.

4.6 ATHLETICS OVER ACADEMICS NARRATIVE

Previously, scholars have determined that salient athletic identification can influence academic achievement, causing an unrealistic juggling act of athletics and academics for college-athletes (Beamon, 2008; Huml & Foster, 2017; Martin et al., 2010; Singer, 2008). The current study proved that high school athletes also had challenges negotiating their athletic and academic responsibilities as six of nine study participants

earned a GPA lower than 3.0. Players having low GPAs was alarming, as coaches and players both suggested the athletic environment encouraged academic achievement, presenting a façade to the reality experienced by study participants. Through participant observation, the researcher was able to experience lack of attentiveness concerning academic achievement among the football team but observing only did not construct the whole narrative around low GPAs.

To develop a holistic understanding of low GPAs and the academic climate among the football program, the researcher asked participants about their transition to high school. Specifically, the researcher wanted to understand if the players experienced in conflicting messages concerning their athletic and academic responsibilities while making the transition from middle school and youth football to playing football in a secondary educational setting. When discussing this topic seven participants suggested their low grades were due to increased commitment to their athletic responsibilities, leading participants to underestimating the needed time to manage their academic responsibilities. Participants suggested that they believed if they mastered their athletic responsibilities as freshman football players, they would have time to improve their grades. Many athletes learned, making this decision would put them at a disadvantage as colleges and universities were reluctant to offer them scholarships because of low GPAs. Thomas stated his grades have adversely affected how colleges and universities approach his recruiting process. Citing his lack of academic performance during his first two years of high school, Thomas who stood 6'4, discussed how it hurt when a college coach said the following to him during a workout session:

We were lifting weights and the coach looked at my transcript and he said ‘I don’t even want to watch your film. I don’t want to look at anything else. You don’t got to lift another weight, but I can’t offer you because of your grades.’

Thomas indicated that his low grades were due to the juggling act of being a young football player at PFC. Thomas believed his time management skills were insufficient, faced with making the decision between using his time to survive on the football field or in the classroom, ultimately causing him to attend summer school for two years in a row.

Like Thomas, participants chronicled how they prioritize their athletics over academics as many players traveled to school via public transportation causing athletes to wake up early and travel home late, attending mandatory workout sessions and practices keeping them at school later than majority of the general student body, faculty, and staff, and receiving outside athletic training to increase their playing capabilities. Five participants describe attending outside training sessions with a local trainer named Monster Maker, an occurrence that will be discussed later in this chapter. Nevertheless, Snupe a four-star offensive lineman (see www.247sports.com), discusses his daily schedule consisting of early wake up times and long distant travel from neighboring Capitol Heights, Maryland, as he states:

I get up at 6:30 to get to school by 7:55. Then I have to sit in study hall from 2:45 to 4:00, then go to practice for two hours. Even in the off season, I see Monster Maker on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, which puts me at home around 10:30 11:00.

This is a substantial challenge for an adolescent navigating a 14-hour day to attend a school to play football. The athletic-academic dilemma is evident when Thomas details

how his academic challenges are due to time management and having to make the decision to eat dinner and shower, rather than complete homework after a long 10 to 14-hour day:

Like physically sometimes you might just say fuck it. You can't do all of your work in study hall. Our study is only an hour, trust me you can't do all your work within one hour of study hall. By time you get out of practice around 6:30, your body is killed, you get home depending if you live in DC or Maryland, between 30 minutes to an hour or more. Shit, I'm in the house at 7:00, eating and showering by 8:00, and by then my body is tired. So, during the season I can't stay up to do my homework. I even go to sleep during my classes, which is even worse.

Early in their high school playing career, participants were forced to make a pivotal decision to prioritize their athletic pursuits over their education. According to Adler and Adler (1991) and Kidd et al. (2018), such prioritization is the process of athletes moving their athletic roles and responsibilities to the top of the hierarchy of salience. Even for Maxx, an undersized running back, the juggling was beginning to become a challenge. In contrast to other participants, Maxx held a 3.7 GPA, and stated he was taking Advanced Placement (AP) classes complicating his balancing act of being a student and athlete. The athletics over academic's narrative was encouraged by various interactions experienced by the participants. Upon enrolling in PFC, participants were introduced to the narrative of prioritizing their athletics over academics, constructing salient athletic identification and its influence on athletic enrichment.

