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## **“The Lifeblood of College Sports”: The NCAA’s Dominant Institutional Logic and the Byproducts of an (Over)emphasis on Recruiting**

Chris Corr

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“THE LIFEBLOOD OF COLLEGE SPORTS”: THE NCAA’S DOMINANT  
INSTITUTIONAL LOGIC AND THE BYPRODUCTS OF AN (OVER)EMPHASIS ON  
RECRUITING

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## DEDICATION

To my wonderful wife, thank you for your unceasing support of my dreams and our family. And thank you to my loving parents, who instilled in me the value of education, laughter, and character.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Southall for his acceptance, guidance, and friendship. I can't imagine being where I am today without you. I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Ballouli, Dr. Nagel, Dr. Gillentine, and Dr. Mihalik for their thoughtful conversations and mentorship. I would also like to thank Dr. Anders for sharing her expertise and passion for social justice. Thank you to all of you for the impact you have had on my life.

## ABSTRACT

In *big-time* college football, successful recruiting is the foundation on which winning programs stand. Power-5 football and men's basketball operate under a dominant institutional logic that values generating revenue above all else. Winning generates revenue and, accordingly, Power-5 stakeholders are often engulfed in their unique athletic roles. The system propagates adherence to a singular *focus* that emphasizes winning and revenue generation. This dominant institutional logic governing big-time college football has been dubbed *jock capitalism* (Southall & Nagel, 2009). While prominent theorists have analyzed college sports through an institutional logic perspective, a systematic examination of the Power-5 football recruiting process has not been conducted to this point. The three parts of this dissertation aimed to examine components of the college football recruiting process through the primary framework of Power-5 football's dominant institutional logic. Findings reveal that athletic role engulfment and racially tasked disparate roles have been *institutionalized* within Southeastern Conference (SEC) football; proliferated by institutional actors (e.g. recruiters and coaches) and adhered to by recruits and players. In the SEC, the emphasis placed on winning football games directly reflects an institutional jock capitalism logic.

## PREFACE

From 2012 to 2018, I worked in various roles in the Southeastern Conference (SEC). I was exposed to the *business* of college sports and inundated with National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) language and ideology. While working in football recruiting I propagated this ideology, indoctrinating countless recruits and employees into the NCAA college-sport hegemony. Just as I did, college athletes, employees, fans and other stakeholders grow up cheering on the NCAA's collegiate model, accepting societal norms that perpetuate the current system. Having indoctrinated countless recruits and employees, I experienced firsthand an environment replete with academic dysfunction, role engulfment, and enabling behaviors. Within the institutional field of Power-5 athletics, I was expected to accept morally and ethically questionable practices as *part of the business*. Subsequently, the following studies that comprise this dissertation were developed sequentially, with the first study informing the second, while the third study was informed by both previous studies. In addition to all the studies being interconnected, they also all had their genesis in the question whose answer led me to leave the college football recruiting profession; *Does college football recruiting really benefit the recruits?*

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## LIST OF SYMBOLS

$n$	The total number of observations within a given sample
$M$	Average value of grouped findings.
$p$	Level of significance within statistical test.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	American Athletic Conference
ACC	Atlantic Coast Conference
ACS	American Community Survey
AFCA	American Football Coaches Association
AGG	Adjusted Graduation Gap
AP	Associated Press
APR	Academic Progress Rate
Big-10	Big Ten Conference
Big XII	Big XII Conference
CCA	College Commissioners Association
CFP	College Football Playoff
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CSRI	College Sport Research Institute
C-USA	Conference USA
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FBS	Football Bowl Subdivision
FGR	Federal Graduation Rate
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
GA	Graduate Assistant
GIA	Grant-in-Aid

GPA .....	Grade Point Average
GSR .....	Graduation Success Rate
HBCUs .....	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
MAC .....	Mid-American Conference
MANOVA .....	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
MWC .....	Mountain West Conference
NCAA .....	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NCSA .....	Next College Student Athlete
NFL .....	National Football League
NLI .....	National Letter of Intent
PAC-12 .....	Pacific-12 Conference
PSA .....	Prospective Student-Athlete
PWI .....	Predominantly White Institution
SEC .....	Southeastern Conference
Sun Belt .....	Sun Belt Conference

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2018, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) made significant changes to the manner which college athletes can transfer institutions (G. Johnson, 2019). “The transfer portal” has altered the landscape of college athletics by removing transfer and eligibility barriers (Dodd, 2019). Nowhere has the effect of the transfer portal been greater than in Division I football. During the 2018-2019 academic year, nearly 10,000 college athletes from Division I institutions entered their names in the transfer portal. Football players accounted for 25% of these transfers (G. Johnson, 2019). This 25% represents an increase of about 1,000 Division I football players’ intention to transfer from the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years; the two academic years prior to the implementation of the transfer portal (NCAA, 2019a). In addition to the implementation of the transfer portal, the NCAA adopted a one-time transfer exemption rule in April 2021. Previously, college athletes were prohibited from participating in athletic competition for one academic year upon transferring (Dellenger, 2021). The one-time exemption allows college athletes to transfer institutions once without having to sit out from competition for any amount of time (Auerbach, 2021). Some college football coaches have likened the transfer portal and transfer exemptions to National Football League (NFL) free agency where a market is created by multiple teams *bidding* for the services of players (Caron, 2019; Costello, 2021; Vrentas, 2021). Whereas in the NFL the

market created by free agency can lead to lucrative contracts, in college football the transfer market bears no financial ramifications on the athlete.

The easing of restrictions on college athlete transfers and recent litigation on college athlete compensation heard by the United States Supreme Court (*Alston v. NCAA*, 2020) illustrate the manner in which college sports are changing. While the merits of simplifying the transfer process and allowing college athletes the freedom to transfer in a manner consistent with traditional students has been a byproduct of the implementation of the transfer portal (and remains an important dialogue that requires continued examination and revision [Dodd, 2018; 2019; Higgins, 2019]), the reasoning behind football players' decisions to transfer has received insufficient examination. Traditional students tend to transfer due to academic reasons (Li, 2010), college athletes tend to transfer for athletics reasons; primarily, when the expectation before attending an institution doesn't meet the experience once enrolled (NCAA, 2016). Given the disconnect between the experience as a recruit and as a college athlete, an examination of the elements that comprise the recruiting process is merited.

College athletics recruiting is described by the NCAA as the *lifeblood* of college sports (NCAA, n.d., para. 1). Recruiting in college football is a major industry that can carry multi-million-dollar ramifications for athletic departments and coaches. During the 2017-2018 academic year, 62 college football programs spent over a million dollars on recruiting alone (Ching, 2018). College football coaches are compelled to make large financial investments in recruiting due to the effect that successful recruiting can have on job retention (Maxcy, 2013). Successful recruiting can help save a coach's job in a volatile field where 11% of NCAA Division I head football coaches are fired each year



(Daughters, 2013). Additionally, college athletic departments make the investment in football recruiting due to the relationship between recruiting success and team success (e.g. winning championships) (Caro, 2012; Caro & Benton, 2012). The monetary benefits that accrue to athletic departments with *successful* (i.e. winning) football programs make the investment in football recruiting a worthwhile risk. The University of Alabama for instance, has seen expenses for the football program rise by over 75% since head coach Nick Saban's hiring in 2007 (Casagrande, 2016). In 2019, Alabama football spent \$2.6 million on recruiting; up 30% from 2015 (Casagrande, 2020). The investment, however, has paid off with 9 top-ranked recruiting class and 6 national championships in Saban's 14-years as head coach. Alabama's athletic department has seen revenue increase from \$64 million in 2008 to \$164 million in 2019 (Casagrande, 2016; 2020).

Alabama's football team accounted for \$106.3 million of the revenue generated by the athletic department in 2019. Of Alabama's 18 other athletic teams, men's basketball was the only team to make money in that year; generating \$66,921 (Casagrande, 2020). Such figures illustrate the dominant institutional logic that major college athletics operate within. Southall & Nagel (2009) coined the term *jock capitalism* to describe the financial enterprise that dictates college athletics under the guise of *amateurism*. *Profit-athletes* are "NCAA college athletes whose estimated market value exceeds the value of NCAA-approved compensation (i.e. grant-in-aid)," and typically consist of athletes in the sports of football and men's basketball (Kidd et al., 2018, p. 116). Profit-athletes are responsible for generating money that in large part funds the entire athletic department, sustaining the operation of all the other athletic teams sponsored by the University (Southall & Weiler, 2014). An unconscious adherence to the

dominant institutional logic of *jock capitalism* ensures that those within major college athletics maintain an unspoken code of silence (Adams et al., 2014; Gutierrez & McLaren, 2012; LoMonte, 2020) while maintaining that “amateur defines the participants, not the enterprise” (Brand, 2006, p. 8).

While studies on college athletics recruiting can be found in the literature, other studies cater towards practice in the areas of recruiting and coach retention (Maxcy, 2013), the relationship between recruiting success and team success (Bergman & Logan, 2016; Caro, 2012; Caro & Benton, 2012; Dronyk-Trosper & Stitzel, 2017; Langelett, 2003; Pitts & Evans, 2016), NCAA regulations and parity between teams (Eckard, 1998; Fizel & Bennett, 1996), geographic recruiting areas (May, 2012; Reimann, 2004), media coverage (Yanity & Edmondson, 2011), and the qualities that comprise a successful recruiter (Magnusen et al., 2011; Magnusen et al., 2014; Treadway et al., 2014). While not attempting to underscore the importance of conducting research with practical ramifications, a theoretical examination of the recruiting process from an institutional standpoint is missing in college athletics recruiting literature.

In college athletics, recruiting informs the decision-making process for which an athlete will sign a National Letter of Intent (NLI) (Bigsby et al., 2017; Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020; Czekanski & Barnhill, 2015; Dumond et al., 2008). The football recruiting process creates an expectation as to what life as an athlete will entail and, as evident by the number of college football players entering the transfer portal, that expectation is not always indicative of the lived college experience (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020; NCAA, 2016). Utilizing institutional logic as a theoretical starting point, this dissertation aims to examine the Power-5 college football recruiting process; with specific regards to

institutional practices (that create expectations [Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020]) and the role of recruiters performing institutional work. The line of research was, by design, systematic in that (1) institutional recruiting practices were examined, (2) the recruiters performing institutional work were examined, and (3) the institutional practices and recruiters performing institutional work were examined utilizing a critical race perspective. While the gap in the literature made the research area appealing, the examination of the recruiting process from an institutional standpoint has potential significance both theoretically and practically. Currently, such an examination may not exist due to the difficulty of penetrating the insider-only collective that is college athletics (Adler & Adler, 1991; Hatteberg, 2018; Southall & Weiler, 2014).

## CHAPTER 2

### SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE RECRUITING OFFICIAL VISITS AND THE MAINTENANCE OF THE INSTITUTION OF POWER-5 COLLEGE SPORT

While all college athletes, their families, and fans of every college sport are emotionally invested in “their” sport, the level of scrutiny and financial investment in recruiting is most pronounced at the NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level, among what have become known as the “Power-5” and “Group of 5” conferences. The Power-5 conferences include the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference (Big-10), Big XII Conference (Big XII), Pacific-12 Conference (PAC-12), and Southeastern Conference (SEC). The Group of 5 conferences include the American Athletic Conference (AAC), Conference USA (C-USA), Mid-American Conference (MAC), Mountain West Conference (MWC), and Sun Belt Conference (Sun Belt).

The apex of college-sport recruiting takes place within Power-5 athletic departments that have budgets that routinely exceed \$100 million. Table 2.1 highlights the ten Power-5 athletic departments with the highest revenues and expenses. Within the Power-5 institutional field, football and men’s basketball are the sports that provide almost all athletic department revenues. Much of the revenues are dispersed to athletic departments from Power-5 conference media rights (See Table 2.2).

There are numerous recruiting websites that produce recruiting news 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. Sports and entertainment networks (e.g., ESPN, NBCSN, and Fox

Sports) devote hours of programming prior to the various “National Signing Days.” Two prominent recruiting websites include the “official” National Letter of Intent ([nationalletter.org](http://nationalletter.org)), jointly administered by the Collegiate Commissioners Association (CCA) and the NCAA and Next College Student Athlete (NCSA) (<https://www.ncsasports.org>), formerly known as the National Collegiate Scouting Association.

Recruiting and signing college athletes is so important that within hours of winning the 2015-16 College Football Playoff (CFP) national championship, Smith (2016) noted University of Alabama head football coach Nick Saban was busy contacting recruits hoping to secure commitments. Coaches, players and fans recognize the importance of recruiting, particularly among the Power-5 sports of football, and men’s and women’s basketball. Future players, as young as 14-years of age, are already on fans’ proverbial radar screens. Head and assistant coaches know full well their livelihood depends on successful recruiting (Wood, 2010). In some cases, college coaches are scorned for recruiting failures as much as on-the-field-or-court subpar performances. Athletic directors and college presidents often field questions from fans and members of the media concerning their coaches’ recruiting efforts. In today’s social media environment, fans react to recruits’ posts as real-time indicators of coaches’ recruiting proficiency or deficiency. Increased year-round attention has resulted in a limited amount of “down time” for everyone involved.

In response, in 2004 the NCAA instituted restrictions on campus visits to, “...end the celebrity atmosphere that [had] developed around the recruiting visit” (Hutton, 2004, para. 5). Despite the heightened focus on college sport recruiting and its importance in a

program's success, little is known about the recruiting process beyond anecdotal accounts and portrayals in movies and television shows (Bennett, 2008). Guided by organizational and institutional theories, this study examines the content of Power-5 conference official visit itineraries and compares findings by gender and sport.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Organizational Culture**

NCAA teams, athletic departments, and Power-5 conferences all have an internal set of agreed upon values, which at an individual organizational level Schein (1984) identified as an organization's culture: basic assumptions that have been invented, discussed or developed to address problems or challenges. After these assumptions have worked well enough to be considered valid, they are taught to new members as "...the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 1984, p. 3). These symbolic organizational assumptions and structures rationalize an organization's stated values and guide organizational members' practical day-to-day actions. Since values are aspirational, organizations must also develop and pass on to new members cultural templates as guardrails that have worked in the past, and can be relied upon by members as they face present-day challenges.

At Power-5 team, athletic department, and conference levels, there is an interface in which dominant individual organizational cultures coalesce into an overarching dominant institutional logic, which – in the case of NCAA Power-5 college sport – Southall and Nagel (2009) referred to as "jock capitalism." This institutional structure, which provides stability and meaning (See Figure 2.1), did not develop organically but was created – and has been subsequently maintained and supported – through the shared

efforts and choices of Power-5 team, athletic department and Power-5 conference members. This organizational/institutional structure is not monolithic and homogenous but rather an arrangement in which constant tension exists and negotiation occurs among and between organizational and institutional members.

### **Institutional Theory**

In addition to research utilizing an organizational culture framework, various elements of institutional theory, including: institutionalization, institutional logics, institutional change, and institutional propaganda have been used to examine the macro-dynamics through which large-scale social and economic changes have occurred within the Power-5 college-sport institutional field (Southall & Staurovsky, 2013). Fundamental to any of these processes is a system of institutional values and practices that are “...taken for granted presumably because people are either not consciously aware of, perceive, or question these phenomena” (Woolf et al., 2016, p. 439). As Jepperson (1991) and Woolf et al. (2016) noted, these represented institutional practices are similar to *performance scripts* that institutional members perform almost without thinking. These scripts not only determine acceptable or unacceptable operational means, they also guide the implementation of institutional strategies, routines, and precedents (Southall et al., 2008).

As Meyer and Rowan (1977) discussed, in order to maintain the ceremonial conformity of policies and practices that function as powerful myths and are institutionalized as rationalized concepts of organizational work, organizations adopt formal structures that reflect “...the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of their work activities” (p. 341). These mythological institutional rules tend

to buffer formal structures from the uncertainties that arise between formal structures and actual work activities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

During official visits, which can last no longer than 48-hours, institutions can pay for a prospect's (and up to four family members) transportation to and from campus, lodging, meals, and entertainment (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.4). Throughout the recruiting process, recruiters perform institutional work, through which they articulate to recruits purported institutional structures within which the recruits will live, work and play once they have been accepted as members of the athletic team. Official visits are presented to recruits as an indication of the lived experiences of current team members. Throughout scripted official visits, recruiters communicate mythological ceremonial facades to recruits.

As Scott (2005) noted, the myriad facets of institutional theory provide a context within which to investigate an institutional field. Institutional actors operate within these "rationalized" systems in pursuit of specified goals. In addition, these models of rationality are cultural systems "...constructed to represent appropriate methods for pursuing [institutional goals] or purposes" (Scott, 2005, p. 5). Consistently, institutional theorists (e.g., Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Nite et al., 2019; Nite & Washington, 2017; Scott, 2005, Southall et al., 2008) have posited that an institution's norms of rationality play a causal role in the creation and maintenance of formal organizational structures and accepted, taken-for-granted facts, which Friedland and Alford (1991) identified as a central or dominant institutional logic. On a macro level, this logic not only guides the development, evaluation and implementation of strategies, but also informs operational procedures and future innovation (Duncan & Brummett, 1991; Friedland & Alford, 1991;



Nelson & Winter, 1982; Washington & Ventresca, 2004). An institution's dominant logic shapes how institutional actors engage in coherent, well-understood, and acceptable activities. In this sense, then, institutions become "encoded in actors' stocks of practical knowledge [that] influence[s] how people communicate, enact power, and determine what behaviors to sanction and reward" (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 98). However, these unquestioned facts (e.g., an institution's logic) may be subject to ongoing dissonance, or – over time – the institutional field may be disrupted.

### **Dominant Power-5 Institutional Logic**

The dissonance between higher education's espoused educational values and those of

Division I (e.g., Power-5) college athletic departments has been well documented. As far back as 1929 the *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* contended college sport was being ruined by commercialism and detailed abuses that threatened to corrupt college sport's presumed purpose (Hersch, 1990). For almost as long as college sport has existed, a common criticism has been college and universities have sacrificed their academic credibility in the name of athletic success (Hersch, 1990). This value incongruence, as Schroeder (2010) noted, is the result of an institutional field in which athletic departments are – in many ways – independent institutional entities that often develop independent values that are in conflict with those of the universities in which they are housed.

However, college athletic departments are not monolithic organizations with only one set of departmental values or practices. In addition, the institution of NCAA Power-5 college sport is not homogeneous. Numerous investigations (Padilla & Baumer, 1994;

Putler & Wolfe, 1999; Santomier et al., 1980; Schroeder, 2010; Southall et al., 2005) have found competing athletic department priorities, with Southall et al. (2005) and Schroeder (2010) uncovering significant differences between the most crystalized values of Division I and Power-5 revenue and non-revenue, and male and female sport programs, with the most pronounced differences being between football and men's basketball and all other sports. Within FBS Power-5 Conference athletic departments, male revenue-sports constitute a subculture that values winning above almost anything else and feels constrained by many NCAA bylaws (Santomier et al., 1980; Southall et al., 2005). Tellingly, Martin (1992) noted members who feel disconnected from espoused core organizational values either develop a counterculture and engage in organizational deviance or adopt a competing institutional logic that replaces the previously dominant one.

In 1987, Sack developed a college-sport matrix that delineated the various levels of professionalism and commercialism that exist in the institutional field of NCAA college sport. He contended that college sport was to varying degrees both professional and amateur, as well as commercialized and non-commercialized. The various NCAA divisions and conferences epitomized these differentiations (See Figure 2.2). Within this identified institutional field, there is strong evidence that over the past 50 years a commercialized, revenue-seeking institutional logic has become dominant within Power-5 college sport (Southall & Nagel, 2008; Southall et al., 2008; Southall, Southall, & Dwyer, 2009; Southall et al., 2014).

## **Institutional Work**

The creation, maintenance and disruption of an institution's dominant logic does not occur in isolation but is the result of – and reflects – the lived experiences of organizational and institutional actors. Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2011) describe this process as *institutional work*, which occurs within existing institutional structures, while simultaneously producing, reproducing, and transforming the institution. Institutional work offers a framework within which institutional actors live, work, and play, and which delineates their roles, relationships, resources, and routines (Lawrence et al., 2011).

The concept of institutional work moves beyond the static view that embedded institutional norms, structures and logics reproduce regardless of praxis (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and recognizes that influential institutional leaders often actively create, maintain, disrupt and recreate institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Nite & Washington, 2017).

An example of a leader's institutional disruption and recreation of an institution's logic through the introduction, dissemination, and insertion of a performance script into an institution's consciousness was Myles Brand's (former NCAA President) institutional work redefining amateurism as *The Collegiate Model of Athletics*, which isolated the concept of amateurism to college athletes while allowing rampant commercialism and maximization of revenue-producing opportunities (NCAA, 2010). As Southall & Staurowsky (2013) noted, Brand wanted to maintain the collegiate model by engaging in institutional work that legitimized college athletes' exclusion from college sport's jock capitalism.

Almost 10-years later, this institutional script (i.e., the collegiate model) has gained so much traction within the institutional field of NCAA Power-5 college sport that on October 29, 2019, when the NCAA national office disseminated a press release outlining a “ground-breaking” shift in policy toward players’ use of their own name, image and likeness, the collegiate-model institutional script was utilized as a delimiting maintenance tool. The press release positioned the NCAA as supporting college athletes’ rights and embracing “...change to provide the best possible experience for college athletes” (NCAA, 2019c, para. 1). However, the release’s lede still articulated a commercial institutional logic that restricted college athletes’ right to benefit from the use of their name, image and likeness, since any monetization had to occur within the NCAA’s collegiate model (NCAA, 2019c, para. 1). What is left unsaid is that the collegiate model (as embodied in NCAA bylaws) precludes college athletes from receiving: “Any direct or indirect salary, gratuity or comparable compensation” (NCAA, 2019d, Bylaw 12.1.2.1.1.). The use of this script is consistent with the theory of institutional work, since institutional actors who benefit from an institutional script tend to work to maintain their favorable positions (Nite & Washington, 2017).

Within NCAA Power-5 college sport (football and men's basketball in particular) recruiting is impacted by technical forces that shape the “core” functions (e.g., work units, coordinated arrangements and duties of recruiters), as well as institutional forces that reflect more peripheral structures (e.g., managerial and governance systems imposed by the NCAA governance structure) (Scott, 2005). Within Power-5 college sport recruiting, some institutional requirements (e.g., NCAA recruiting-related bylaws) are strongly backed by authoritative agents or effective surveillance systems and sanctions

(e.g., NCAA, conference, and/or athletic department compliance offices). Recruiters' responses to such forces will vary, depending on which elements are predominant: external controls (e.g., surveillance and sanctions) or internalized processes that rely on organizational actors holding deeply set beliefs and assumptions (Scott, 2005). External controls – in the absence of deeply set beliefs – often result in strategic deviant responses (e.g., bending, breaking or ignoring imposed rules) (Santomier et al., 1980; Southall et al., 2005).

This exploratory study drew upon institutional theory and, specifically, institutional work to examine official recruiting visits as examples of institutional maintenance work, since although institutions are considered to be enduring entities, organizational actors must still “work” to maintain and communicate institutional practices to internal and external constituencies. Specifically, if one of a college-sport recruiter's tasks is communicating a team's values to recruits, an official visit communicates to prospective members how institutional members communicate, enact power, and determine what behaviors will be sanctioned or rewarded (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). An official visit's unquestioned, taken-for-granted “facts” reflect particular courses of action developed into performance scripts (i.e., official visit itineraries), which introduce recruits to a team's institutional practices (Jepperson, 1991; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Woolf, et al., 2016).

An important element of an official recruiting visit is determining whether recruits “fit in.” Consistent with Woolf et al. (2016), one of a recruiter's major functions is developing a structure within which recruits are socialized into existing institutional

practices. The maintenance of existent institutional norms depends on recruits being exposed to and coming to embrace and internalize a team's espoused values .

### **Research Context**

In official NCAA parlance, recruiting is "...any solicitation of a prospective student-athlete<sup>1</sup> (PSA) or a PSA's relatives...by an institutional staff member or by a representative of the institution's athletics interests for the purpose of securing the PSA's enrollment and ultimate participation in the institution's intercollegiate athletics program" (NCAA, 2019b Bylaw 13.02.14). While a football or men's basketball program's success (e.g., wins, players "turning pro") is a key factor in many player decisions, visiting campus is an important opportunity for a program to sell itself, and players to find out if they are comfortable with the coaches and other players (Anderson, 2012; Lawrence & Kaburakis, 2008; Letawsky et al., 2003). Power-5 prospects may take five official visits during their senior year but can take no more than one to any individual institution (NCAA, 2019b Bylaw 13.6.2.1; Bylaw 13.6.2.2.1.3).<sup>2</sup>

Broadly, Bylaw 13 of the NCAA D-I Manual outlines recruiting guidelines. There are specific policies related to transportation (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.5), lodging (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.6), entertainment (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.7), complimentary admissions to athletic events (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.7.2), meals (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.7.7), and cash disbursement to student host(s) to cover costs

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<sup>1</sup> Consistent with Staurowsky and Sack (2005), in this manuscript the term "student-athlete" refers to a specific use in an NCAA bylaw (e.g., "prospective student-athlete"). In all other circumstances, the term "college-athlete" is used.

<sup>2</sup> Football recruits may begin taking official visits April 1<sup>st</sup> of their junior year. Men's basketball recruits may take five official visits during their junior year and an additional five during their senior year.

for entertainment (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.7.5) while PSA's and their family are on an official visit. Other than the NCAA Eligibility Center clearing a PSA to take an official visit, there are no bylaws specifically mandating academic-related discussions during an official visit.

Given an official visit's importance and relatively short (48-hour) duration, planning is extremely detailed, with time often allocated down to the minute (Sallee, 2014). In most instances, programs prepare a written itinerary and provide it to a recruit's travel party and current athlete host(s). According to the NCAA's regulatory framework, official-visit activities must be comparable to what a "regular student" might experience on a campus visit, or at least commensurate with what is regularly provided to athletes at that institution (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaws 13.6.6; 13.6.7.7). In addition, the NCAA wants official visits to mimic what a college athlete should expect upon enrollment at an institution. Extant research has found campus visits aid in prospective students' understanding of "the nature of college...[which] may be important to his or her future success...[and being] academically [prepared] for college admission" (Radcliffe & Bos, 2013, p. 137). Lytle (2012) notes college campus visits are intended to provide prospective college students with brief – but realistic – introductions to campus life, which will assist in students' college-selection process.

Another purpose of any college visit is to introduce prospective students to the concept of time management. It is customary for a full-time college student to be enrolled in four-to-five courses, which meet for 12-15 hours per week (Pelletier & Laska, 2012). In addition, it is recommended college students devote two-three hours per week to outside study time for each hour of class time (Nelson, 2010). This equates to 30-45

hours per week for a full-time student enrolled in four-to-five classes. The NCAA (2016) contends college athletes spend 38.5 hours (23% of their week) on academics. According to the same NCAA report, college athletes spend an average of 34 hours (20%) on athletics (NCAA, 2016).

For traditional prospective SEC students (i.e., students not participating in collegiate athletics), campus tours are standardized across the 14-member conference. Each SEC university has an admissions page where students can register for a campus tour. While the campus tour is complementary, expenses related to travel, lodging, dining, and even parking are the responsibility of individual potential students and their family. According to admissions office websites, these campus tours usually last 2-4 hours and consist of an academic information session, and tours of the central part of campus, libraries, dorm rooms/student housing, dining halls/food courts, and recreation facilities. In addition, many individual colleges and departments within SEC universities also offer orientations for admitted students that function as an extension of the university campus visit. These orientations, while specialized to a specific academic discipline, do not include reimbursement for travel, lodging, dining, or parking.

Within this context, this study documented and categorized official-visit itineraries as examples of institutional work performed by members of SEC teams and athletic departments. The following section details the sampling frame, as well as the data-collection and coding procedures.



## **Methodology**

### **Sampling Frame**

The Southeastern Conference (SEC) was chosen as this study's sampling frame due to the conference's position as the premier conference in collegiate athletics (Renkel, 2017). The SEC consists of 14 member institutions and offers a total of 21 sports: 9 men's and 12 women's. While offering the least number of sports among Power-5 conferences, the SEC spends more money on recruiting than any other conference (Ching, 2018). In terms of a financial commitment, the SEC places more of an emphasis on recruiting than any other Power-5 conference. Notably, in 2017-2018, SEC athletic departments had four of the top-five and eight of the top-20 Power-5 recruiting budgets (Ching, 2018).

### **Procedure**

Emails were sent to a designated member of each varsity sport coaching/recruiting staff within each SEC athletic department, requesting official visit itineraries from the year 2018 or 2019. For each institution and team, at least three attempts were made. No responses or acknowledgments of these initial communication attempts (across any sport or program) occurred. After achieving no success in obtaining information via email solicitations, acquiring data through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests was deemed the most efficient strategy, since 13 out of the 14 SEC member universities are public universities (Vanderbilt University is the only private university). Eight athletic departments responded to the FOIA request by providing standard official visit itineraries across multiple sports from 2018 or 2019. Two athletic departments requested payment to complete the FOIA request and three athletic

departments provided no response. It should be noted that the three athletic departments that did not respond operate in states that require residency requirements to fulfill FOIA requests.

## **Data**

A “typical” itinerary consisted of one-to-two pages of chronologically-organized activities with parenthetical location and transportation information. All itineraries presented a detailed schedule outlining official-visit activities. Contact information for coaches, support staff, and athlete hosts was also noted on itineraries.

Within a thematic framework containing three college-athlete roles: 1) athletic, 2) academic, and 3) social (Adler & Adler, 1987; 1991), official-visit itinerary elements were coded and duration of activities (in minutes) calculated. The NCAA classification of recruits as “prospective student-athletes,” purportedly acknowledges the primacy of recruits’ academic role. In addition, acknowledging the importance of allowing recruits to socialize and be entertained NCAA regulations: a) permit travel of up to 30 miles from an institution’s primary campus for the purpose of entertainment while a PSA is on an official visit (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.7.1); b) allow institutions to spend up to \$40 per day, per PSA on activities specifically related to entertainment (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.7.8); and c) permit a student host, or a member of an athletic team at the institution, to be provided with \$40 per day for the purpose of entertaining a PSA during an official visit (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.7.5).

Individual activities were coded by a team of researchers trained in thematic and discourse analysis. An athletic activity was any activity specifically related to potential sport participation (i.e., meeting with an athletic coach, observing practice or an athletic

contest, trying on athletic equipment, and/or taking a tour of a strength and conditioning facility). An academic activity was specifically related to academics (i.e., meeting with a faculty member, observing a college class, and/or taking a tour of an academic facility). Examples of social activities were going to the movies with a host(s), attending a football game<sup>3</sup>, and/or sharing a meal with current team members. It should be noted that across all sports, social activities almost exclusively took place in the evening or at night. Table 2.3 provides representative coding examples.

The number of times a themed-activity was listed, as well as the amount of time dedicated to that activity during a 48-hour official visit was calculated. By summarizing listed instances and minutes dedicated, the amount of institutional work devoted to each theme/role could be determined. The twenty-one individual sports were initially categorized by gender. In addition, based on Sack's (1987) and Southall and Staurowsky's (2013) typologies, sports were separated into three categories related to revenue generation: a) *non-revenue* sports, b) *revenue* sports, and c) *profit* sports. The non-revenue sports in this study typically generate less than \$100,000 of revenue and included: beach volleyball, equestrian, men's and women's golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, rifle, soccer, softball, men's and women's swimming & diving, men's and women's tennis, men's and women's track & field, volleyball, and wrestling. Revenue sports were baseball and women's basketball, teams that may generate substantial revenue but still have expenses that exceed revenues. Power-5 profit sports are football and men's

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<sup>3</sup> For non-football PSA's, attending a football game was coded as a "social" activity. However, a football PSA attending a football game was coded as an "athletic" activity, since a football player would not view the game as a social event but as an athletic event. Therefore, when PSAs attended a sporting event in which they would participate as a college athlete, attending that game was coded as an athletic activity.

basketball, teams that generate more revenue than expenses and fund revenue and non-revenue sports' operations. For some analyses, MANOVA tests compared variables across a sample of eight institutions, allowed inferences across the 14 SEC members.

### **Findings**

In total, 76 official visit itineraries from 21 sports from 2018 or 2019 were collected. Thirty-three itineraries (43%) were from men's sports and 43 (57%) were from women's sports. All itineraries allotted eight-hours each night for sleeping. Sixty-seven of 76 (88%) itineraries listed the official visit's date/day. Fifty-two (78%) official visits took place over the course of a weekend (Friday through Sunday). Baseball ( $n = 4$ ), football ( $n = 7$ ), and gymnastics ( $n = 4$ ) were the only sports to have, exclusively, weekend official visits.

Only 17 of 75<sup>4</sup> (23%) recruits stayed in dormitories with current college athletes during their official visit. Of the 17 who stayed in dormitories, all were from non-revenue sports: (i.e., equestrian, women's golf, gymnastics, rifle, softball, men's swimming & diving, women's swimming & diving, women's tennis, women's volleyball, and wrestling), and only three were male athletes (2 swimming & diving, 1 wrestling). Fifty-seven of 75 recruits (76%) stayed in a hotel during their official visit. While 12 itineraries did not specifically name the hotel, 45 recruits stayed at an identified hotel. According to Google's hotel "class-rating" measure (recognized by *Forbes* as a leading hotel review site [Elliott, 2018]), 14 recruits (31%) stayed at a 4-star hotel<sup>5</sup>, 25 recruits (56%) stayed

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<sup>4</sup> One women's volleyball itinerary did not report where PSA stayed during the official visit.

<sup>5</sup> Baseball, men's basketball (2), women's basketball, football (3), gymnastics, soccer, men's tennis, men's track & field, women's track & field (3).

in a 3-star hotel<sup>6</sup>, and six recruits (13%) stayed in a 2-star hotel<sup>7</sup>. It should be noted that within individual athletic departments, many teams utilized the same hotel for official visits. Of the 14 recruits who stayed at a 4-star hotel, eight were recruits of the same school and represented six different sports.<sup>8</sup> Overall, recruits tended to stay at the highest rated hotel in closest proximity to campus.

Overall, *social* activities were the most prevalent ( $M_{Social} = 8.2$ ) and had the most time allocated ( $M_{Social} = 10$  hours and 35 minutes [10:35]). *Athletic* activities ( $M_{Athletics} = 4.1$ ) were less prevalent and had less time allotted ( $M_{Athletics} = 4:58$ ). *Academic* activities were the least prevalent ( $M_{Academics} = 1.2$ ) ( $M_{Academics} = 1:06$ ).

### **Individual Sports**

Table 2.4 summarizes itinerary content by sport. When individual sports were examined, several noteworthy findings emerge.

Gymnastics ( $M_{Social} = 14:35$ ), football ( $M_{Social} = 14:23$ ), and men's swimming & diving ( $M_{Social} = 13:20$ ) dedicated the most time to social activities, while rifle ( $M_{Social} = 5:30$ ), women's volleyball ( $M_{Social} = 5:00$ ), and women's lacrosse ( $M_{Social} = 4:25$ ) dedicated the least. Rifle ( $M_{Athletics} = 11:00$ ), women's swimming & diving ( $M_{Athletics} = 7:09$ ), and men's basketball ( $M_{Athletics} = 7:06$ ) dedicated the most time to athletics, while softball ( $M_{Athletics} = 3:08$ ), women's golf ( $M_{Athletics} = 2:26$ ), and women's lacrosse ( $M_{Athletics} = 0:00$ ) dedicated the least. Equestrian ( $M_{Academics} = 6:35$ ), rifle ( $M_{Academics} = 6:30$ ), and

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<sup>6</sup> Baseball, women's basketball (2), football (2), men's golf, women's golf (2), gymnastics, lacrosse, soccer (2), softball (3), men's swimming & diving, women's swimming & diving (2), men's tennis, women's tennis (2), men's track & field (3), women's track & field.

<sup>7</sup> Baseball, men's golf (2), soccer, men's track & field, volleyball.

<sup>8</sup> Baseball, football, soccer, men's tennis, men's and women's track & field.

women's lacrosse ( $M_{Academics} = 2:15$ ) dedicated the most time to academics but each sport had only a single itinerary. The gender-combined sports (i.e., women's [ $M_{Academics} = 2:03$ ] and men's track & field [ $M_{Academics} = 2:00$ ]; women's [ $M_{Academics} = 1:24$ ] and men's swimming & diving [ $M_{Academics} = 1:26$ ]) dedicated the most time to academics, while women's volleyball ( $M_{Academics} = :15$ ), baseball ( $M_{Academics} = :15$ ), and women's soccer ( $M_{Academics} = :24$ ) dedicated the least.

## **Gender**

Table 2.5 highlights the gathered data in the context of gender differentiations. While men's sports dedicated 1:42 more time to social activities, time dedicated to athletics was roughly equivalent for men's ( $M_{Athletics} = 4:57$ ) and women's ( $M_{Athletics} = 4:59$ ) sports. However, the number of athletic activities was greater in men's ( $M_{Athletics} = 4.7$ ) than women's sports ( $M_{Athletics} = 3.7$ ). Men's and women's itineraries contained roughly the same number of academic activities ( $M_{Academics} = 1.1$  and  $1.2$ ) but women's sports dedicated 24 minutes more to academics. In addition, multivariate analyses for gender indicated that official visits for male sports dedicated significantly less time to academics than official visits for female sports ( $P < .01$ ).

## **Non-Revenue Sports**

The average amount of time devoted to social activities during non-revenue sport visits was ( $M_{Social} = 10:23$ ). The average number of athletic activities among non-revenue sports was ( $M_{Athletics} = 3.8$ ), spanning ( $M_{Athletics} = 5:02$ ). The average number of athletic and academic activities, as well as time allotted to athletic and academic activities, was nearly identical for male and female non-revenue sports. However, on average, male non-revenue sports dedicated more time ( $M_{Social} = 1:18$ ) to social activities than female non-

revenue sports. The average number of academic activities was ( $M_{Academics} = 1.2$ ), with only 1:16 during an official visit devoted to academics.

### **Revenue Sports**

Revenue sport (baseball [ $n = 5$ ] and women's basketball [ $n = 3$ ]) itineraries contained an average of 8.3 social activities with (on average) 10:55 dedicated to social activities. The average number ( $M_{Athletics} = 4.0$ ) and time ( $M_{Athletics} = 4:17$ ) of revenue-sport athletic activities was lower than both non-revenue and profit sports. Across all groups, academic activities were the least emphasized among revenue sports in both number of activities ( $M_{Academics} = 0.8$ ) and time ( $M_{Academics} = 0:28$ ). Multivariate analyses for sport groupings indicated that revenue sports dedicated significantly less time to academics than non-revenue sports ( $P < .05$ ).

### **Profit Sports**

Football ( $n = 7$ ) and men's basketball ( $n = 4$ ) itineraries contained an average of 10.1 social activities that comprised 12:10 of a visit. Profit sports dedicated ( $M_{Social} = 1:49$ ) more to social activities than revenue or non-revenue sports, and averaged 2.1 more athletics activities and dedicated :10 more to athletics. While football and men's basketball averaged more academic activities ( $M_{Academics} = 1.4$ ), they dedicated ( $M_{Academics} = :29$ ) less time to academics. Multivariate analyses for sport groupings indicated football and men's basketball (i.e., "profit" sports) itineraries involved significantly more social ( $P < .075$ ) and athletic ( $P < .01$ ) activities than revenue sports and non-revenue sports.