4.7 PRE-EXPOSURE TO PROFESSIONALISM OF SPORT NARRATIVE

Vissek and Watson (2005) examined professionalization of attitudes of youth, college, and professional Hockey players, and results suggested that as an athlete matriculates through level of play, he adopts a professional approach to sport participation. Particularly within competitive sport, the longer a person has been playing a sport, there is an increase in their professional attitudes and approaches to sport participation (Vissek & Watson, 2005). Webb (1969) suggested the professionalization of an athlete's attitude and approach to sport participation, was indicative of the athletes desire to win, discarding opportunities to increase skill set or technique. The professionalism narrative of the football program was evident as study participants were intensely focused on winning the prize of becoming a big-time college or NFL football player.

For participants, they discussed the professional nature of playing football at PFC. In many complex ways, players prescribe to the "get the job done" rhetoric from coaches during off season workouts. Pre-exposure to professionalism in sport was apparent as Brian discussed how not completing the job or task of playing college football would break him, as he explained to the researcher:

Playing little league was fun, playing at a good high school football team was a big deal. Going to college was a big deal and going to the NFL is a big deal. I feel like I could have done more with my opportunities, but not getting the job done would break me.

Brian explains that his professional opportunity was diminished because he was not able to perform on the field to the best of his abilities. Kwame, who recently migrated to the US from the Congo, confirms professionalism of the football environment suggesting his motivation for migration to the US was attached the opportunity of playing Division I football, leading to a potential NFL career, as he states:

My motivation? I want to be a great football player for myself and my country, so I need to get in the league and prove that African people can do some things right. I definitely want to get to the league.

Making it to the league was a common goal for study participants as Lucky suggested his professional approach to football was because of the following:

I'm doing all of this to get to the league. Of course, I want to get college paid for but, pubbing my highlight tape on twitter, or improving my personal brand on social media, is all an end goal of making it to the league.

The obsession with making it the NFL was possessed by majority of the study participants. Along with this obsession was the understanding of the outside dedication needed to fulfill their athletic aspirations. Five participants discussed receiving outside training sessions from a local trainer known for handling the region's top football talent. The participants referred to the trainer as "Monster Maker", a name that was congruent with the savage nature of the weight room. Participants understood that for them to make it the next level, outside training was needed to separate them from the pack. Snape, the top recruit included in the sample, attributed much of his success to the training he received from Monster Maker. Training with Monster Maker continued the narrative of pre-exposure to professionalism of sport, as many of his clients attend top football

programs including University of Alabama – Tuscaloosa, University of Kentucky, and University of Maryland. Therefore, pre-exposure to professionalized attitudes was encouraged and facilitated through the school and surrounding communities, further cementing salient athletic identification.

4.8 SOCIAL MEDIA CELEBRITY NARRATIVE

As previously mentioned, through participant observation, social media presence facilitated salient athletic identity. The narrative of being active social media celebrity on sites such as Twitter and Instagram, posting highlight films and workout pictures constructed how the study participants viewed themselves. In 2016, the NCAA changed a rule allowing officials from college football programs to interact with recruits via social media (Elliot & Kirshner, 2016). Specifically, coaches were now allowed to retweet, like, favorite, or respond to a recruit's tweet. In addition, coaches were now allowed to send private messages to recruits via Twitter (Elliot & Kirshner, 2016). With Hudl (see www.hudl.com) rising to prominence along with this new rule, access to football recruits moved across uncharted territory making social media ground for inflating the egos of some of the country's top athletes. The inflation of egos and increase of visibility heightened the awareness athletic identity as Ronny explains how social media presence has increased his celebrity among friends, family, and other members of his community:

Sometimes I see people and they say 'You the tall guy from PFC.' Or they may say 'aren't you number 18 from PFC?.' Especially when I have on PFC gear, they put two and two together from my twitter account and my play on the field.