### **Discussion**

Within the Southeastern Conference, official visit itineraries function as performance scripts, in which athletic departments' institutional practices are performed

and conveyed to PSAs. In addition, for recruiters and relevant stakeholders, Power-5 institutional scripts establish routines, communicate acceptable or unacceptable levels of operational resource allocation and create precedent for changes to strategic initiatives. While there is evidence of a dominant institutional recruiting logic in the SEC, within athletic departments profit-sport official visit itineraries are similar in both content and emphasis, while also significantly different from revenue and non-revenue sport itineraries. These findings are not surprising, given that the SEC has been described as a “copy-cat” conference, in which each program (e.g., team and athletic department) is well aware of what other programs are doing. Teams within each category (i.e., male/female, non-revenue/revenue/profit) replicated official visit itineraries, which offers evidence of shared institutional work within the Southeastern Conference.

Consistent with previous research (Southall et al., 2005; Schroeder, 2010), while there were no significant differences between itineraries based upon athletic department, this study did find significant differences between profit and non-revenue sport itineraries. Clearly, this study’s findings offer evidence of subcultures within athletic departments, as well as the existence of a dominant institutional logic that recognizes the ascendancy of Power-5 football (and to a lesser extent men’s basketball) within the institutional field of NCAA Power-5 college sport.

This conference-level dominant logic is not surprising, since less-successful departments and teams likely model their strategies and performance scripts after those of more successful (in terms of wins and losses) programs. Given that many SEC coaches have coached at other SEC schools (Levine, 2015), such mimicry or groupthink is to be expected. In 2015, following their third national championship in five seasons, University



of Alabama football staff complained other football programs were copying many of their recruiting materials (Kingsbury, 2015). This study's findings offer evidence recruiters follow similar "game plans" and engage in similar institutional work (Johnson, 2018).

Within the SEC institutional field, official visits introduce recruits to athletic departments' organizational values and the overall institutional practices of SEC members. Activities undertaken during official visits send subtle and not-so-subtle messages about what is important to both recruiters and recruits. Tailoring official visits to what recruits' value sends distinct signals that may be counter to espoused university narratives (e.g., The importance of educational opportunities.). According to the Director of On-Campus Recruiting for a football program in the SEC, a majority of official visits begin on Fridays, since college football games are, traditionally, held on Saturdays. One of the most important activities for all recruits (but especially for football recruits) is an SEC football game (SEC Source 1, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

In addition to SEC football games being almost exclusively Saturday events, many SEC sports feature competitions that occur over the course of a weekend (e.g., SEC baseball and softball series typically occur on Fridays, Saturdays, & Sundays and gymnastics meets are often held on Friday nights). Given these parameters, it is reasonable that non-revenue recruiting staffs would schedule official visits to coincide with home football games. According to an SEC football director of player personnel, while there is some flexibility (based off individual recruits' requests), official visits tend to follow a football-centric schedule (SEC Source 2, personal communication, September 19, 2019).

Recruits tend to not determine on which specific days an official visit will take place. In addition, official visits most often take place on weekends, so recruits miss as little school as possible. However, departments also strategically schedule official visits on weekends, so recruits can experience an SEC gameday environment. Saturday nights are tailor-made opportunities for current athletes to socialize with recruits, creating an expectation of a college athlete's social life. If official visits began in the middle of the week (e.g., Wednesday/Thursday), recruits would be exposed to a much different college experience with a balance of academic/social/athletic activities. While athletic and social official visit activities are important, weekend recruiting trips limit a recruit's exposure to academic activities (e.g., classes, labs, lectures, libraries) and the academic rigors of college life.

Official visits are formal institutional structures that re-present, as Meyer and Rowan (1977) stated, "...the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of their work activities" (p. 341). Power-5 official visits present a mythological portrait of big-time college sport, suppressing and minimizing the academic demands of attending what is – many times – a rigorous academic institution.

During a weekend official visit, recruits experience a campus environment markedly different from a mid-week one. In many ways, official visits are ceremonial façades through which recruiters present a scripted mythological college experience communicating to recruits the importance of social and athletic activities. However, this scripted experience bears little resemblance to the reality of college. While "academics" forms the foundation of the NCAA grant-in-aid system official visits minimize academics while emphasizing social and athletics activities over academics.

Consistent with previous research regarding identified subcultures within Power-5 athletic departments, this study identified competing athletic department priorities (Padilla & Baumer, 1994; Putler & Wolfe, 1999; Santomier et al., 1980; Schroeder, 2010; Southall et al., 2005). While – in order to satisfy NCAA recruiting mandates – all sports adhere to a similar official visit script template, observable differences offer evidence of subcultures within athletic departments. Specifically, revenue and profit sports dedicated more activities to social activities than any other component. In addition, profit sports clearly emphasized athletic and social components, while minimizing academics. While existence is not causation, such minimization is problematic given that Power-5 football and men's basketball players graduate at significantly lower rates than full-time male students (Southall et al., 2015), consume alcohol at higher rates than both the general student body and female athletes (Leichliter et al., 1998; Olthuis et al., 2011), and become engulfed in their glorified athlete role (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1989, 1991; Kidd et al., 2018). Clearly, this study's itineraries are not consistent with the totality of a college athlete's experience. Identifying this emphasis on athletic and social components during official visits should inform future research into the relationship of institutional work (i.e., recruiting) to athletic role engulfment of both Power-5 profit athletes and recruiters. One of the purported tasks of a college recruiter is communicating institutional and departmental values, and appropriate and/or acceptable actions and behaviors to recruits. However, a recruiter's ultimate goal is getting a recruit to sign a NLI and grant-in-aid agreement. Therefore, the emphasis placed on specific components of an official visit reflect the actions Power-5 recruiters deem appropriate to achieve these goals.

A variety of future studies should be conducted in this area. Itineraries in other Power-5 and Group of 5 conferences should be analyzed to determine the extent to which there is an institutional recruiting logic that permeates Power-5 sports and Power-5 profit sports in particular. In addition to content analyses, recruits across a variety of sports should be interviewed to determine specific activities that occurred during their official visits. To determine the degree to which Power-5 recruiters' institutional work is consciously designed to reinforce and support recruits' athletic role engulfment, it is suggested in-depth semi-structured interviews with Power-5 sport recruiters also be undertaken. While such interviews will likely be difficult to arrange, such candid discussions are a necessary adjunct to this study.

As Power-5 college athletes continue to be engulfed in their athletic roles (Kidd et al., 2018), the institutional work of recruiting college athletes reflects the production, reproduction and support for a dominant SEC institutional logic, in which SEC football is the focal point. As Lawrence (2011) noted, institutional workers continually and actively determine and transform the institutional structures within which they live, work, and play. The focus of SEC recruiters on constructing and facilitating athletic and social activities during official visits communicates to recruits the pre-eminent importance of their athletic and social roles. If recruiters are – in fact – cognizant of recruits' role engulfed status, such construction helps meet the primary goal of securing a recruit's commitment. As any good salesperson does, recruiters read and play to recruits' wants, need and desires.

Table 2.1: *Top-Ten Power-5 Athletic Department Revenues-Expenses*

Rank	University	Conference	Total Revenues	Total Expenses
1	Texas	Big XII	\$214,830,647	\$207,022,323
2	Texas A&M	SEC	\$211,960,034	\$146,546,229
3	Ohio State	Big Ten	\$185,409,602	\$173,507,435
4	Michigan	Big Ten	\$185,173,187	\$175,425,392
5	Alabama	SEC	\$174,307,419	\$158,646,962
6	Georgia	SEC	\$157,852,479	\$119,218,908
7	Oklahoma	Big XII	\$155,238,481	\$132,910,780
8	Florida	SEC	\$149,165,475	\$131,789,499
9	LSU	SEC	\$147,744,233	\$131,717,421
10	Auburn	SEC	\$147,511,034	\$132,885,979

*Note.* (Flaherty, 2018, 247sports.com).

Table 2.2: 2019 Power Conference Revenue Distributions

Conference	2019 Distribution	Per-member
Big Ten	\$760 million	\$54.0 million
SEC	\$660 million	\$43.7 million
Big XII	\$374 million	\$34-37 million
Pac-12	\$354 million	\$29.5 million
ACC	\$465 million	\$29.5 million
Annual Revenues	\$2.75 billion	

Table 2.3: Codes Examples & Themes

Code Example	Theme
Equipment Sizing with Head Equipment Manager [name omitted] & Photo Shoot with Sports Information Director [name omitted]	Athletic
Meet with Staff to review Strength and Conditioning plan	Athletic
Observe team shoot-around	Athletic
College of Business. Meeting w/ Professor	Academic
Attend History Class with [name omitted]	Academic
Tour the Academic Center with Academic Advisor, Staff	Academic
Game night with the women's team!	Social
Breakfast at the Hotel with Girls and their families	Social
Walk to [football game]; Recruits on Field [for pregame]	Social

*\*Note.* Codes represent examples taken verbatim from itineraries. Bracketed items indicate names of individuals, universities, or facilities that have been removed to maintain anonymity.

Table 2.4: Sport Findings

Sport	<i>n</i>	Athletic Items	Athletic Time	Academic Items	Academic Times	Social Items	Social Time
Equestrian	1	5.0	6:05	4.0	6:35	8.0	12:55
Rifle	1	4.0	11:00	2.0	6:30	6.0	5:30
Lacrosse	1	1.0	0:00	1.0	2:15	9.0	4:25
Track & Field (Women's)	5	4.0	6:50	1.8	2:03	9.8	10:32
Track & Field (Men's)	5	4.4	5:57	1.8	2:00	8.6	12:28
Swimming & Diving (Men's)	3	5.7	6:06	1.3	1:26	6.7	13:20
Swimming & Diving (Women's)	6	5.5	7:09	1.5	1:24	8.3	10:59
Golf (Women's)	4	2.0	2:26	1.0	1:17	7.5	8:38
Gymnastics	3	3.7	5:50	1.0	1:05	8.3	14:35
Football	7	6.6	3:59	1.7	0:58	11.4	14:23
Basketball (Women's)	3	4.3	4:10	1.3	0:51	11.7	10:48
Tennis (Women's)	4	3.3	5:35	1.3	0:51	7.3	8:48
Softball	5	2.6	3:08	1.2	0:46	8.8	10:37
Tennis (Men's)	4	4.3	4:33	1.0	0:45	7.8	8:05
Wrestling	1	4.0	4:15	1.0	0:30	10.0	11:25
Basketball (Men's)	4	4.8	7:06	0.8	0:26	7.8	8:18
Golf (Men's)	4	2.5	3:41	0.5	0:26	6.5	11:37
Soccer	5	4.8	4:41	0.6	0:24	8.6	10:55
Baseball	5	3.8	4:22	0.4	0:15	6.2	11:00
Volleyball	4	3.5	3:18	0.8	0:15	5.0	5:00



Beach	1	2.0	6:00	0.0	0:00	4.0	8:30
Volleyball							

*\*Note.* Figures represent calculated averages in cases where  $n > 1$ .

Table 2.5: Summary Statistics

Group	<i>n</i>	Athletic Items	Athletic Time	Academic Items	Academic Times	Social Items	Social Time
All Sports	76	4.1	4:58	1.2	1:06	8.2	10:35
Men's Sports	33	4.7	4:57	1.1	0:53	8.2	11:33
Women's Sports	43	3.7	4:59	1.2	1:17	8.2	9:51
Profit Sports	11	5.9	5:07	1.4	0:46	10.1	12:10
Revenue Sports	8	4.0	4:17	0.8	0:28	8.3	10:55
Male Non- Revenue Sports	17	4.1	5:01	1.2	1:09	7.6	11:19
Female Non- Revenue Sports	40	3.7	5:03	1.2	1:19	7.9	10:01

*\*Figures represent calculated averages*

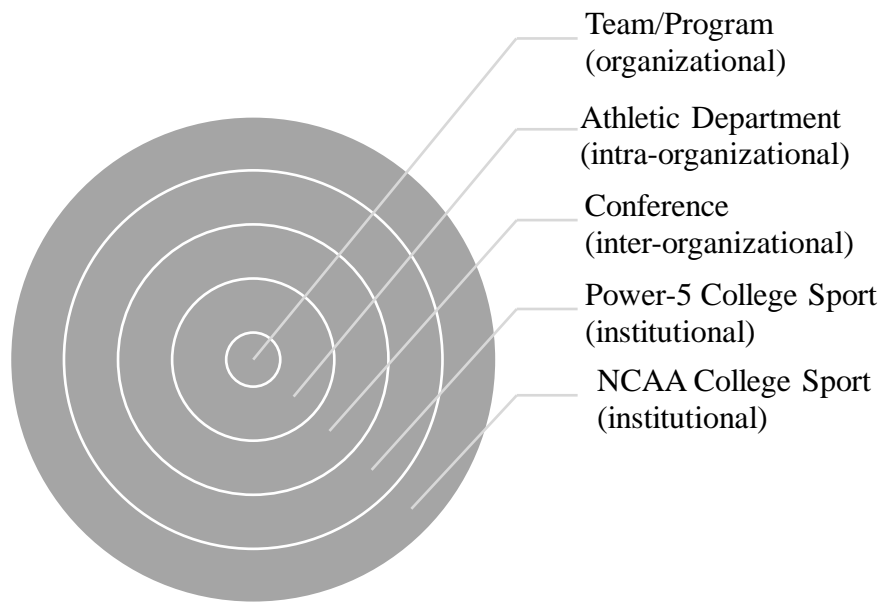


Figure 2.1: College Sport's Organizational and Institutional Layers

	Commercialized	Less Commercialized
Professional Athletic Scholarships	Corporate Model (Power-5, FBS)	“Small Time” Corporate Model (FCS, D-II, D-III)
Amateur No Athletic Scholarships	Ivy Model (Ivy League)	Amateur Model (D-III)

Figure 2.2: Typology of College Athletic Conferences/Divisions (Sack, 1987)

## CHAPTER 3

### SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE FOOTBALL RECRUITING:

#### INSTITUTIONALIZED ROLE ENGULFMENT AMONG RECRUITERS

For the past 30 years, the state of Florida has consistently had the greatest number of high school football players recruited by NCAA Division I programs (NCAA, 2018). A majority of these players have come from South Florida<sup>9</sup> (Underwood, 2019). In fact, Miami-Dade and Broward<sup>10</sup> Counties are two of the most talent *rich* football counties in the United States (Knox & Willis, n.d.). While these counties are football recruiting hotbeds, they are also historically crime-ridden areas (Vassolo, 2018), with Opa-locka, just north of Miami in Miami-Dade County, having “...the most violent crimes per capita of any city in the [United States]” (Garcia-Roberts, 2009, para. 26).

In 2004, Willie Williams was a five-star linebacker from Opa-locka’s Miami Carol City Senior High School and one of the nation’s top college football recruits. Recruiting analysts frequently compared Williams to National Football League (NFL) Hall-of-Famer Lawrence Taylor (Pearlman, 2014). At the request of the *Miami Herald*, Williams agreed to chronicle his “official visits,” becoming one of the first football recruits to give the “outside world” (e.g., college football fans, the media, and the general

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<sup>9</sup> South Florida encompasses a geographic region of Florida consisting of Broward, Miami-Dade, and Monroe Counties (South Florida Regional Planning Council, n.d.).

<sup>10</sup> Broward County is situated contiguously North of Miami-Dade County.

public) an “inside look” at “big-time” football recruiting (Pearlman, 2014). Williams, who lived in poverty in Opa-locka, detailed a recruiting environment markedly different from the “normal” day-to-day reality of many residents of Miami-Dade and Broward counties: “...private jets, police escorts, squads of cheering co-eds and a conveyer belt of steak and lobster tails” (St. John, 2004, para. 4). Williams’ description of ice carvings, expansive meals, and limo rides was dismissed by some as an aberration, or a young man’s boastful exaggeration. However, other observers contended Williams’ experience was – and is – the norm for five-star football recruits (DiMengo, 2014; Jude, 2020). While the NCAA membership was forced to change several bylaws in an attempt to limit the largesse heaped upon recruits such as Williams, official on-campus visits for prospective Power-5 football recruits still include what most people would characterize as lavish activities not typical of the recruitment or on-campus experiences of most college students.

While college recruiting receives extensive media scrutiny, it has received little systematic, critical examination. The NCAA contends on-campus recruiting visits are designed to expose prospective college athletes to academic and social experiences comparable to those of “regular students” (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaws 13.6.6; 13.6.7.7, p. 128). However, a recent analysis of SEC football official visit itineraries (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020) revealed a focus on social, entertainment, and athletic-related activities during official recruiting visits. This focus on non-academic activities is consistent with the hypercommercialized and professionalized nature of Power-5 college sport (Southall et al., 2014; Southall et al., 2015; Southall et al., 2008; Southall, Southall, & Dwyer, 2009).

Previous research has revealed that athletic role engulfment is widespread among Power-5 *profit athletes*.<sup>11</sup> Athletic role engulfment is associated with a variety of negative outcomes among these athletes, including: increased academic dysfunction and lagging graduation rates (Adler & Adler, 1985; Corr et al., 2019; Corr, Eckard, et al., 2020; Snyder 1985; Southall et al., 2015), post-athletic transition difficulties (Kidd et al., 2018), misogynistic and homophobic attitudes (Curry, 1991; Southall et al., 2010; Southall, Nagel, et al., 2009), body-image shaming (Steinfeldt et al., 2011), ignorance of serious injury (Nixon, 1992), and increased alcohol consumption and binge-drinking behaviors (Leichliter et al., 1998; Martens et al., 2006).

This study extends previous research to investigate whether and to what extent there is evidence of institutionalized athletic role engulfment among Power-5 college-football recruiters. While much attention has been focused upon recruits, and the practices implemented to *earn* their commitment, there has been little – if any – systematic examination of the *institutional work* performed by Power-5 football recruiters who construct and maintain the institutional mechanisms (e.g., material practices and symbolic constructions, espoused beliefs, policies & procedures) reflective of a Power-5 football institutional logic. By design, the emphasis during campus visits on social, entertainment, and athletic-related activities – at the exclusion of education-related events – conveys to future institutional members (i.e., recruits) an athletic-focused Power-5 institutional logic. Since recruiters plan, organize and manage the recruiting process, including campus visits, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

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<sup>11</sup> Profit athletes are NCAA college athletes whose estimated market value exceeds the value of NCAA-approved compensation (i.e., NCAA Bylaw 15.02.5 “A full grant-in-aid [GIA] is financial aid that consists of tuition and fees, room and board, and required course-related books.”).

- Consistent with the theory of role engulfment, are SEC football recruiters, who ostensibly have the same three roles within intercollegiate athletics as players (i.e., academic, athletic, and social), engulfed in their athletic “recruiter” role?
- In this athletic role, do SEC football recruiters perform institutional work that constructs, supports and communicates Power-5 football institutional logic?

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Role Engulfment**

Within personal interactions or experiences, actors assume a *role* or *roles* aligned with socially accepted actions and behaviors associated with membership in a specific group (Biddle, 1979, 1986). *Role theory* outlines how an individual’s behavior reflects learned and assumed *role(s)* within a specific social context or setting (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991; Biddle, 1979; Miller & Kerr, 2003). Within this setting, individuals display behavior that is linked to, and reinforced by, other group members. Behavior associated with an assumed role is taught to new members, who learn and replicate such actions (Biddle, 2013). Glorification of a specific role within this context can lead to role dominance (Biddle, 1979, 1986). Role dominance occurs when the rewards of a specific role become *so* great (e.g., over-valued) that it becomes dominant over other roles (Biddle, 1979, 1986, 2013). Consequently, other roles may be abandoned, with an individual becoming engulfed in the now fully dominant role. Within this framework, role dominance, abandonment, and engulfment exist within a reinforcing, relational matrix. Tajfel (1978) noted an individual’s self-identified membership in a social group has value and emotional significance to that individual. In this study’s



context, the social group/institutional setting in which players, recruits and staff members – and specifically recruiters – exist is an SEC football program.

According to the NCAA's *Principle of Amateurism*, participation in college sport "...should be motivated primarily by education and by the physical, mental and social benefits to be derived" (NCAA, 2019b, p. 3). It is important to note the NCAA and its members maintain college sports serves a societally important non-commercial objective: higher education (*Alston v. NCAA*, 2020). In the NCAA's collegiate model, college athletes are asked to maintain "excellence" in at least three disparate roles (i.e., academic, athletic, and social). It is well established that Power-5 college athletes (including SEC football players) are often engulfed in their athletic role (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1987, 1989; 1991; Kidd et al., 2018; Southall et al., 2015). It is theorized that – in part due to institutionalized pressures – SEC football recruiters are engulfed in their athletic (recruiter) role, which often precludes their engaging in meaningful academic endeavors associated with their role as a university employee or social activities unrelated to the *total [football] institution* in which they work (Goffman, 1961; Settles et al., 2002; Southall & Weiler, 2014).

The Power-5 football industry has profound economic and social effects on college campuses, as well as in local communities, states and regions in the United States. However, SEC football members are usually physically and socially isolated from other sports within the athletic department, as well as academic departments across campus (Southall & Weiler, 2014). For a number of reasons (e.g., status associated with recruiting a possible All-American and/or NFL prospect, earning bonuses for recruiting-class rankings and on-the-field success, and promotions within the program), it is

theorized SEC football recruiters become engulfed in their athletic role (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991). When an individual is engulfed in a dominant role, other preexisting roles are often cast aside or abandoned. Such role engulfment is exacerbated by the elevated status of Power-5/SEC football in American and – specifically – Southern culture (Branch, 2011). As former NCAA President Myles Brand noted, “...college sports can be a cultural game changer in the United States” (Wimmer Schwarb, 2018, para. 2). For many fans, SEC football is a cultural tie that binds families, generations, communities, and an entire region (i.e., the Southeast).

Numerous scholars have described Power-5 football and men’s basketball players as commodified entertainers who generate significant revenue for their universities (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). Not surprisingly, the NCAA national office lauds the revenue-generation capacity of these players, noting the revenue produced by NCAA profit-athletes “...translates into non-revenue sport opportunities for the vast majority of those who participate in NCAA sports – annually more than 460,000 young men and women” (NCAA, 2014, para 5). Fortunately, according to Dr. Mark Emmert, NCAA President, “...for these athletes the [college athletic] experience is exactly what it is intended to be: a meaningful extension of the educational process” (NCAA, 2014, para 5). It is the responsibility of SEC football recruiters to identify, recruit and sign talented football players who, through their football skills, in turn generate the revenue that provides athletic and educational opportunities for the hundreds of thousands of young men and women of whom Emmert identifies.

Within this setting, we theorize recruiters, just as profit-athletes, focus on their athletic, revenue-generating role (Adler & Adler, 1989, 1991; Corr, Southall, & Nagel,

2020). This institutionalized athletic role engulfment reflects an *institutional logic* supported and maintained through institutional work performed throughout Power-5 college sport, including athletic departments (e.g., Sports Information/Communications/Public Relations, Development, New and Creative Media, and Marketing), conference offices and conference television networks (e.g., The SEC Network).

### **Institutional Logic Theory**

Within an institutional setting (e.g., Power-5 college sport, SEC football) members' behaviors are produced and reproduced within organizational structures, which serve to rationalize such actions by reference to an established set of material practices and symbolic constructions. This institutional logic is available for elaboration by individuals within the institutional field. Jepperson (1991) described an institutional logic as "the rules of the game" (p.143) that define, mold and shape institutional actors' behaviors, and which are established when informal rules or social patterns become embedded in internal policies and procedures, central authority systems or cultural constructs. Through the communication of these "rules" to new institutional members and relevant stakeholders, the logic propagates itself. Thornton and Ocasio (2008) contend institutional actors often incorporate a dominant logic into everyday decisions and behaviors. As institutional actors become engulfed in a role that has been adopted and deemed acceptable, their role engulfment becomes institutionalized and viewed as not only acceptable but expected and valued. Such engulfment becomes an institutional logic, an established precedent for future advancement (Southall, Southall, & Dwyer, 2009).

The institutional field of college sport has been examined by several theorists (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020; Nite, Ige, & Washington, 2019; Nite, & Washington, 2017; Southall et al., 2014; Southall et al., 2008). Recently, a Power-5 college sport institutional logic has been identified (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020; Nite & Washington, 2017; Southall et al., 2014; Southall et al., 2008), within which Power-5 college recruiters fulfill an institutional role often requiring a 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week commitment. One of a recruiter's primary roles is clearly communicating a team's core values and mythological *ceremonial facades* to recruits (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020).

An institutional logic affects organizational actors' roles, relationships, and routines (Lawrence et al., 2011). Notably, an institutional logic does not arise spontaneously but is the result of institutional work performed by organizational and institutional actors in their assumed roles. Such work occurs within existing institutional structures, and offers a framework that simultaneously produces, reproduces, and transforms an institution's values, as well as the assigned or assumed roles of individual actors (Lawrence et al., 2011). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) noted that influential institutional leaders often actively create, maintain, disrupt and recreate such frameworks. However, while leaders may transform or recreate an institution, it is up to others (in this case, football recruiters) to maintain and/or recreate existing structures, while simultaneously communicating an institutional logic to prospective institutional members (i.e., recruits).

## **Institutional Role Engulfment**

Recruiters' institutional work takes place before, during, and after scripted official visits during which a recruit's expected institutional role is elaborated (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020; Nite et al., 2019). Consistent with role theory, official football recruiting visits provide an institutionalized outline of the dominant role a recruit is expected to assume within the team. Through this process, goals are rationalized and methods for achieving these goals are outlined (Scott, 2005). While athletic departments are – in many ways – independent institutional entities, the same can be said about Power-5 football programs. Given this reality, as Southall et al. (2005) and Schroeder (2010) noted, college athletic departments do not possess a single set of departmental values. As has become clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, within Power-5 athletic departments there are competing priorities, with sports competing with each other for primacy when faced with shrinking revenue streams. The 2020-21 college sport financial crisis – brought on by a pandemic – has exposed long-standing competing department priorities.

Partly as a result of their being the revenue generators upon which the entire college-sport industry depends, Power-5 football and NCAA Division I men's basketball players and staff are members of an organizational subculture within Power-5 athletic departments (Santomier et al., 1980; Southall et al., 2005). Indicative of the need to protect revenue streams, even in the midst of a generational corona-virus pandemic, Power-5 athletic departments have done everything possible to make sure football and men's basketball games are played and televised. In an attempt to return to normal as soon as possible, many departments opened stadiums, recognizing the importance of television audiences seeing fans (even socially distanced ones) in the stands. As members

of Power-5 athletic departments, recruiters work to maintain and support a Power-5 institutional logic that prioritizes football and men's basketball, and encourages players, coaches and staff to become engulfed in their institutionalized roles. Over the past 10-15 years, the competing values (i.e., institutional logics) of revenue and non-revenue programs within Power-5 athletic departments have become apparent (Southall et al., 2005; Southall et al., 2008; Southall, Southall, & Dwyer, 2009; Southall et al., 2014). As was identified nearly 20 years ago, "big-time" (e.g., Power-5) college football and men's basketball programs are – in many fundamental ways – different from all other college sport programs.

The University of Alabama's head football coach, Nick Saban, is an example of an organizational leader whose institutional work is re-creating and replicating an institution's logic through the introduction, dissemination, and insertion of a single organization's performance script across an institution's consciousness. While Alabama football has a long and storied history, Saban has led the Crimson Tide to unprecedented – almost mythical – success. Since 2012, Saban and Alabama's blueprint for success (which includes a coordinated focus on recruiting, strength training, and the use of sports consultants and psychologists) has become the "model" which all SEC football programs seek to replicate. This modeling is an example of *organizational replication* within an institutional field (Nite & Washington, 2017). Within the SEC, emulating *The 'Bama Way* or *The Saban Process* has become standard operating procedure, with all other SEC football programs working to replicate Alabama's "successful" practices and operations. The pursuit of this standard has influenced personnel decisions throughout SEC football. During the 2020 season, an examination of publicly available online media guides

revealed seven of the other 13 SEC football programs employed a director or coordinator of recruiting who has worked under Saban. Such replication is to be expected, given the importance of recruiting and Alabama's record of recruiting success (Caro, 2012; Caro & Benton, 2012). Organizational actors not only seek to replicate organizational practices when transplanted into new locations, but also, often unknowingly, transmit the dominant institutional logic to the new organization (Cullen et al., 2004; Zhou, 2010). Former Saban recruiters attempt to duplicate Alabama recruiting practices, which are part of a taken-for-granted "Alabama" institutional logic. Such *copy-cat* practices are consistent with the theory of institutional work, since institutional actors who benefit from currently accepted institutional scripts tend to work to maintain their favorable positions (Nite & Washington, 2017).

### **Southeastern Conference Football Recruiting**

SEC football recruiting is impacted by technical forces that shape the "core" functions (e.g., work units, coordinated arrangements and duties of recruiters who are "in the trenches"), as well as institutional forces that reflect more peripheral structures (e.g., managerial and governance systems imposed by the NCAA governance structure) (Scott, 2005). Within SEC football recruiting, some institutional requirements (e.g., NCAA recruiting-related bylaws) are strongly backed by authoritative agents or effective surveillance systems and sanctions (e.g., NCAA, Conference, and/or athletic department compliance offices). Recruiters' responses to such forces will vary, depending on which elements are predominant: external controls (e.g., surveillance and sanctions) or internalized processes that rely on organizational actors holding deeply set beliefs and assumptions (Scott, 2005). External controls – in the absence of deeply set beliefs – often

result in strategic deviant responses (e.g., bending, breaking or ignoring imposed rules) (Santomier et al., 1980; Southall et al., 2005).

Corr, Southall, & Nagel (2020) found that during official recruiting visits, organizational actors “work” to maintain and communicate institutional practices to internal and external constituencies. Specifically, if one of a college-sport recruiter’s tasks is communicating a team’s values to recruits, an official visit should include opportunities to let prospective members know how institutional members communicate, enact power, and determine what behaviors will be sanctioned or rewarded (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Within a football program, these unquestioned, taken-for-granted “facts” are reproduced in performance scripts (i.e., official visit itineraries) whose purpose is to introduce recruits to the football program.

Another important element of an official recruiting visit involves recruiters determining whether recruits “fit in.” Consistent with Woolf et al. (2016), recruiters develop and maintain a structure within which recruits are socialized into existing institutional practices. Maintenance and communication of existent institutional norms depends on recruits being exposed to and coming to embrace and internalize existing institutional values communicated by recruiters.

While role engulfment involves an individual assuming one role over another, this choice does not take place in a vacuum. Rather, this role engulfment is institutionalized. The institutional setting in which these choices take place encourages individuals to become engulfed in an institutionally-prescribed dominant athletic role. Their role engulfment depends upon and supports (and is supported by) the behaviors of other institutional actors. It is theorized that by their actions, recruiters – engulfed in their



athletic role – encourage recruits to become engulfed in their athletic role. In this self-replicating and reinforcing institutional setting, the institutional work performed by recruiters reduces recruits’ institutionally-prescribed options to a narrow bandwidth of possibilities, discouraging recruits from exploring or pursuing conflicting roles. While recruiters view recruits as commodities that can help them be successful, recruits see recruiters as gate keepers, who hold the keys to their NFL futures. With both potentially engulfed in their institutionally-prescribed athletic roles, there is little room for deviation. For both recruit and recruiter, career paths and reward systems have been institutionalized and reinforced. The path to success has been clearly marked.

### **Recruiting and Institutionalized Role Engulfment**

In SEC football, recruiting success often has multi-million-dollar ramifications, since great players win championships and help generate significant revenue (Caro, 2012; Kercheval, 2016, Langelett, 2003). As has become apparent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Power-5 athletic departments – including SEC departments – are disproportionately reliant on football to generate merchandising, ticket sales, and television and media rights revenue (McEvoy et al., 2014) that supports non-revenue sport programs and pays coaching and administrative staff salaries. Within this environment, recruiting talented football players is crucial to an athletic department’s overall fiscal success. Not surprisingly, all but three Power-5 football recruiting budgets (see Table 3.1) annually exceed \$1 million (Ching, 2018; Estes, 2019). “During the 2018 fiscal year, public schools in the SEC averaged more than \$1.3 million in football recruiting costs, compared with public schools in the Big 12 (\$961,981), ACC (\$938,424), Big-10 (\$855,437) and PAC-12 (\$708,750)” (Estes, 2019, para. 19). The top-

three recruiting budgets (i.e., Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee), and four out of the top-six (Texas A&M is #6) are all SEC schools (Flaherty, 2019). In addition, SEC programs, on average, expense 30% more than the other Power-5 conferences on football-specific recruiting (Brady et al., 2015). Such expenditures are not surprising given that in 2019, the SEC led the nation in average football game attendance (72,735) (Vitale, 2019). Given that the SEC spends the most of any conference on football-specific recruiting, leads the nation in average attendance, and is historically recognized as the “strongest” football conference, the conference’s emphasis on football is not surprising (Berkes, 2016). This emphasis is reflected in the SEC branding tagline: Here [in the SEC] “It Just Means More” (SEC, 2017).

The importance of football recruiting in the Power-5 has been well researched. Scholars have examined the relationship between coaches’ job security and signing top-rated recruits (Maxcy, 2013) and the relationship between winning and recruiting (Bergman & Logan, 2016; Caro, 2012; Caro & Benton, 2012; Dronyk-Trosper & Stitzel, 2017; Elliott, 2020; Langelett, 2003; Pitts & Evans, 2016). Most studies concerning college football recruiting are directed from an institutional level - the effect recruiting has on a specific institution - or what factors influence a high school athlete’s decision-making process. Kidd (2019) found that athletic role engulfment is prevalent among high school football players and has negative academic and social consequences. While Kidd (2019) acknowledged the recruiting process further engulfs high school athletes in their athletic role, an examination of role engulfment among Power-5 football recruiters has not been conducted.

Corr, Southall, & Nagel (2020) found official visit itineraries among SEC football programs emphasize athletic and social themes over academics. Such emphasis on an official visit, an integral component of the recruiting process (Anderson, 2012; Lawrence & Kaburakis, 2008; Letawsky et al., 2003), is a ceremonial facade designed to shift a recruit's focus from the *real* experience of being a college athlete (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020). In relation to athletic role engulfment, a recruiter's greater emphasis on athletics and social themes conveys to a recruit the lack of importance and value a football program places on academics. Since recruiters don't prioritize academics, recruits – and eventual enrollees – are more inclined to abandon the academic role.

Due to the structure of official visit itineraries found by Corr, Southall, & Nagel (2020), evidence may exist that recruiters are role engulfed as well. The current study seeks to determine whether, and to what extent, SEC football recruiters are engulfed in their assigned role. While there is strong evidence of role engulfment among college athletes, there exists no investigation of role engulfment among Power-5 football recruiters. Given the importance of recruiters to a recruit's decision-making process (Magnusen et al., 2011; Magnusen et al., 2014; Treadway et al., 2014), examining role engulfment among SEC recruiters is an important undertaking.

### **Methodology**

The SEC consists of 14 members, of which 13 are public universities. The conference was chosen for this study's research frame because SEC football is "the" penultimate example of the NCAA's collegiate model of athletics, in which "...amateur defines the participants, not the enterprise" (Brand, 2006, p. 8). SEC football is highly competitive, commercialized and professionalized, and recruiting is as intense as in any

Power-5 conference. Not surprisingly, the SEC spends more money on football recruiting than any other Power-5 conference (Estes, 2019, Flaherty, 2019).

### **Interviews with Recruiters**

As in many organized sport settings (Adams et al., 2014; Gutierrez & McLaren, 2012), college sport – and college football in particular – adheres to an *omerta* (‘no one denounce’) code of silence system, in which not speaking to “outsiders” is not just policy, but also part of the culture (Adams et al., 2014; Gutierrez & McLaren, 2012). For years, universities – and specifically athletic programs – have claimed almost total control over player conduct and speech (LoMonte, 2020). The culture of college athletics has really emphasized silence, with an emphasis on not “rocking the boat” or stirring up controversy (LoMonte, 2020). Players are inculcated into how to act and what to say to the press or any “outsider.”

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the actions of recruiters in their role as institutional messenger. Consequently, interviews with SEC football recruiting staff members were conducted. Initially, all SEC football recruiting staff members listed on SEC football program websites were contacted via email and invited to participate in telephone interviews. No recruiting staff member responded. Subsequently, follow-up phone calls were made, and one staff member agreed to take part in a telephone interview. At the conclusion of that initial interview, Director of Player Personnel – University A (Director-A) communicated that another SEC football recruiting staff member was willing to be interviewed.

Subsequently, systematic snowball sampling, in which one interviewed football recruiting staff member provided access to two additional subjects, resulted in the study’s

( $n = 4$ ) participants. While to someone unfamiliar with the culture of Power-5 college sport this study's sample may seem small, it is actually quite robust, with the four participants representing three (21%) SEC football programs. Three subjects held Director of Football Recruiting (Director) positions. Each participant took part in a semi-structured telephone interview that explored the recruiting process and official visits. In response to strenuous demands that no information be traceable to them, their athletic department, or university, all data has been de-identified to ensure participant anonymity.

While participants varied in age, all three Directors had over six-year's experience in their current position, while the recruiting coordinator had two-year's experience. Two participants identified as Black males and two identified as White males. Of the four participants, two were former football players, with one having played high-school football and another having played both high school and college football (See Table 3.2).

### **Coding of Interviews**

Interviews were audio recorded and stored on a password-protected laptop. Audio recordings were transcribed and checked for accuracy by each member of the research team. Each of the recruiters was sent the transcript of their interview and asked to verify both the verbal content and clarify the context of specific quotations they felt necessary. Researchers relied on in-vivo coding to identify prevalent themes across participants. Using in-vivo coding is preferable when identifying themes using participants' exact language. Axial coding was undertaken to group similar in-vivo codes (Creswell et al., 2007). Between coding rounds, notes were compared for accuracy and agreement (Thompson et al., 1989). Coding was conducted until data saturation was achieved.

## Findings

### Recruits

The four interviewed recruiters were asked to describe the socio-demographics of the players they recruit. There was a general consensus regarding recruits' racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Director-A stated: "85% are Black. Out of that 85% that's [*sic*] Black, s\*\*\*, 50% of them are, you know, single parent. I would say low income...that's who plays [football]."

Director-B noted:

A 100% lower-class. Low-income homes, single parents, sometimes no parents, sometimes children. So ya, that's basically the majority, I would say, of kids.

Definitely more African Americans on the colleges I've been at. I remember one time, one of my recruiting classes we only had one, one White guy.

Recruiter-A stated:

The racial makeup of the team is like 80-85% Black...You know how there's the lower class in America? Generally, below that. Like I would say a decent amount...maybe like 60-70% of them are lower class people. And that's maybe a conservative estimate, maybe it be [*sic*] like 80%. Some of them are like legitimate poverty and pretty much had no home. Some of them are just poverty and like just really struggled in their home lives. But that's not all of them, I mean, some people come from middle class environments. I don't really know any that come from like upper-class, maybe 1 or maybe like a couple. I mean like .01% come from affluent family environments. I would definitely say, in general...a large chunk of collegiate athletics is built on the back of taking elite

athletes from very bad socioeconomic situations and making money off of them by them playing a sport regardless of whether they can get an education or not. Director-C stated: “80-90% African American...the talent pool of the, for whatever reason the majority of athletes are African American, that is your recruiting base.”