Football here is so small, the world is so small. It makes me feel good when someone tells me they have seen my highlights online or at a game.

Snupe discussed how social media presence as a top football recruit can be difficult to navigate as he noted:

Being a top recruit, it's really like you want to be regular student but people start to look up to you. Really because of social media, you have to watch what you say, what you do on it. You just really gotta watch what you do on twitter and stuff.

Snupe and Ronny highlight the benefits and apprehensions for being a top recruit with social media visibility. Understanding the landscape, social media encouraged a narrative of social media presence centered around getting to the next level. Study participants were intentional on retweeting and posting content of their official recruiting visits and scholarship offers, while putting the accomplishments on a national stage to be viewed by members of their community.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, & CONCLUSION

5.1 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore narrative construction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of Black high school football players living in Washington, D.C. The research process was guided by study aims of understanding and interpreting how narratives (Franck & Stamboluva, 2019) construct salient athletic identification among a sample of adolescent football players. Guided by study aims, the researcher looked to answer the following questions: (1) When engaging with a sample of Black male high school football players, in what ways do personal narratives construct athletic identity? (2) How are phenomena such as salient athletic identification and athletic role engulfment (Kidd et al., 2018) present when exploring the academic enrichment and development of non-athletic social skills of study participants?

Applying Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional approach to data analysis, along with ethnographic participant observation, results suggested the weight room was the scene in which athletic identity was constructed through interactions with coaches and teammates. In this setting, study participants were encouraged to be "Dawgs" by the coaching staff, injecting beastly and savage imagery in the narrative constructing athletic identity (Hawkins, 2017). Through ethnographic semi- and unstructured interviews, the researcher was able to determine salient athletic identification was constructed through the following narratives: (a) youth football as an

early interactional-performative narrative, (b) athletics over academics narrative, (c) pre-exposure to professionalism of sport narrative, (d) and social media celebrity narrative. The results suggest that Black high school football players construct their narratives of athletic identity and participation from early accounts of youth football participation, which is compounded by high school athletic participation pushing academic enrichment and non-athletic social development to participant's periphery. These narratives were joined by the narrative of professionalized attitudes towards high school football and social media celebrity, moving study participants attention and efforts away from academics as majority of participants earned low grades.

This study highlights the persistence of salient athletic identification among Black football players attending a well-regarded private high school. Study participants clearly lack awareness the exploitative undertones that inform their lived experiences, including: exchange of labor for grant-in-aid wages (Southall & Weiler, 2014), racialized experiences of Black football players (Hawkins, 2010), and cautionary tales of African migrant laborers (Hawkins, 1999).

While research setting was a high school with an excellent academic profile, salient athletic identification was widespread among study participants. According to the school's profile, it is a "Catholic, college preparatory, and co-educational school" (PFC School Profile 2018-2019, 2019) that emphasizes the importance of college-level academic preparation. The school's profile proclaims that least 98% of its student population matriculate into higher education, while 100% of the 2018 graduating senior class has been accepted into colleges or universities (PFC School Profile 2018-2019,

2019). While PFC touted its students' academic achievement, this study's participants did not reflect such academic success. In fact, many participants discarded academic aspirations, viewing academic responsibilities and tasks as necessary evils that were simply roadblocks to be overcome in order to play football. Deeply engulfed in their athletic role, study participants who go on to play college football will face the same challenges, since persistent salient athletic identification establishes a continuum of commodification for exchanging labor for grant-in-aid (Southall & Weiler, 2014), within high school and college sport.

This study confirms that while players striving for a "scholarship" they are not focused on academic at all. It is apparent even educationally well-regarded high schools serve commodify Black football players who are focused making it to the "league."

Participants prominent identification with their athletic roles and responsibilities remained persistent even within a rigorous and robust academic environment.

When reflecting on the research process and participant's awareness of their own salient athletic identification, the researcher found study participants did not recognize the football program's *conveyor belt* nature. They are unaware that many people beneficiaries of their sport participation. Encouraged by various adult and peer interactions, study participants willingly sacrifice academic success in order to succeed in high school football. Players – unaware of the fragility of their only resilient factor – do not understand they are commodified bodies on a highly competitive football team, who can be easily replaced.