When discussing recruits, three recruiters contended coming from a lower-socioeconomic background was a “positive” intangible for a recruit. Director-C noted:

More often than not they’re not from a financially stable home...it goes towards the character evaluation, the upbringing [*sic*]. Coaches, they are big about knowing about the parents and the homelife...if they’re a little rough around the edges but have some manners to them that’s almost a positive because it means they’re gonna play with a chip on their shoulder...they come in with a strong work ethic because they see [football] as a way to succeed and how they want to achieve their goals in life. Just to prove the haters wrong.

Director-B stated:

I feel like a kid that came up with nothing, they [*sic*] got a lot to prove. And I feel like, in this sport, that’s what it’s all about. Trying to prove something to get my momma out the hood, so, I don’t have to sleep on the couch anymore.

Director-C added:

It should be viewed more as an opportunity just like any entry level job is, you’re not going to generate the same revenue as the higher-ups in a company. In a way, I think that’s what the NCAA is, it’s a money maker. Any business model will tell you that the entry level positions are gonna be compensated less...The compensation can be adjusted as so, it’s in high demand for a scholarship. Just

like the support staff jobs that are in high demand, you can bring people in for less than what they should work for and it's not, in my mind, necessarily wrong. Essentially, each of the recruiters confirmed what many observers of SEC football already "know" – the vast majority of recruits are Black and tend to be from a lower socioeconomic background.

## **Recruiting**

All recruiters shared similar sentiments regarding a number of topics. Each indicated their program began recruiting players as young as 14 or 15 years of age. Consistent with previous research (Anderson, 2012; Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020; Lawrence & Kaburakis, 2008; Letawsky et al., 2003), each subject stressed a primary recruiting goal was getting a recruit to visit their campus in order to develop a personal relationship with the coaching staff. A relationship with the coaching staff was identified as the single most important factor in a recruit's decision. Director-A detailed the importance of an official visit in helping build this strong relationship:

That is the whole f\*\*\*ing [*sic*] point. If you can't get a kid on campus, then you aren't going to get the kid. Your entire job, pretty much [that of] every single fulltime staff member, is to try and work and get kids on campus so they can meet with coaches.

Director of Recruiting – University C (Director-C) also expressed the importance of an official visit: "If it's not an official visit, it doesn't tend to pull nearly as much weight. Like if you don't go on an official visit and you commit somewhere without taking an official there? It's kind of a shock."



The importance of a strong coach-recruit relationship was also noted. Director of On-Campus Recruit – University B (Director-B) stated:

To the majority of kids, it is very important to get them on campus. For like several reasons. I mean, parents seeing the campus. You got people [*sic*] that's involved with the kid that wanna see the campus. Kid wanna see the campus so, I mean, it was important.

Consistent with Eklund (2020) and Klenosky et al. (2001), who found recruitment to be a familial process, every recruiter talked about the importance of recruiting those who have a close relationship with a recruit. Director-A also expressed the notion of the SEC as a conference of replication:

Everybody's trying to do the Saban Model...everybody's trying to be like Saban now. I went to Alabama and stayed there for two days and watched and learned how they do stuff and I took some of those ideas back to here. I brought a few of the ideas here that they like.

Replicating the recruiting success of the most successful program in the SEC (perhaps the nation) was a consistent theme throughout all interviews.

Since a football recruit is – by definition – being recruited to play football, it makes sense that much of an official visit will involve football-related activities. This focus on a recruit's expected athletic role was evident during all of the conversations with recruiters. Recruiter-A noted:

They will absolutely go to a practice. They'll go to like a gameday walkthrough and stuff like, they'll be there. They'll pretty much try and have them with the

team as much as possible on a gameday to pretty much show them like, ‘This is what you’re gonna be a part of.’

As was evident throughout the conversations, communicating the importance of recruit’s focusing on their athletic role was an assumption during all recruiters’ conversations.

Recruiter-A articulated the time commitment football players must make to the program: “They simply put in substantially more time than any other sport. No sport even comes close to how much time the football players commit to the team.”

### **Academics v. Athletics**

Power-5 college football players often publicly state that academics plays a crucial role in their choice of university, yet their ultimate recruitment decision is not indicative of academics being a significant determining factor (Eklund, 2020). Supporting this contention, official visit itineraries do not reflect academic focus. Director-B shared a similar position: “The kids we recruit, academics is not high on the list of something they wanna do when they come visit a school.” Director-A stated that the nature of the timing of an official visit makes covering academics difficult: “A majority of [players] are coming in Friday and leaving Sunday so when they get there on Friday, class is usually over.”

A common theme among all four of the interviewed members was that the academic component of an official visit is primarily for the parents. Director-B stated as much:

I don’t feel like a lot of these kids are really interested in the academic part of the actual college. I feel like that’s more for the parents. It’s usually the parents with the most questions about academics.

Director of Recruiting – University C (Director-C) concurred:

A school that's in a Power-5 conference that doesn't have the best academic reputation? I doubt that they try to push [academics] too much...I'd say generically it probably is geared more towards the parents because when you're dealing with 17-year-old kids it's not their highest priority.

Director A's language and tone of voice illustrated a level of frustration with having to provide an academic component as part of an official visit: "You gotta hit academics...the f\*\*\*in' [*sic*] academics." Each recruiter used the phrase "bare minimum" when discussing players' academic standing. A common theme among recruiters was that football players struggle academically. Director-B:

I feel like most of your kids have academic issues. I feel like almost the majority of recruiting classes in the nation, I would say, has more than half of their kids are, you know, they got some type of red flag in the classroom [*sic*]. 'Cuz [*sic*] a lot of these kids these days they not even taking the right class that would make them NCAA qualified...if you trying [*sic*] to go to college and play sports and you not taking the right classes then you kinda just out there in high school just having fun.

Director-C described the importance of recruits being able to be admitted to the university: If they can get in without us doing any extra stuff for them, that is what we look for...as long as you can qualify, we're good with it. Director-A also highlighted the importance of a player being admitted to the university: "Academics are the most important thing because without academics they can't get into school...they need to have the minimum requirements to get in." Director-A went on to discuss the importance of an

athlete's academic standing upon enrollment: "It's very important because without academics they're not eligible and then if they're not eligible you get hit with the APR [Academic Progress Rate]. Now you lose scholarships, visits, and all that. They need a 2.0 [GPA] to be eligible."

To recruiters the concept of "academics" had little – if anything – to do with an athlete's education. It involved mitigating the likelihood of poor academic performance (i.e., low grades and/or ineligibility), which would have a negative impact on the football program. Discussions of "academics" were really conversations about admissions, eligibility and management of academic metrics (e.g., Graduation Success Rate [GSR] and APR). The first academic hurdle was getting a recruit admitted to the university.

Director-A discussed the inherent fluidity of the admissions process:

It depends on how good he is. If he got minimum requirements and he's a three-star kid that's a marginal player, they're not gonna fight for him. If he's a, s\*\*\*, [sic] high major five-star kid, you know, they gone do [sic] whatever it takes to get him [admitted]. Some kids that are low-level they may have a 2.3 [GPA] and an 800 [SAT] which is barely [qualified for admittance]...and the school may say 'f\*\*\* [sic] no because he's not gonna be successful here' but the coach may go in and say, 'I want this kid in...he's gonna be one of the one's I fight for.' Some of them [will admit the recruit] as long as the [coach's] track record is good.

Consistent with the findings from a recent in-depth analysis of official visit itineraries (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020), recruiters admitted to a greater emphasis on athletics during an official visit. Director-B stated:

[A recruit] will sit down with a professor depending on what major they are...[for] maybe ten, twenty minutes...the head coach is the last person that he, you know, kinda sit down and talk to before he get out of town [*sic*]. It could go, you know, an hour. It could go for however long the coach kinda want [*sic*] it to.

Director-A shared a similar sentiment:

They'll meet with...tutoring people...academics, you know, they'll meet with all them [*sic*] people...[for] 30 minutes. During the visit you're gonna meet with your position coach...your area coach and then you'll probably meet with the coordinator. They'll meet with equipment, weight room, training, nutritionist. They'll also meet with...the player development guy, life-skills guy. Kids [choose] schools off relationships.

This need to introduce recruits to a variety of institutional members was another consistent theme present in all interviews.

Supporters of the current collegiate model often describe an athletic “scholarship” as a priceless opportunity for a college education. Director-A expressed this exact sentiment – and more: “You getting [*sic*] an education...meals, you getting gear, you getting travel, you getting sex, you getting, you getting everything...what you're getting is priceless.”

Notably, an “education” is only one component of a priceless package of benefits. Director-A also discussed recruits' choice of academic major: I would say 50, 60% of the kids know what they wanna major in. And then the other 40% are placed in certain majors. Probably general studies or, you know, something where they can get a degree. Director-B also discussed major selection:

I don't think that a university will, you know, kinda make a kid, you know if a kid wanna be an engineering major or a business major, I mean they would probably be like, 'Hey it's not probably in your best interest.' [sic]

Recruiter-A stated the dichotomy between success in academics and athletics:

I think it's like one in a thousand are gonna be legitimately good students if they're like good players on the team... I think it's the requirements that go into being a football player, and I think that's specific to football...like I think if you are a top-level talent football player and you are putting everything you can into football, I think the idea that, because being a football player in the SEC is more than a fulltime job, so to then expect to be a top-level student? [sic] Like it can be done, I'm not saying it can't be, but I think it's a thousand times harder and you have to be like, be way smarter than a normal kid would in order to balance that schedule, and also a lot of the times they aren't, because they've been pushed through from grade to grade because they're elite athletes.

Recruiter-A went on to discuss the opportunity for an education afforded college football players:

The whole idea that they're playing for their education is ridiculous considering I think very few of them get a quality education, even if they're at a good school because, and again this is specific to football, those hours. I mean FBS football, like legitimate football, you are putting, those players are putting in probably 80-100 hours a week on football. So, I think to then expect, I mean I don't know, maybe like a normal class schedule like in terms of homework and what you have to put into it, is generally something like 30-40 hours something like that. And

then especially if you take, a lot of the time you're taking kids from poor economic and academic backgrounds it's going to take even more work for them to be successful students. Like I think the fact, like saying that they are playing for an education is bull\*\*\*\* because most of them aren't getting a f\*\*\*ing education [*sic*].

The feeling among recruiters that SEC football players do not have real access to meaningful educational opportunities was not an unexpected finding, but was disconcerting, nonetheless.

Transitioning from a discussion of educational opportunities, to another academically-related topic, Recruiter-A discussed the role faculty members play in football players' academic success:

I think overall it might honestly be somewhat of like a pity thing and like a teacher's duty type of thing that like, not a duty to the school but honestly like a duty to that player to a degree because they, I think most teachers know "this kid has been pushed along and isn't really smart enough to be here," to be honest a lot of the time. Or it might be that they know they are really busy and have all this other stuff going on so they're like kind of taking pity and being ok with trying to help them out more and kind of making it their duty to be like "Ok, I want to help this person succeed because no one else has." Teachers take it upon themselves to try and be better people. And then I do, I don't think it's so much a conscious decision to let players be eligible, I think honestly, it's just like an unconscious decision of like "Ya, I'm just gonna help this guy out. I get he's busy, I get he has other stuff." It's not a conscious school wide thing of "keep this kid eligible."

While each subject expressed the importance of the official visit, Director-A expressed the ultimate purpose of an official visit: “When a guy comes on campus [for an official visit] you wanna show him something...the official visit should be a party.”

Recruiting Coordinator – University A (Recruiter-A) crystallized the social nature of an official visit:

[We’ll] do like normal bull\*\*\*\* stuff that the parents can go to, like going bowling and just like showing them the campus. Showing them the beauty of the campus and like what a day in the life of the campus would be and then, you know, then the players will take them out, and stuff like that, and show them a good time. They’ll take them out to bars and clubs, I mean also it depends on the kid...some of them will go out with the players, like wherever the players happen to be going out to that night, the OV’s [official visits] will sometimes just tag along with them, you know, and that is also by design, it’s one of those things that’s, “Hey you’re going to hang out with this player? We don’t wanna know what you’re doing.” Because then you become liable for it.

Individual components of the official visit that are regulated by the NCAA must be commensurate with the experiences of a typical athlete at an institution (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaws 13.6.6; 13.6.7.7). In addition, the NCAA contends an official visit should give athletes an idea of what to expect upon enrollment at an institution. With this in mind, Director-A noted the importance of showing recruits where they will live:

You gotta [show] them off-campus apartments because at the end of the day a lot of kids are not gonna, especially here, kids are not staying in the dorms here. [At



other programs] they got nice-a\*\* [sic] apartments, so kids, some people will stay there.

During their on-campus tour recruiters communicate to recruits that they will live, eat, and train in a privileged environment (e.g., off-campus apartments, football facilities, and academic support centers) that inherently separates them from the rest of the general student-body, akin to Goffman's *total institution* (Southall & Weiler, 2014). Recruiter-A noted this differentiation:

Definitely it's like known, "Hey, they're football players. We are going to treat them better and help them out with things." It's not the rules don't apply to them but there's definitely a 1000% more of a willingness to try and help them be semi-successful, you know...just like on campus and in the classroom, they definitely are treated different than the rest of the students.

### **Other Themes**

Given the infantilizing language recruiters in this study used, it is not surprising that Director-C identified players' *age* (i.e., immaturity) as a primary reason why college football players should not receive any compensation beyond their "full-ride" scholarship (i.e. GIA). Given the racial, financial, and social disparities as well as the time demands of being a football player in the SEC expressly acknowledged by recruiters in this study, it is of note that the three recruiters holding Director (i.e., *leadership*) positions adamantly opposed Power-5 football players receiving compensation beyond the value of a GIA. The reasoning behind this opposition aligns with the SEC football institutional logic. Director-A clearly stated the current level of player compensation was more than adequate:

Athlete A, who has a 2.3 [GPA] and a 700 SAT is not getting into [University A]...So when you getting an education, you getting meals, you getting gear, you getting travel, you getting sex, you getting, you getting everything...what you're getting is priceless [*sic*].

When asked if football players should receive greater cost-of-attendance stipends than other athletes, Director-A continued:

I never believed in that spot because they say a hundred thousand people are not going to watch a science project. Well, that science project student is the reason that [University A] is a top-ten school. And that's the reason that people come to the school. It's because not only its athletic, because of the academic part and that's what they sell...[all athletes] are putting in the same amount of work.

When asked if football players were treated differently and/or had a different experience than other athletes. Director-A continued: "Oh, most definitely. Because they, they are the face of the school. Ya, they [*sic*] the face of the program so everything they do is magnified. You know. And they're expected at a certain standard." Director-B agreed that football players, since they generated the most revenue, were treated differently than other athletes and enjoyed a semi-celebrity status on campus. While recognizing football players' increased visibility, both Director-B and Director-C strongly were concerned that any compensation beyond a GIA could potentially "ruin" the sanctity of college football by creating "selfish" players who did not play "for the betterment of another guy."

## Discussion and Conclusion

The focus of an official visit, and the overall recruitment of an SEC football player, is determined by the SEC football recruiting staffs (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020). Reflective of the football-centric focus of SEC football official visits, recruiters in this study openly acknowledged their engulfment in their athletic recruiter role. They normalized practices that glorify the athletic role of SEC football players while marginalizing their academic or education role. This study's results offer evidence such institutionalized practices are replicated throughout the SEC (cf. *The 'Bama Way* or *The Saban Process*). The institutional work performed by SEC football recruiters reinforces their engulfment in their athletic role and communicates to recruits their expected dominant role.

The institutional work performed by recruiters not only emphasizes the importance of football, it also marginalizes academic pursuits. Recruiters in this study viewed "academics" as a *barrier*, or obstacle, to completing their institutional work. Specific language (e.g., "the f\*\*\*in' academics") illustrates not only frustration with having to make time for academics or education during an official campus visit, but a general antipathy toward higher education. Recruiters in this study seemingly do not value academics and view having to include an academic component during a campus visit as a hindrance to successful recruitment of a sought-after player. Furthermore, the importance of academic eligibility, not educational attainment, was consistently expressed by several recruiters, and explicitly by Recruiter-C, who noted keeping academically-underprepared players eligible was a program's fundamental goal. This

attitude reflects the degree to which members of SEC football programs have abandoned a focus on academics.

The primacy of a football player's athletic role is communicated to recruits during the entire recruiting process. The institutional work of SEC recruiters (that communicates the institutional acceptance of athletic role engulfment) has real-world outcomes, as evidenced by the disproportionately negative academic outcomes of SEC football players (Adler & Adler, 1985; Corr et al., 2019; Corr, Eckard, et al., 2020; Snyder 1985). These negative academic outcomes are racialized, with the adjusted graduation gap (AGG) of Black SEC players (-24.3) being significantly greater than those of White SEC players (+5.0) (Corr, Eckard, et al., 2020). Since 83% of starting SEC football players are Black, this racialized athletic role engulfment has a disparate effect on SEC football players of color (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020).

Engulfed in their athletic role, this study's recruiters publicly praise the value of the educational opportunity afforded athletes, while privately disparaging academics. Not surprisingly, recruiters also construct campus visits in a manner that mythicizes the glory associated with being an SEC football player. While recruiters in this study openly acknowledged the inordinate amount of time football players must dedicate to both football and academics, scheduled official visits minimize the academic demands associated with being a "student."

College football games typically occur on Saturdays and official visits strategically take place over the course of a weekend to magnify the spectacle of SEC football games. While the justification for weekend official visits is to minimize recruits missing their own classes, it is notable that football, baseball, and women's gymnastics

are the only sports in the SEC to host official visitors exclusively on weekends (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020). In addition, “regular” students quite often visit campus during the week to ensure they have an opportunity to see a campus, and realistically interact with students and faculty (Lytle & Moody, 2020). Conversely, the overall message communicated to a recruit during a weekend football official visit is that he is a football player who also has many chances to “party.”

Consistent with this “party” atmosphere, the integral role of female hosts on official visits has been well documented (Benedict & Keteyian, 2013; Bennett, 2009; Thamel & Evans, 2009). The role of a female host during an official visit is often associated with sexual commentary (e.g., “you getting sex”). This unspoken sexualization of an official visit is part of what has been described as the *omerta* of college football. This unacknowledged use of female hosts as enticements for recruits was mentioned by Recruiter-C in the context of player hosts entertaining recruits on official visits. The NCAA permits current player hosts to be provided up to \$40 per day for the purpose of entertaining a recruit on an official visit (NCAA, 2019b, Bylaw 13.6.7.5). Recruiter-C illustrates the “design” of an official visit to *release* recruits with player hosts at the end of each day to ensure that the football staff avoids becoming “liable” for any specific action that occurs. The transfer of accountability from the football staff to the player host and recruit promotes an environment in which members of the football staff relinquish responsibility. This “design” illustrates recruiters’ desire to *protect* the football program by constructing a code of silence.

A key component of higher education is exposing students to what they do not already “know.” As has been ascribed to Plato and/or Socrates, “An unexamined life is

not worth living” (Larivée, 2015). However, none of the recruiters in this study seemed intent on providing the “students” they were recruiting an opportunity to explore various educational opportunities. In this study, recruiters identified a lack of academic focus on an official visit as indicative of recruits’ lack of interest in obtaining an education. The phrase *kids don’t care about academics* illustrates that recruiters are engulfed in their athletic role. This antipathy toward athletics reflects an institutional logic that devalues educational attainment and fails to provide football players with the time and/or space to “think” things through.

This minimization of academics is communicated to recruits and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Recruits are institutionalized to not care about academics because recruiters have communicated this institutional logic to recruits during their interactions. Recruiter-A illustrates the presence of an institutional logic within a university-wide setting (i.e., *football players need to be eligible to compete*), and also the presence of role engulfment permeating its way to faculty members representing the university itself. Based on the statements made by Recruiter-A, athletic role engulfment could be a campus-wide phenomenon in which parties at varying levels of the athletic department and the institution itself are engulfed in a semblance of an athletic role.

During post-practice media availability in September 2019, The Ohio State University quarterback Justin Fields made headlines by admitting he had rarely if ever been on the Ohio State campus, except for time spent at the football training facility and Ohio Stadium (Kinsey, 2019). While it may seem odd that a college athlete had never stepped foot on campus, this wasn’t the first time a college football player revealed he had rarely been on campus. In 2013, then Texas A&M University and Heisman-Trophy-

winning quarterback Johnny Manziel revealed he was only on campus once a month (Middlehurst-Schwartz, 2013). As a graduate student, during his two years at Louisiana State University, quarterback Joe Burrow took almost all his classes online (Stacy, 2019). This lack of interaction with campus or other students is indicative of the continuing separation and segregation of college football players. This separation further alienates players from campus, the student body, and faculty and contributes to players' increasingly abandoning their academic role. In addition, academic admission standards may be adjusted for college athletes (Olson, 2019; Taylor, 2012); these standards may also vary within a sport as well, based upon athletic ability.

Consistent with the Power-5 football institutional logic, there is strong evidence that SEC football recruiters are engulfed in their athletic role. In this role they clearly perform institutional work designed to support and maintain an athletically-focused Power-5 institutional logic.

### **Future Research**

There are several areas that call for future research. One area is the consistent infantilizing of football recruits and current players. The use of the word “kid” or “kids” by recruiters in this study illustrates this consistent infantilizing. While an 18-year-old is classified as an adult in a larger societal context, Power-5 football players are consistently infantilized (Southall & Karcher, 2016). Barber (2008) states, “Adult athletes are treated like children and behave accordingly; children are pushed to grow up into profit-generating adult athletes as fast as possible” (p. 94). A singular focus on football exemplifies recruiters' desires that recruits assimilate into the dominant Power-5 football institutional logic.

Indicative of Power-5 college football's institutional logic, Director-A visited a program that has experienced an unquestioned level of success over the past decade to replicate the practices they utilize. The NCAA itself acknowledged in response to Willie Williams' accounts of recruiting visits "a 'keep up with the Joneses' mentality" that exists among NCAA members (St. John, 2004, para. 7). Similarly, Louisiana State University head football coach Ed Orgeron noted in the lead up to the 2020 CFP national championship that "[college football] is a copycat league" (Kubena, 2020, para. 42), indicating an institutional logic shared at the national level among all football programs. Research utilizing organizational theory in the context of the SEC could be valuable to the field.

Additionally, the racialization of the recruiting process is extremely apparent concerning the comments of recruiters in this study. Neocolonial comments regarding Black recruits and their socioeconomic status and familial upbringing illustrate the leveraging of non-athletic related factors that recruiters employ to influence and hold sway over recruits' decisions. The insinuation of multiple recruiters that SEC football players, a group predominantly comprised of Black males, are not "smart" enough to balance the time demands to be successful academically and athletically deserves systematic examination. The delineation between Black and White coaches regarding recruiting responsibilities is another important area that needs to be addressed given the language of recruiters in this study. Future research should examine the racialization of the recruiting process in relation to recruiters and coaching staffs.



Table 3.1: P-5 Football Recruiting Budgets, 2017-2018 Fiscal Year (Ching, 2018)

Rank	Program	Conference	Recruiting Budget
1	Georgia	SEC	\$2,517,452.40
2	Tennessee	SEC	\$2,479,672.00
3	Auburn	SEC	\$2,461,960.00
4	Michigan	Big-10	\$2,365,460.40
5	Alabama	SEC	\$2,314,326.00
6	Penn State	Big-10	\$2,143,474.20
7	Kentucky	SEC	\$2,131,701.40
8	Nebraska	Big-10	\$2,116,756.80
9	Notre Dame	ACC	\$2,069,652.20
10	Oklahoma	Big-12	\$1,967,040.00
11	Ohio State	Big-10	\$1,867,262.00
12	Florida	SEC	\$1,844,675.40
13	Arkansas	SEC	\$1,837,537.40
14	Florida State	ACC	\$1,793,936.80
15	Illinois	Big-10	\$1,787,241.60
16	Texas A&M	SEC	\$1,785,446.60
17	Kansas	Big-12	\$1,730,998.80
18	Texas Tech	Big-12	\$1,694,973.40
19	Clemson	ACC	\$1,664,950.00
20	Duke	ACC	\$1,659,693.00
21	N.C. State	ACC	\$1,657,498.20
22	LSU	SEC	\$1,646,719.20
23	Indiana	Big-10	\$1,645,962.80
24	Iowa State	Big-12	\$1,627,463.00
25	Texas	Big-12	\$1,594,832.60
26	Minnesota	Big-10	\$1,588,738.60
27	Louisville	ACC	\$1,588,149.00
28	Oregon	PAC-12	\$1,547,952.80
29	Michigan State	Big-10	\$1,486,227.60
30	North Carolina	ACC	\$1,480,769.60
31	Iowa	Big-10	\$1,473,247.00
32	Baylor	Big-12	\$1,472,167.60
33	Vanderbilt	SEC	\$1,442,988.40
34	Washington	PAC-12	\$1,414,237.20
35	Arizona	PAC-12	\$1,411,078.00
36	South Carolina	SEC	\$1,401,481.60
37	West Virginia	Big-12	\$1,389,010.80
38	USC	PAC-12	\$1,376,879.00
39	Utah	PAC-12	\$1,374,675.80
40	Georgia Tech	ACC	\$1,368,104.60
41	Virginia Tech	ACC	\$1,364,785.60
42	Virginia	ACC	\$1,343,521.00

43	Oregon State	PAC-12	\$1,318,975.20
44	Kansas State	Big-12	\$1,306,997.80
45	Stanford	PAC-12	\$1,304,655.60
46	Purdue	Big-10	\$1,294,840.20
47	Ole Miss	SEC	\$1,291,168.00
48	UCLA	PAC-12	\$1,275,200.40
49	Miami	ACC	\$1,263,298.80
50	Pittsburgh	ACC	\$1,235,892.40
51	Arizona State	PAC-12	\$1,230,371.20
52	Rutgers	Big-10	\$1,208,702.40
53	Missouri	SEC	\$1,181,120.20
54	Mississippi State	SEC	\$1,175,758.40
55	Syracuse	ACC	\$1,154,782.60
56	California	PAC-12	\$1,098,657.60
57	Washington State	PAC-12	\$1,093,735.20
58	Northwestern	Big-10	\$1,072,704.80
59	Wake Forest	ACC	\$1,066,879.80
60	Boston College	ACC	\$1,045,621.20
61	TCU	Big-12	\$1,043,849.80
62	Wisconsin	Big-10	\$1,033,421.00
63	Maryland	Big-10	\$ 997,650.00
64	Colorado	PAC-12	\$ 912,495.40
65	Oklahoma State	Big-12	\$ 902,920.40

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Table 3.2: SEC Recruiters

Group	Age	Race	Years in Position	Years in Football Recruiting	Former College Athlete
Director of Player Personnel – University A (Director-A)	44	Black	4	8	NO
Recruiting Coordinator – University A (Recruiter-A)	24	White	2	2	NO
Director of On-Campus Recruiting – University B (Director-B)	29	Black	2	6	YES
Director of Recruiting – University C (Director-C)	28	White	2	6	NO

CHAPTER 4  
THE NCAA'S DOMINANT INSTITUTIONAL LOGIC  
AND THE LACK OF BLACK HEAD COACHES IN POWER-5 FOOTBALL

**Introduction**

During the 2020 college football season, there were a record number of minority head coaches ( $n = 14$  of 65; 22%) in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I, Power-5 “autonomy” conferences (NCAA, 2021). While the number of minority head coaches in Power-5 football has increased the last five years ( $n = 11$  in 2016) the number of minority assistant coaches has remained fairly constant. During the 2016 season 49% of assistant coaches in Power-5 football identified as a minority. By 2020, minorities have come to comprise the majority (54%;  $n = 272$ ) of assistant coaches in Power-5 football (NCAA, 2021). While each coach’s path to becoming a Power-5 head football coach is unique, possible causes for a proportionally lower number of minority Power-5 head coaches is an area of research requiring further examination.

The adage “climbing the corporate ladder” describes the typical trajectory of becoming a FBS football head coach. In the vast number of cases, an assistant coach progresses from an entry level to an upper-level management position (Barnett, 2019). Most coaches initially serve as a graduate assistant coach (e.g., completing a graduate degree while gaining coaching experience). The next rung on the corporate ladder is to become full-time assistant or “position” coach. Position coaches are responsible for

coaching a specific group of “position” players (e.g., running backs, wide receivers, linebackers) as well as recruiting future position players (Kulha, 2013). All position coaches recruit both the position they coach and certain geographic regions (e.g. recruiting areas) (Horne, 2013). Position coaches are tasked with forming relationships with high school coaches and “developing pipelines to local high schools” (Horne, 2013, para. 4). After serving as a position coach, a coach may progress to the position of “coordinator.” Coordinators serve as a de facto “head” coach of the offense, defense or special teams (Johnson, 2019; Kilgore, 2019). Serving as a coordinator is quite often a stepping-stone to being hired as a head coach (Barnett, 2019). Given this traditional trajectory, within Power-5 conference football, there are fewer minority head coaches (21% in 2020), than would be expected based upon the number of minority position coaches (54% in 2020).

Theorists have identified several barriers that inhibit Black football coaches from being hired as coordinators and/or head coaches. Cunningham and Sagas (2005) found that athletic administrators tend to hire coaches who resemble themselves. Interestingly, in 2020, the percentage of Power-5 head football coaches who are White males ( $n = 79\%$ ), was exactly the same as the percentage of White male Power-5 athletic directors (NCAA, 2021). Not coincidentally, since most Power-5 football head coaches are White, more “successful” head coaches are also White, which leads to a bias toward hiring White head coaches (Turick & Bopp, 2016). In addition, Turick & Bopp (2016) theorize that Black head coaches are also expected to be successful recruiters, a duty traditionally placed on assistant coaches, impacting Black coaches’ opportunities for advancement. Given that athletic administrators inordinately value leadership, a trait ascribed to

offensive or defensive coordinators (Turick & Bopp, 2016) when making head coach hiring decisions, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- Given that the majority of Power-5 football players (including a greater percentage of starters who make a significant impact on the outcome of a game) are Black, do the majority of Black coaches serve as the *primary*/lead recruiter for Black recruits?
- Consistent with previous research that socially-effective recruiters tend to be more effective (Magnusen et al., 2011; Magnusen et al., 2014; Treadway et al., 2014), do coaches recruit geographic areas that are ethnically and socioeconomically similar to their hometown?
- Given the importance placed on Power-5 football recruiting (Caro, 2012) and previous literature on racial tasking of college football coaches (Turick, 2018; Turick & Bopp, 2016), do Black coaches serve as the primary recruiter for five- and four-star Black recruits)?

This study focuses on the relationship between recruiting and upward coaching mobility of Black Power-5 football coaches. Guided by *interest convergence* (Bell, 2004) and building on the work of Turick & Bopp (2016) this proposal will examine the underrepresentation of minority head coaches in Power-5 football seeking to uncover differences in the distribution of recruiting responsibilities between White and Black position coaches and coordinators on Power-5 football coaching staffs.

### **Literature Review**

Within the field of sport management, scholars have called for greater use of critical paradigms (Frisby, 2005; Hylton, 2010; 2012), specifically *Critical Race Theory*

(CRT) to examine ways to promote anti-racism in sport (Hylton, 2010). While sport management literature is often stratified into individual subfields (e.g., sport finance, sport marketing, etc.), Hylton (2010; 2012) contends CRT can provide a commonality linking these subfields. Hylton (2012) argues that by not addressing race within sport management, we perpetuate a societal norm that seeks to express *color-blindness* (i.e., a choice to ignore racial issues) and devalues sport management research involving race. Examining the intersection of race, coaching levels, and opportunities for career advancement has potential implications across multiple subfields within sport management. From a practical standpoint, examining the recruiting practices of Power-5 football staff members would determine whether such practices have contributed to the racial composition of Power-5 college football.

Given criticisms of the NCAA, the positive benefits associated with participation in college athletics can be overshadowed. In fact, many college athletes have nothing but positive things to say regarding their college athletic experience (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). College athletes develop time management skills and become part of a network of professionals that often assists in the transition from college athlete into the workforce (Menke, 2010). Another positive is the opportunity to receive an athletics grant-in-aid that covers some to all of the costs of going to college (Bastie, 2018). In this sense, college athletics could be looked at as *the great equalizer* as high school athletes from low socioeconomic backgrounds may be able to afford to attend college and receive an education they might not have had financial access too. College athletics can also provide a pathway to success for high school athletes from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Within Black communities, athletes often serve as role models for children. Stories of

Black athletes achieving financial success through sports suggest college athletics is often a *stepping-stone* to upward social mobility (Beamon, 2010; Rudman, 1986). Black college football coaches are embodiments of the success and upward social mobility that college athletics can provide.

While the positive outcomes related to college athletics are worth noting, social conflict and racial undertones cannot be ignored. Power-5 college football programs have been described as neocolonial plantations on which Black players and Black recruiters are metaphorically viewed as slaves (Black players) and traders (Black recruiters), while White coaches and administrators are seen as overseers (Branch, 2011; Hawkins, 2010). In this analysis, predominantly White Power-5 administrators, head coaches, and coordinators at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) reap financial rewards generated by predominantly Black athletes (Branch, 2011; Byers & Hammer, 1995; Hawkins, 2010; Southall & Weiler, 2014). In 1995, former Executive Director of the NCAA Walter Byers described college athletics as reflecting a “neo-plantation mentality” in which coaches and administrators act as “overseers and supervisors” that “own the athlete’s body” (Associated Press, 1995, para. 3). Viewing college sport as a neocolonial institution is consistent with critical race theory, which challenges the dominant ideology surrounding college athletics.

Using critical race theory to examine Power-5 college football recruiting acknowledges the *intercentricity* of race and racism (Bell, 1992, 1995; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lawrence, 1995), the prevalence of Whiteness as a property right, and the legitimization of racist practices within the United States legal system and society at large (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Harris, 1995). Using



critical race theory, several scholars have found NCAA governance justifies racist practices (Agyemang & DeLorme, 2010; Cheeks, 2016; Hawkins, 2010; Hextrum, 2019). For example, NCAA academic standards for admission disproportionately affect athletes seeking enrollment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). As Cheeks (2016) noted, Black college athlete applicants are often underprepared academically (i.e. lower test scores) compared to their White counterparts. Broad NCAA admission standards inhibit Black college athlete's ability to enroll, let alone progress and complete a degree (Cheeks, 2016).

Critical race theory recognizes the intersectionality of race and racism along with other identities that are targeted, minoritized, disenfranchised, and oppressed (Cheeks, 2016; Crenshaw, 1988) and the principle of interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theory also utilizes: the art of counter storytelling and personal narrative (Delgado, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda, 1991), an activist approach with the goal of implementing tangible social justice initiatives (Crenshaw, 1995; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2005), and a critique of liberalism (Crenshaw, 1988; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). A coaching-interview mandate such as *the Rooney Rule*<sup>12</sup> is a sport-specific, practical example of abstract liberalism, which perpetuates colorblindness through practices that, ostensibly, seek to provide equal opportunities for minority candidates, while decontextualizing historical, cultural, and political factors that influence decision-making

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<sup>12</sup> Implemented in 2003 by the NFL, the Rooney Rule mandates that organizations must interview at least one "diverse" candidate before making a hiring decision regarding a head coach, general manager, or front office position (NFL, 2018). The National Association for Coaching Equity and Development has asked that the NCAA adopt the Eddie Robinson Rule, a proposal similar in practice to the Rooney Rule (Medcalf, 2016).

(Bonilla-Silva, 2014; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In such instances, through the use of *tolerant* language, the privileged group rationalizes their ignorance of race-related issues (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bopp et al., 2019). In the context of coaching hirings, Bopp et al. (2019) noted the “targeted” hiring of Black coaches in specific coaching positions may actually be in the best interest of White head coaches, given the high number of Black college football players .

### **Critical Race Theory**

Gramsci (1971) applied the concept of hegemony in the context of a certain social group’s authority over others. Hegemony operates without a direct military force but rather is maintained through the consent of the people living, working, and interacting within a given hegemonic structure. In order to maintain the status quo, codes of everyday engagement demand, and receive, consent from societal members (Gramsci, 1971). In the context of critical legal studies, early scholars used Gramsci’s work to focus on issues of class and socioeconomic stratification in the United States absent a consideration of race. Critical race theorists emerged among critical legal studies scholars by centering race at the forefront of critiques of jurisprudence that reproduced inequality.

Crenshaw (1988) acknowledges a racial hierarchy that assigns Black members of society to a socially subordinate group. Within this hegemonic structure of race, the opportunities and experiences available to a Black community are limited when compared to a White community that has more advantageous societal positions. While legal action continues to aid in reducing the number of overtly racist symbols, language, and practices in the United States, the assignation of the Black community to a socially-subordinate position continues, often perpetuated by strategic legal actions framed as

altruistic (Crenshaw, 1988). While critical legal scholars analyze race in the United States primarily through the lens of the historical ramifications of legal decisions, critical race theorists seek to advance social discourse and stimulate research by exposing racist practices and deeply-rooted racist beliefs (Lopez, 2003). The application of a critical race perspective to various academic fields has advanced the dialogue surrounding racial issues in the United States while highlighting the unique components of racism.

A central theoretical concept of critical race theory is the importance of individual narratives that challenge the racial hegemony existing within society. Delgado (1989, 1995) called for counter storytelling in academic settings on the heels of Derrick Bell's work chronicling the lasting effects of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). According to Delgado (1989), the dominant group within a hegemonic structure creates and disseminates stories from generation to generation that serve to justify the dominant group's position. Therefore, storytelling that runs *counter* to that of the dominant group is important in detailing racial disparities. Delgado (1989) noted the emotional components of counter-narrative stories serve to create an understanding of a variety of lived experiences. While White society has passed down stories that justify their continued existence as the dominant group, Black society must share their stories as well in hopes that the dominant group will hear and understand what it is like to be a Black member of United States society. Counter storytelling can serve to close the gap between societal groups. As Delgado (1989) states, "All movements for change must gain the support, or at least understanding, of the dominant group, which is White" (p. 2440).

Bell (1976, 1995a, 2004) acknowledges a need for racial realism and consciousness within United States society arguing that Black activists and leaders within

Black communities must have *realistic* expectations when working toward social justice. Racial realists acknowledge the permanence of racism, recognizing that social justice initiatives need to focus on attainable change and not the impossible goal of *ending racism*. Expectations of attainable change must be tempered by the historical, cultural, and political forces that largely determine the position racial groups occupy within American society. From this perspective, achieving *absolute* equality is unattainable (Bell, 1995a). However, awareness of the United States' racial hierarchy can inform the continued fight for social justice. As Lopez (2003) noted, "...racism always remains firmly in place but...social progress advances at the pace that White people determine is reasonable and judicious" (p. 84). Understanding interest convergence and the historical forces that have led to tangible changes is integral to formulating realistic, and attainable, social justice initiatives (Bell, 1995a; Lopez, 2003).