Racialized experiences of study participants did not appear as a dominant narrative within personal and social interactions. Of dominance was the use of "Nigga" in

the weight room setting, being utilized by coaches and players alike. Baldwin (1981, 1984) suggest that Black racial identity is situated in culturally developed and connected relationships with anti-black ideals and institutions. When discussing racial identity of Black males, it is often a discussion of marginalization among their own community and family, and institutional forces such as mass incarceration (Alexander, 2012; Pierre & Mahalik, 2005). Also included in the lived experience of being Black, is the reality of racism and its affects one's quality of life (Viner et al., 2012). Essed (1990) suggest that stress stemming from racism is "to live with the threat of racism means planning, almost every day of one's life, how to avoid or defend oneself against discrimination" (p. 260). In a broad sense, the daily encounters with racism experienced by Black men, proves to be problematic when attempting to paint a picture of life success. This fight for a successful idea of a successful life is what Edwards (1979, 2000) suggest is driving Black youth into precarious athletic predicaments, positioning Black male youth in another position of marginalization.

The recognition of racism, racial identity, and its connected with athletic participation was discussed by Lucky as described his position as a young Black male who plays football. Lucky suggest the following:

As a Black man I think people are scared of me, I'm educated, I can play sport, I'm good at this sport, I wanna be successful. But being Black puts me at a disadvantage because if I want to work in a regular work setting like an office, they are gonna look at you different or judge you.

Intersectionality of race and athletic participation was apparent as Lucky suggested that his position as a football player assisted with developing a healthy understanding of his

blackness. Lucky stated that his Black experience would be vastly different if he was not an athlete. This declaration could be viewed as Lucky's connection to the anti-white social representation of playing football, a resistance to whiteness and an effort to strength his racial identity (Baldwin, 1984). The current study was unable to construct narratives of race and sport, but a follow up study should be conducted to understand how race is an active competent of narrative construction of salient athletic identification.

In addition to racialized experiences, Kwame's journey to PFC should serve as a depiction of the current state of high school migration patterns, and a cautionary tale of institutional logics (Southall & Staurowsky, 2013) motivating secondary education institutions and their athletic programs. In February 2019, Kwame migrated to the US from Kinshasa, Congo to play football. Kwame was brought to the PFC's football program from a handler, who Kwame called his uncle. During Kwame's interview, he would refer to this person as his sponsor, but would later call the same man his uncle towards the end of questioning. When Kwame first enrolled in the school, he had no academic record, student identification number, class registration, or history playing American Football. Kwame also disclosed that he was unfamiliar with the English language, teaching himself conversational English by watching YouTube videos. Quickly, the researcher understood that Kwame who stood 6'4, weighing 290 pounds was here to play football because he lacked the skills to read and write the English language even on a secondary education level.

Kwame's challenges with the English language were clear during his interview, as the researcher had to repeat many of his questions in addition to using non-verbal body language to express what questions were asking. Even with this disconnect, Kwame who

somehow had already received two scholarship offers without athletic and academic history, could still express his desire to be in the US to play football for an opportunity to play in the NFL. The researcher found this alarming, that a person who was only in the US for three months, could drink the metaphorical *Kool-Aid* of making it to “da league” without any apprehension. If language was not a barrier, the researcher would have asked Kwame, how did he come to develop such a salient athletic identity when discussing football? Was his desire to play NFL, a concoction of media imagery and coaching from his handler or uncle? Or how did he even come to the journey of migrating to the US for sport at the pivotal age of 17?

Intersection of race, globalization, and sport were all represented within these two scenarios. Particularly, athletic identity was the common factor between the two players, with athletic identity serving as a sociocultural resilience factor to be a young Black male in Washington, DC, and the driving force for another player to leave his home continent in search of a better life. Both scenarios, show two individuals in precarious life situations, looking for safe and comfortable narratives of their existence.