### **Interest Convergence**

A White society entrenched in a culture of segregation and the repudiation of many lawmakers made enforcing the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* untenable across much of the Southeast region of the United States. In 1957, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus deployed the state's National Guard to block the first Black students attempting to integrate at Arkansas' Central High School. Faubus positioned the National Guard to prevent the nine Black students from entering the high school for a month before federal troops intervened (Jaynes, 2020; Pattillo Beals, 1995). In 1963, Governor George Wallace physically stood in a doorway at the University of Alabama and blocked entry in protest of the enrollment of the University's first two Black students. Less than six-months prior during his inaugural address, Wallace

infamously declared, “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever” (Bell, 2013, para. 1). In Virginia, rather than move forward with the integration of schools, politicians adopted a platform of *massive resistance* in 1956. Public schools in many counties across the state were closed for up to 2-years while new private schools received government funding and admitted only White students (Hershman, n.d.). Federal intervention was required in both Alabama and Virginia to enforce the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

In the wake of Southeast resistance to school integration, critical race theorist and Civil Rights litigator Derrick Bell filed hundreds of desegregation cases across the region. Bell’s experience working to ensure the enforcement of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in the Southeast led him to theorize why desegregation was met with such resistance and wasn’t effective. One such theory led him to coin the term *interest convergence*. Interest convergence states that racial equality will only be pursued by the racial majority when such equality serves the racial majority’s interests, or fulfills their needs (Bell, 1980, 1992, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Milner, 2008; Milner et al., 2013). Interest convergence succinctly explains that racial equality will only be pursued by the White majority, when such equality aligns with the interests, wants, and needs of the those raced White (Bell, 1980, 1992, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Interest convergence, and critical race theory more broadly, is frequently found in the education-reform academic literature (Castagno & Lee, 2007; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Milner, 2008; Milner et al., 2013; Zion & Blanchett, 2011). Many critical race scholars have examined college athletics, with some proposing sweeping NCAA reform (Cooper et al., 2017; Hawkins, 2010; Hawkins, 2017; McCormick & McCormick, 2012), while others have

investigated the hiring and longevity of football coaches (Turick & Bopp, 2016), *racial tasking* (Bopp & Sagas, 2014; Bopp et al., 2019; Turick, 2018), and academic success among Black college athletes (Donnor, 2005; Harper, 2009). Outside of Hawkins (2010), critical race theory has not been the framework for a study analyzing recruiting in college athletics.

Bell (1980) argues that interest convergence explains the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. While the case is celebrated as a landmark legal ruling, ostensibly *ending* segregation in public schools and promoting racial equality (as evident by the iconic phrase "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" [*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, p. 13]), Bell (1980; 2004) argues that the Court was influenced by other motives. Bell emphasized how the ideological war between democracy and communism was heightened during the Cold War, which occurred at the same time as many of the apex events of the Civil Rights Movement. Seeking to oppose the rise of communism internationally, the United States government sought to minimize images of domestic racial strife and inequality. Bell explains that the White House administration sent white papers to the Supreme Court advocating for desegregation, not on the grounds of justice and morality but rather to stem international criticism the United States was receiving from allies and foes alike. The narrative of domestic racial equality and tranquility following World War II was called into question by racial tensions in both the North and South in the 1950s; and Black soldiers who had fought and died in World War II protecting democracy against the ideological threats of fascism, communism and socialism, returned home to be confronted with covert and overt racism. Bell (1980) argued this historical national and international context resulted in the Supreme Court

issuing a ruling openly acknowledging segregation was not only unconstitutional, but also that it was *wrong*.

Bell (2004) noted that while *Brown v. Board of Education* resulted in the desegregation of public schools, it also lessened the quality of education afforded to many Black students. In the South, desegregation resulted in economic growth for the White majority. Interest convergence challenges the illusion of empathy, morality, and justice in racial reform. Racial reform occurs only when Whites recognize it benefits them (Bell, 2004). Black organizing can attempt to leverage interest convergence but ultimately, the racial majority decides which reforms are implemented.

### **Integration of SEC Football**

College football in the *South* is as culturally engrained as any institution in the region. Hall of Fame football coach Marino Casem described football in the Southeast as “a religion, and Saturday is the Holy Day” (Hall, 2013, para. 4). Efforts to desegregate society in the Southeast and the ever-present racial tension are directly part of the history of SEC football. In fact, society and college football in the South resisted integration hand in hand. By 1959, every major sports league in the United States had integrated and by 1966 the most prominent college athletics conferences had integrated as well (Kirk, 2014; Oriard, 1991). The University of Kentucky was the first SEC school to begin recruiting Black football players in 1966, signing 2 Black recruits that year (White, 2010). The first Black football player to participate in SEC competition was Nate Northington at the University of Kentucky the following season in 1967 (Bembry, 2017). The University of Florida began recruiting Black football players in 1968 by announcing in mailers sent to high school football coaches across the state they would begin

“recruiting athletes regardless of race...to recruit the best athletes possible from the state” (White, 2010, p. 486). The University of Florida football program, however, enacted admissions testing for Black recruits to, ostensibly, gauge academic qualification for admission to the University. A Florida assistant coach reported that despite distributing the admissions tests that no Black players met the “scholastic requirement” for admission to the University (White, 2010, p. 487).

Hill (2004) noted the cultural prestige and power a head football coach holds is amplified in the South. Especially given the history of racial tension in the Southeast, there must be a certain level of comfort when hiring Black head coaches to lead SEC programs (Hill, 2004). Accordingly, the SEC was the last major college athletics conference to employ a Black head football coach, doing so in 2003 when Mississippi State University hired Sylvester Croom (Longman & Glier, 2003; Zenor, 2003). Since 2000, there have been 63 SEC head football coaches. Including Croom, only 5 (8%) have been Black<sup>13</sup> (O’Gara, 2020). Ten of the conference’s 14 football programs have never employed a Black head coach. While it has been over 30-years since Louisiana State University hired John Mitchell in 1990 making him the first Black defensive coordinator in the SEC, coordinator positions are still predominantly held by White coaches (Alabama Sports Hall of Fame, n.d.). In 2017, Larry Scott became the first Black offensive coordinator in the 121-year history of University of Tennessee football (Potkey, 2017). Subsequently reports claimed that then head football coach Lyle Allen “Butch” Jones had only promoted Scott from tight ends coach to offensive coordinator to retain

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<sup>13</sup> Sylvester Croom (Mississippi State University), Joker Phillips (University of Kentucky), James Franklin (Vanderbilt University), Kevin Sumlin (Texas A&M University), and Derek Mason (Vanderbilt University).



him on his coaching staff; Scott had developed a reputation as an *ace* recruiter and was sought after by other programs (Climer, 2017). In 2020, the University of Florida hired its first Black offensive coordinator when head coach Dan Mullen promoted Brian Johnson from quarterbacks' coach (O'Gara, 2020). The promotion, however, was primarily an increase in *title* and not responsibility as Mullen maintained his role as the offensive play caller. Given Johnson's reputation as a *top* recruiter in college football (Nettuno, 2020), the promotion to offensive coordinator may have been spurred by a similar motivation to that of Larry Scott at University of Tennessee 3-years prior. Johnson moved on to the NFL as quarterbacks' coach for the Philadelphia Eagles in January 2021 (Erby, 2021). Although SEC football is a predominantly Black sport in both number of players and coaches, football programs in the SEC still grapple with employing Black coaches in leadership positions on coaching staffs.

### **Racial Tasking**

*Racial stacking* occurs in sport when athletes are segregated based on social assumptions of perceived abilities determined by racial composition (Loy & McElvogue, 1970). Historically, the most prevalent form of racial stacking is in football where segregation often occurs by position based off socially constructed views of athletes' perceived intelligence and athleticism (Hawkins, 2002; Perchot et al., 2015; Pitts & Yost, 2013; Loy & McElvogue, 1970). Historically in football, racial stacking has been prevalent at the quarterback position, where heightened awareness and overall intelligence are crucial attributes. Quarterbacks are viewed as the most prepared player, who must know the assignments and roles of the 10 other offensive players. Quarterbacks are deemed to have the highest level of mental acuity with the ability to make split-

second decisions (Kissel, 2013). Traditionally, quarterbacks have been White, because of their perceived superior intelligence. Conversely, Black players have historically *stacked* at “skill positions” where athleticism is considered the most valuable trait (Hawkins, 2002; Pitts & Yost, 2013; Schneider & Eitzen, 1986; Siler, 2019). While most commonly analyzed in football, racial stacking has also been examined in other sports as well. At many levels of competition, men’s and women’s basketball players have been racially segregated positionally with the point guard position sometimes being viewed as a White position (Berghorn, et al., 1988; Perchot et al., 2016). In women’s volleyball, the “setter” position has historically been a position in which Black athletes are underrepresented (Eitzen & Furst, 1989). In all three positions (i.e., quarterback, point guard, and setter) leadership and intelligence are highly valued. Across sports, Black athletes typically predominate (e.g., stack) in positions where strength, speed, and athleticism are valued more than mental acuity and leadership.

In 2002, Hawkins reported an increase in Black athletes at the quarterback position in college football from the 1970s to 2000. However, this increase in Black quarterbacks was attributed to changes in the skills required at the quarterback position rather than racial progress. As college football tactics and strategy changed, quarterbacks who were mobile or “athletic” became more valued. Stereotypically, Black athletes (stacked in the running back position) were perceived as possessing athleticism. While the percentage of Black quarterbacks has continued to increase in college and professional football, broadly speaking, the *tasks* Black and White quarterbacks are expected to complete are different (Bopp & Sagas, 2014). Black quarterbacks often run more and throw less than their White counterparts; an emphasis that illustrates the

different tasks each are asked to complete (Bopp & Sagas, 2014). A schematic emphasis on utilizing Black quarterbacks' athleticism to rush rather than pass effectively tasks Black quarterbacks as "skill" players playing the quarterback position, marginalizing the traditional demands of playing the position. Bopp et al. (2019) note that tasking Black quarterbacks to run more often "has the potential to hinder Black quarterbacks' analytical approach to understanding the game, increase their risk of injury, as well as limit the development of their throwing skills" (p. 9). Each of these hindrances may serve to devalue Black quarterbacks and negatively affect their professional opportunities (underdeveloped understanding of the game and throwing skills) and their longevity (increased injury risk) compared to their White counterparts.

In college football, coaches are racially tasked as well. While each assistant coach has a similar title: "assistant," a coaching hierarchy among assistant coaches is defined by the role(s) each performs (Turick, 2018; Turick & Bopp, 2016). Turick (2018) noted that in addition to on-field football roles, Black assistant coaches are often tasked with recruiting players and monitoring them once they are enrolled as students. Tasking Black assistant coaches with these additional and disparate roles may disproportionately inhibit their opportunities for advancement (Cunningham & Bopp, 2010), since they are viewed by head coaches and athletic directors as simply recruiters and "babysitters" and not leaders capable of successfully managing all aspects of a football program (Turick & Bopp, 2016). As Black and White coaches assume roles with differing emphasis, it may serve the interests of White head coaches and coordinators to employ Black coaches in recruiting-oriented positions, especially given the importance of recruiting in college football.

## **Institutional Logic Theory**

The predominant institutional logic of the institution of Power-5 college football and men's basketball has been defined as *jock capitalism* (Southall & Nagel, 2009) in which Power-5 athletic departments seek to maximize revenue within a hyper-commercialized environment. Within an institutional field, institutional members learn and recreate accepted behaviors, practices, and ideologies that serve to justify institutional policies and practices (Jepperson, 1991). Within the institutional setting of NCAA Power-5 college sport, Corr, Southall, & Nagel (2020) found that official recruiting visits serve to communicate athletic departments' dominant institutional logic to recruits. Consistent with *jock capitalism* and the competing logics that exist between higher education and athletic departments, official recruiting visits communicate a value system that emphasizes athletics over academics (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020). Recruiters within individual athletic departments communicate this value system to recruits during an official visit (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2021).

Institutions require a collective effort among actors to maintain and, if necessary, adapt the dominant logic (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). In the context of college football recruiting responsibilities, successful recruiting correlates to winning football games and winning football games correlates to revenue generation (Caro, 2012). Within a culture that values winning above all else (Santomier et al., 1980; Southall et al., 2005), Power-5 football programs seek to replicate an athletics-focused institutional logic (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2021). Considering that Black coaches may be tasked with more recruiting responsibility than White coaches (Turick & Bopp, 2016) and successful recruiting is pivotal to winning football games (Caro, 2012), athletic administrators and head coaches

may, unconsciously, maintain the institutional status quo by more often valuing minority coaches as recruiters (Turick & Bopp, 2016). Such maintenance is consistent with Battilana (2011) who found that institutional actors only seek to deviate from dominant institutional ideologies given a divergent social position. Given that coaches are more likely to hire coaches who look similar to them (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005), or who perform a specific institutionally-proscribed role, the social position of head coaches, and therefore the dominant logic, tends to remain constant.

### **Coaching Staff Structure**

The NCAA permits FBS coaching staffs to have 11 members (one head coach and 10 full-time assistant coaches) (Johnson, 2017). Not surprisingly, the head coach is the most “powerful,” followed by the offensive and defensive coordinators and, subsequently, the remaining position coaches (R. Johnson, 2019). This power structure is reflected in coaching salaries, with the head coach being the highest paid, followed by coordinators (Berkowitz et al., 2019a; Berkowitz et al., 2019b).

In addition, while overall 48% of Power-5 football coaches are White, 78% of head coaches and coordinators (i.e., those who wield institutional power) are White (NCAA, 2021). While a head coach is responsible for overseeing all aspects of a football program, a coordinator is tasked with leading their respective “side of the ball” (i.e., offense or defense) (Barnett, 2019; Donovan, 2017). Fundamentally, a coordinator is the “head coach” of either the offense or the defense (Kilgore, 2019). Just as a head coach hires coordinators to carry out his philosophy, coordinators are very involved in hiring position coaches to carry out their philosophy. In many ways, a coordinator is an

autonomous extension of the head coach, since coordinators supervise position coaches (Donovan, 2017).

Not surprisingly, job responsibilities of head coaches, coordinators, and position coaches vary, as does the perceived pressure, with pressure (as well as salary) increasing as a coach moves up the proverbial ladder (Bender, 2020; R. Johnson, 2019). Since they only coach their position players, position coaches have less responsibility and are therefore subservient to their coordinator and the head coach (R. Johnson, 2019).

Conversely, an offensive/defensive coordinator is responsible for all 11 offensive/defensive players on the field at a given time (and, more broadly, the entirety of offensive players). Since position coaches have more limited “game-planning” and on-field coaching responsibilities, they assume an increased recruiting load (Simmons, 2020; Turick, 2018; Weathersby, 2014).

As even the NCAA national office recognizes, “Recruiting is not only the lifeblood of any athletics department, but also a benefit to the entire campus” (NCAA, n.d., para. 1). No surprisingly, since position coaches interact almost daily with fewer players (i.e., players from their position), they have more opportunities to develop close relations with these players. Consequently, the primary job responsibility of a position coach is recruiting (Horne, 2013; Simmons, 2020; Turick, 2018; Weathersby, 2014). Horne (2013) states, “all assistant coaches are recruiters and usually have a designated area that they are responsible for...a region where they have established ties or developed pipelines to local high schools and their coaches” (para. 4). Many times, a position coach is assigned a recruiting area based on where he went to high school or college, as well as

established connections and/or familiarity with high school coaches, athletes and their families (Horne, 2013).

Given the locations that *top* recruits call home, coaches from specific geographic areas or ethnic enclaves may be at a premium. Since 2009, counties serving major metropolitan areas have produced the greatest number of five-star high school football recruits; Los Angeles County (serving Los Angeles, CA) – 48, Broward County (serving Fort Lauderdale, FL) – 38, Harris County (serving Houston, TX) – 26, Gwinnett County (serving Atlanta) – 24, Dallas County (serving Dallas, TX) – 23, and Miami-Dade County (serving Miami, FL) – 23 (Knox & Willis, n.d.). The counties producing the greatest number of 5-star recruits can be seen in Figure 4.1. Institutions located outside a close proximity of these *hotbeds* for high school football recruits seek to employ coaches that can gain entry to strategic geographic regions (Schrotenboer, 2020). Given the demographic composition of many recruiting hotbeds, Black coaches from similar ethnic enclaves may be sought after by White head coaches and coordinators to gain entry to specific geographic regions. The University of Colorado football program for example, “has a progressive reputation and a pressing need to recruit players from metro areas in other states, where many players are Black” (Schrotenboer, 2020, para. 62). The University of Colorado is 1 of 2 NCAA institutions (Stanford University) to have hired more than one Black head football coach in its history. As previous scholars have noted, socially effective recruiters maximize the likelihood of achieving their goal (signing a

recruit to an NLI<sup>14</sup>) by establishing a comfortable relationship with a recruit, his coach and/or his immediate family (Magnusen et al., 2011; Magnusen et al., 2014; Treadway et al., 2014). Being from the same geographic area can establish a sense of familiarity, which allows for the development of a level of comfort from the beginning of the recruitment process.

Given this context, this study sought to examine the various roles that coaches perform within the recruiting process utilizing a critical race theory framework, informed by interest convergence.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Setting**

The SEC was chosen as the research setting based on previous work (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020; 2021; Glier, 2012), as well as it having the highest percentage of both Black football coaches (50% in 2020) and players (57% in 2020) among Power-5 conferences (NCAA, 2021). Data will be collected beginning with the 2018-2019 academic year due to the NCAA rule change allowing for 11 full-time coaching members in football (up from 10) in January 2018 (Johnson, 2017). Including 4 permissible graduate assistants, coaching staffs in college football now number 15 total coaches. Upon passing an annual NCAA recruiting exam, these 15 coaches are permitted to coach current athletes and recruit prospective athletes (NCAA, 2017). The rule change allowed

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<sup>14</sup> Indicates an athlete has signed a National Letter of Intent (NLI), an agreement between a recruit and an institution in which the recruit agrees to attend the institution for one full academic year and the institution agrees to compensate the recruit by providing one full year of financial aid.



for head coaches to hire an additional position coach or coordinator; coaches with recruiting responsibility.

## **Data**

### ***Recruiting Data***

Recruiting success was determined based on *247Sports Recruiter of the Year* ranking. *247Sports*, a subsidiary of *CBSSports*, is recognized as the recruiting industry leader in determining recruiting rankings for high school football recruits (*247Sports*, 2012). Utilizing a composite ranking system, *247Sports* calculates recruiting rankings based on the average of multiple, widely recognized, recruiting services (e.g. ESPN and Scout). A 5-star football player typically holds multiple offers from the most historically powerful and prominent college football programs in the Power-5. Regardless of the subjective nature of recruiting rankings, the correlation between number of stars (i.e. 5-star, 4-star, etc.) and number of suitors (i.e. scholarship offers) makes signing a higher rated recruit a useful means of determining the recruiting success of a coach.

Additionally, a correlation exists between signing 5- and 4-star players and winning national championships in Power-5 football (Elmasry, 2017; Kercheval, 2016).

In addition to *Recruiter of the Year* ranking, a number of variables on SEC coaches were calculated using data found on *247Sports.com*. The *Primary Recruiter* is the coach that is designated to lead the recruitment of a recruit and is primarily responsible for their signing with a particular program. Knowing which coach was the primary recruiter for each individual recruit is pivotal to examining each research question. The total number of recruits in which a coach served as the primary recruiter was collected to examine *recruiting load* (i.e. which coaches were responsible for signing

the most recruits). The position, hometown, high school, race, and star-rating of each recruit was gathered along with information on the total number of football programs to offer a recruit a scholarship (*Total Offers*), number of official visits taken (*Official Visits*), and football programs a recruit officially visited (*Official Visits-Location*). As previously mentioned, recruiting rankings are an imperfect system but analyzing the total number of football programs to offer a recruit a scholarship and if football programs are hosting a recruit on an official visit is a more objective measure to determine how coveted a recruit truly is by college football programs.