5.2 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Theoretical implications of the current study are this study answered the scholarly call to apply narrative inquiry to the sport literature landscape (Smith, 2010; Smith & Sparks, 2009), as well as this study presented needed exploration of secondary education research settings. Smith (2010) has encouraged sport scholars to apply narrative inquiry to sport studies to illuminate the cultural nuances and humanistic nature of knowledge creation. The current study assisted with pushing the trend of qualitative research in sport spaces, providing an in-depth application of narrative inquiry. Based on Cooper’s (2014)

suggestion of using qualitative methods when investigating experiences of Black male athletes, the current study provided theoretical and analytical justification for his premise. In addition, the current study provided an in-depth exploration of athletic identity development in a secondary education research setting. Previous research demonstrates the scarcity of Black high school athletes (Sabo et al., 1999; Weichman & Williams, 1997), but it is the intention of this study to assist with bridging the literary gap of understand such a unique population. Black voices deserve constant examination and liberation as we see issues concerning their athletic remaining persistent since the 21st century (Edwards, 1979, 2000; Gaston, 1986; Harris, 1996; Harrison, 1998).

Since the current study's results are not generalizable, applying the current methodological approach to other research opportunities is important to provide a more complete understanding of athletic identity and narrative construction among high school athletes. Consequently, similar studies should be conducted in a wide variety of secondary-education settings, including middle and upper socioeconomic settings, large high schools, rural schools, and majority White high schools.

In addition to conducting studies in a variety research setting, researchers should investigate narrative construction in other sport team settings, such as basketball, or track and field, tennis, golf. Future studies should seek to determine the extent of salient athletic identity among female and transgendered athletes as well. Questions concerning athletic identity of Transgender athletes should explore the fluidity of gender identity and its relationship to their athletic-self (Gray, Crandall, & Tongsri, 2018).

Lastly, the current study did not examine socializing agents such as parents and coaches regarding participant's athletic identity development. While operating as a

participant observer, the researcher was exposed to the coaches' role in facilitating salient athletic identity through the use of "beastly and savage" metaphors. Regarding interviews, participants would mention coaches who were important to their athletic careers, providing motivation for further examination of coaches and their own athletic identity and role engulfment. Future studies should seek to uncover the extent to which coaches who are former players are transmitting their own personal athletic identity and role engulfment to a new generation of football players.

In addition, research into parents as socializing agents who encourage salient athletic identity acquisition among players should be conducted. While parents have been the subject of mainstream media examination (e.g., Friday Night Tykes), systematic examination of parents as socializing agents is an area that is ripe for future investigation.

5.3 STUDY LIMITATIONS

Limitations to the current study included time to complete the research process, interviewer fatigue, and the researcher's ability to travel throughout the course of the project. The researcher completed interviews with nine participants, while also serving as a participant observer. This approach to data collection wore on the researcher's fatigue, a challenge the researcher did not consider prior to submitting the IRB protocol to conduct the study. The data collection process also included constant journaling along with other techniques to ensure the researcher was reflexive about his own subjectivity. Also, the travel schedule needed to complete the research process was difficult as the researcher lived in another state, causing him to have to plan around other responsibilities. Some trips were cut short as the researcher attended the school when they either had assemblies, or recess.

5.4 CONCLUSION

In an effort to understand why Black boys love being athletes, the current study highlights that for many Black boys, early introduction to the game of football has an addicting effect on how they view sport participation. Participants in the sample, constructed their livelihoods as athletes, with other components of their lives falling by the waist side. Majority of the study participants will fail to reach the NFL, causing concern to the holistic development of football players as young men. Regarding Black men, there should some caution when pushing a generation of black youth in the silo of athletic participation. It has been 20 years since Edwards (2000) provided his thoughts on the Black athlete at the turn of the 21st century. Black athletes are still dealing with hyper-socialization with sport, particular with sport and its connection their self-worth and masculinity. The future looks vastly different than the past as athletes now have a new and improve method of hyper-socialization in the form of social media. Ultimately, this study should serve as launching point for future research to examine how social media induces the athletic superiority complex among high school athletes.

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