### ***Census Data***

Recruiting data was calculated from a variety of sources. The 15-member coaching staffs at each institution were examined based off their demographic background, coaching background, and recruiting success in the 2019, 2020, and 2021 recruiting classes. A college football coaching staff typically represents 1 head coach, 2 coordinators, 8 position coaches, and 4 graduate assistants. The demographic and coaching background of each coach was identified using biographical information found on athletic department websites and media guides. Socioeconomic background and upbringing were determined based off each coach's identified *hometown* found on athletic department websites and within media guides and calculated using the most recent United States Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) data (<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>). The most recently available Census data is from the 2010 decennial Census. While using Census data within the past 20-years is considered statistically valid (Geronimus & Bound, 1998), the 2019 ACS provided more current demographic information of geographic areas. The ACS has been found to be

comparably reliable to the more robust United States Census (National Research Council, 2007; Yang et al., 2014). The United States Census database allows users to search the most recent ACS data by entering the name of a city, county, or state. Coaches demographic variables consist of each coach's hometown: *Median Age, Percentage of High School Graduates, Median Annual Household Income, Percentage Living Below Poverty Level, Total Population, Black Population, and White Population*. Demographic variables were used to determine the ethnic enclave and socioeconomic status in each coach's identified hometown.

Understanding the demographic background of recruits that coaches are signing is an important layer to this study. The socioeconomic background of each recruit was determined based on the geographic location of their identified hometown on *247Sports.com* and calculated using the most recent ACS data. Recruits demographic variables consist of each recruit's hometown: *Median Age, Percentage of High School Graduates, Median Annual Household Income, Percentage Living Below Poverty Level, Total Population, Black Population, and White Population*. Demographic variables were used to determine the ethnic enclave and socioeconomic status in each recruit's identified hometown. Since college football coaches are typically assigned to recruit a specific geographic area (Casazza, 2019; Lee, 2020; May, 2012), identifying the socioeconomic background of a specific geographic area a coach is assigned to is important when examining recruiting from a racial perspective. Many athletic department websites list recruiting areas for each member of the football coaching staff for the stated benefit of high school coaches and recruits, illustrating the importance each coach has in recruiting a specific geographic area.

### ***Biographical Data***

Extensive biographical data on each coach was gathered from athletic department websites and media guides. *Title*, *Position*, and *Secondary Title* were gathered to group coaches during analysis. *Title* broke down into three categories: Head Coach, Coordinator, or Assistant Coach. The variable *Position* identified which position group each coach was responsible for coaching. *Secondary Title* consisted of any additional titles a coach had (e.g. Run Game Coordinator, Associate Head Coach). Previous coaching experience and coaching positions were gathered for all coaches in the sample. Relationships among coaches on each staff were examined to determine if certain assistant coaches were consistently hired to work for coordinators or head coaches. Given that coaches in the SEC consistently work for multiple football programs within the conference over the course of their coaching careers (e.g. Will Muschamp at Auburn University, Louisiana State University, University of Florida, University of South Carolina, and University of Georgia) (Levine, 2015), personal and/or professional relationships may limit the opportunities for coaches outside the SEC to be employed within the conference. Other collected variables included: Age, Race, College, Degree, Coaching Experience [High School], Coaching Experience [College], Coaching Experience [Professional], Head Coach Experience, Head Coach Experience [Age], Coordinator Experience, Coordinator Experience [Age], Assistant Coach Experience, Assistant Coach Experience [Age], Graduate Assistant Experience, Former Player, Former Player [Position], Former Player [College], and Former Player [Professional]. Head coach, coordinator, and assistant coach experience by age was gathered to indicate a coach's age at first opportunity within each title/position. Analysis was run across these

variables to determine if differences existed in the opportunities afforded to Black and White coaches.

### **Analysis**

Much of the data is descriptive in nature and individual mean scores of particular variables will be used throughout the findings to illustrate differences between the division of labor, if present, of minority and White coaches with relation to recruiting. As it is theorized that increased recruiting responsibility placed on Black coaches negatively affects opportunities for advancement (Turick, 2018, Turick & Bopp, 2016), analysis were run to determine if differences exist between Black and White coaches recruiting responsibilities and examine research question 1. Comparisons between hometown demographic data of primary recruiting coaches and signed recruits were used to examine research question 2. Analysis of coaches' race and recruits' star-ratings were run to examine research question 3. For comparisons between variables, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare whether differences exist between independent variables. Tukey's HSD test was used as a post-hoc measure to determine if variables were statistically significant. Tests of statistical significance ( $p \leq .05$ ) and relevance were reported upon comparison between variables. Statistical comparisons were calculated using the software package SPSS by IBM Business.

### **Positionality**

As mentioned in the preface of this dissertation, I have professional work experience working in the field of college football recruiting. While my firsthand knowledge of recruiting practices and operations are valuable in conducting research I have taken measures to avoid confirmation bias. By collecting data beginning with the

2019 recruiting class, I ensured that I was not extensively a part of the recruitment process for any of the recruits in this study as my final date of employment in a recruiting position was May 2018.<sup>15</sup> While I acknowledge that I have worked for and have had personal relationships with coaches in this dataset, none of the data being collected is subjective in nature and no internal bias can be found in the dataset.

### **Limitations**

It is worth noting that using 2019 ACS data as a measure of the demographic and socioeconomic background of coaches is not current as geographic regions have no doubt changed over time. While the primary recruiter variable on *247Sports* is essential to answering this study's research questions there is a confluence of factors that contribute to a recruit's enrollment decision. A knowledge of which coach was primarily responsible for recruiting specific recruits is valuable but acknowledging the variety of factors that contribute to a recruit's enrollment decision is worth noting.

## **Findings**

### **Racial Composition of Coaches**

In total, 378 SEC coaches were examined from 2018-2021. During this span, Vanderbilt University head football coach Derek Mason was the only Black head coach in the Conference; Mason was fired during the 2020-2021 season (Schlabach, 2020). Coordinators accounted for 18% of coaches ( $n = 67$ ). Fifty coordinators were White (75%) and 17 were Black (25%). Twenty-nine offensive coordinators were White (83%) and 6 were Black (17%). Twenty-one defensive coordinators were White (66%) and 11

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<sup>15</sup> The 2019 recruiting class signed in either the Early Signing Period in December 2018, or on National Signing Day in February 2019.

were Black (34%). Black coaches comprised of 53% of position coaches ( $n = 112$ ) and White coaches made up 47% ( $n = 98$ ). Seventy-three graduate assistants were identified with 59% White ( $n = 43$ ) and 41% Black ( $n = 30$ ). White coaches accounted for 73% of offensive graduate assistants ( $n = 24$ ) and 38% of defensive ( $n = 13$ ). Black coaches comprised 27% of offensive graduate assistants ( $n = 9$ ) and 62% of defensive ( $n = 21$ ). Three White graduate assistants coached special teams while 3 additional White graduate assistants were not identified as coaching a specific position. A statistically significant relationship exists between coaches' title (i.e. coordinator or position coach) and coaches' race ( $p < .001$ ). White coaches examined in this study were more likely to be coordinators than Black coaches. Racial composition of coaches is depicted in Table 4.1.

### **Background of Coaches' Hometowns**

Head coaches in the SEC were on average 50.7 years old. Coordinators were 45.6 years old with White coordinators averaging 46.9 and Black coordinators 40.4. Position coaches were 44.9 years old with White position coaches averaging 45.9 and Black position coaches 44.3. White position coaches and coordinators had been coaching for a greater number of seasons ( $M_{WhitePosition} = 22.6$ ;  $M_{WhiteCoordinator} = 24.2$ ) than Black coaches ( $M_{BlackPosition} = 19$ ;  $M_{BlackCoordinator} = 17.5$ ). The median age of position coaches' hometowns was statistically similar for White and Black coaches ( $M_{WhiteAge} = 36.4$ ;  $M_{BlackAge} = 36.2$ ). The median age of Black coordinators' hometowns was greater than that of White coordinators ( $M_{WhiteAge} = 35.8$ ;  $M_{BlackAge} = 38.4$ ). The median annual household income of Black position coaches' hometowns was \$51,335, greater than that of White position coaches ( $M_{WhiteIncome} = \$49,595$ ). The median annual household income of White coordinators' hometowns was \$50,323 and Black coordinators was \$46,931.

The percentage of high school graduates was statistically similar across all coaches ( $M_{WhitePosition} = 85.7\%$ ;  $M_{BlackPosition} = 85\%$ ;  $M_{WhiteCoordinator} = 84.3\%$ ;  $M_{BlackCoordinator} = 85.7\%$ ). The percentage of coaches' hometown population living below the poverty level was also similar across all coaches ( $M_{WhitePosition} = 21\%$ ;  $M_{BlackPosition} = 20.9\%$ ;  $M_{WhiteCoordinator} = 21.1\%$ ;  $M_{BlackCoordinator} = 20.9\%$ ). White position coaches were from hometowns with larger overall populations than Black position coaches ( $M_{WhitePosition} = 357,395$ ;  $M_{BlackPosition} = 223,598$ ). The overall hometown population for coordinators was similar for White ( $M_{WhiteCoordinator} = 142,827$ ) and Black coaches ( $M_{BlackCoordinator} = 139,409$ ). The hometown population of White position coaches was 19% Black ( $M_{WhitePosition} = 68,918$ ) and 54% White ( $M_{WhitePosition} = 192,687$ ). The hometown population of Black position coaches was 25% Black ( $M_{BlackPosition} = 55,753$ ) and 54% White ( $M_{BlackPosition} = 120,718$ ). The hometown population of White coordinators was 33% Black ( $M_{WhiteCoordinator} = 47,768$ ) and 54% White ( $M_{WhiteCoordinator} = 77,552$ ). The hometown population of Black coordinators was 26% Black ( $M_{BlackCoordinator} = 36,788$ ) and 60% White ( $M_{BlackCoordinator} = 82,944$ ). The background of coaches is depicted in Table 4.2.

Forty-nine Black coaches hailed from states located in the Southeast United States ( $AL = 12$ ;  $AR = 2$ ;  $FL = 6$ ;  $GA = 7$ ;  $LA = 8$ ;  $MS = 6$ ;  $SC = 3$ ;  $TN = 1$ ). Thirteen Black coaches were from the Midwest ( $IL = 2$ ;  $IN = 1$ ;  $MI = 1$ ;  $OH = 3$ ;  $OK = 1$ ;  $TX = 5$ ), 7 were from the West Coast ( $AZ = 1$ ;  $CA = 6$ ), 5 were from the Northeast ( $CT = 1$ ;  $DC = 1$ ;  $MD = 2$ ;  $NJ = 1$ ), and 2 were born internationally ( $Jamaica = 1$ ;  $Congo = 1$ ). Thirty-four White coaches were from the Southeast ( $AL = 9$ ;  $AR = 3$ ;  $FL = 5$ ;  $GA = 4$ ;  $LA = 3$ ;  $MS = 3$ ;  $SC = 5$ ). Twenty-five White coaches were from the Midwest ( $IA = 1$ ;  $IL = 1$ ;  $MI$



= 3;  $MN = 1$ ;  $MO = 5$ ;  $NE = 2$ ;  $OH = 3$ ;  $OK = 3$ ;  $TX = 6$ ), 16 were from the Northeast ( $CT = 1$ ;  $MA = 1$ ;  $NJ = 4$ ;  $NY = 4$ ;  $PA = 3$ ;  $RI = 1$ ;  $VA = 1$ ;  $WV = 1$ ), and 15 hailed from the West Coast ( $AK = 1$ ;  $AZ = 1$ ;  $CA = 6$ ;  $CO = 4$ ;  $NV = 2$ ;  $UT = 1$ ). A distribution of coaches' home states is illustrated in Figures 4.2 and 4.3.

### **Racial Composition of Recruits**

Overall, 653 recruits were examined as part of this study. Black recruits accounted for 87% of the total ( $n = 569$ ) and White recruits the remaining 13% ( $n = 84$ ). Forty-nine 5-star recruits were signed by SEC programs from 2018-2021. Forty-five five-star recruits were Black (91.8%) and 4 were White (8.2%). Four-star recruits accounted for the largest number of recruits ( $n = 312$ ) with 92.6% Black ( $n = 289$ ) and 7.4% White ( $n = 23$ ). Of the 27 White recruits rated as a five- or four-star, 41% played the quarterback position ( $n = 11$ ). Comparatively, of the 334 Black recruits rated as a five- or four-star, only 2.7% played the quarterback position ( $n = 9$ ). Three-star recruits represented 45% of all recruits in the study ( $n = 292$ ) with 80.5% of three-stars being Black ( $n = 235$ ) and 19.5% White ( $n = 57$ ). The racial composition of recruits is depicted in Table 4.3.

### **Background of Recruits' Hometowns**

The median age of Black recruits' hometowns was 36.7 and 36.3 for White recruits. The percentage of high school graduates was similar for Black and White recruits ( $M_{BlackRecruit} = 86.4\%$ ;  $M_{WhiteRecruit} = 86.8\%$ ). White recruits came from hometowns with a higher median annual household income ( $M_{WhiteRecruit} = \$59,638$ ) than Black recruits ( $M_{BlackRecruit} = \$52,837$ ). The percentage living below the poverty rate was greater among Black recruits ( $M_{BlackRecruit} = 19.4\%$ ) than White recruits ( $M_{WhiteRecruit} =$

16.8%). Black recruits' hometowns had a greater population ( $M_{BlackRecruit} = 220,282$ ) than White recruits ( $M_{WhiteRecruit} = 130,871$ ). Black recruits' hometown Black population was 73,703 (33.5% of the total population) and White recruits was 47,521 (36.3%). Black recruits' hometown White population was 111,162 (50.5%) and White recruits was 70,733 (54%). The background of recruits is depicted in Table 4.4.

Five-, four-, and three-star recruits differed in hometown demographics depending on the recruit's race. The hometowns of Black five-star recruits featured a higher median age ( $M_{Black5Star} = 36.2$ ) than White five-star recruits ( $M_{White5Star} = 34.8$ ). Black four- and three-star recruits had similar hometown median ages to White four- and three-star recruits ( $M_{Black4Star} = 36.6$ ;  $M_{Black3Star} = 36.9$ ;  $M_{White4Star} = 36.1$ ;  $M_{White3Star} = 36.6$ ). Black five-star recruits came from hometowns with a lower percentage of high school graduates ( $M_{Black5Star} = 86.8\%$ ) than White five-star recruits ( $M_{White5Star} = 88.4\%$ ). Black four-star recruits also hailed from hometowns with a lower percentage of high school graduates ( $M_{Black4Star} = 86.2\%$ ) than White four-star recruits ( $M_{White4Star} = 88.2\%$ ). Black three-star recruits were from hometowns with a slightly higher percentage of high school graduates ( $M_{Black3Star} = 86.3\%$ ) than White three-star recruits ( $M_{White3Star} = 85.9$ ). Black five-star recruits' hometowns had a higher annual household income ( $M_{Black5Star} = \$58,213$ ) than White five-star recruits ( $M_{White5Star} = \$57,343$ ). Black four-star recruits' hometown had a lower annual household income ( $M_{Black4Star} = \$53,780$ ) than White four-star recruits ( $M_{White4Star} = \$54,513$ ). Black three-star recruits were from hometowns with lower annual household income ( $M_{Black3Star} = \$50,974$ ) than White three-star recruits ( $M_{White3Star} = \$61,628$ ). Black five-, four-, and three-stars came from hometowns with greater poverty rates ( $M_{Black5Star} = 16.9\%$ ;  $M_{Black4Star} = 19.3\%$ ;  $M_{Black3Star} = 20.1\%$ ) than

White recruits ( $M_{White5Star} = 13.9\%$ ;  $M_{White4Star} = 17.2\%$ ;  $M_{White3Star} = 17.1\%$ ). Black five-star recruits were from hometowns with smaller overall populations ( $M_{Black5Star} = 134,516$ ) than White five-stars ( $M_{White5Star} = 854,450$ ). Black four- and three-star recruits were from hometowns with larger overall populations ( $M_{Black4Star} = 247,169$ ;  $M_{Black3Star} = 181,213$ ) than White four- and three-star recruits ( $M_{White4Star} = 210,054$ ;  $M_{White3Star} = 95,910$ ). Black five-star recruits were from hometowns with a Black population of 30,895 (23% of the total population) and White population of 75,736 (56.3%). White five-star recruits were from hometowns with a Black population of 79,875 (9.3%) and White population of 459,901 (53.8%). Black four-star recruits were from hometowns with a Black population of 80,320 (32.5%) and White population of 124,270 (50.3%). White four-star recruits were from hometowns with a Black population of 79,935 (38.1%) and White population of 109,898 (52.3%). Black three-star recruits were from hometowns with a Black population of 70,786 (39.1%) and White population of 91,460 (50.5%). White three-star recruits were from hometowns with a Black population of 32,378 (33.8%) and White population of 54,739 (57.1%).

Black recruits were predominantly from the Southeast United States ( $n = 362$ , or 74.3% of all Black recruits). The majority of Black recruits from the Southeast were from the states of Georgia ( $n = 78$ ) and Florida ( $n = 73$ ) followed by Mississippi ( $n = 54$ ), Alabama ( $n = 48$ ), Louisiana ( $n = 37$ ), Tennessee ( $n = 31$ ), South Carolina ( $n = 18$ ), North Carolina ( $n = 9$ ), Kentucky ( $n = 7$ ), and Arkansas ( $n = 7$ ). Seventy-eight (16%)

Black recruits were from the Midwest<sup>16</sup>, 34 (7%) were from the Northeast<sup>17</sup>, and 13 (2.7%) were from the West Coast<sup>18</sup>. White recruits were predominantly from the Southeast United States as well ( $n = 74$ , or 73.3% of all White recruits). White recruits were most commonly from the states of Georgia ( $n = 18$ ), Texas ( $n = 15$ ), and Florida ( $n = 14$ ). Twenty-one (20.8%) White recruits were from the Midwest<sup>19</sup>, 3 (3%) were from the Northeast<sup>20</sup>, and 3 (3%) were from the West Coast<sup>21</sup>. A distribution of recruits' home states is illustrated in Figures 4.4 and 4.5.

### **Recruiting Responsibility**

Black coaches served as the primary recruiter for 60.3% of recruits ( $n = 394$ ) and White coaches for 39.7% of recruits ( $n = 259$ ). Black coaches served as the primary recruiter for 64.1% of Black recruits ( $n = 365$ ) while White coaches served as the primary recruiter for 35.9% of Black recruits ( $n = 204$ ). Conversely, among White recruits, Black coaches served as the primary recruiter for 34.5% ( $n = 29$ ) while White coaches served as the primary recruiter for 65.5% ( $n = 55$ ). Twenty-six five-star recruits (53.1%) had a Black coach as their primary recruiter and 23 (46.9%) had a White coach. Of the 45 Black five-star recruits, 53.3% ( $n = 24$ ) had a Black coach as their primary recruiter while 46.7% ( $n = 21$ ) had a White coach. Two White five-star recruits were recruited by a Black coach and 2 were recruited by a White coach. A Black coach served

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<sup>16</sup> Texas (47), Ohio (11), Michigan (9), Illinois (5), Missouri (3), Oklahoma (2), and Minnesota (1).

<sup>17</sup> Maryland (11), Virginia (8), New Jersey (5), Washington D.C. (4), Pennsylvania (3), Connecticut (1), Rhode Island (1), and West Virginia (1).

<sup>18</sup> California (7), Arizona (2), Utah (2), Nevada (1), and Washington (1).

<sup>19</sup> Texas (15), Oklahoma (2), Illinois (1), Indiana (1), Missouri (1), and Ohio (1).

<sup>20</sup> Pennsylvania (1), Virginia (1), and Washington D.C. (1).

<sup>21</sup> California (2) and Colorado (1).

as the primary recruiter for 65.1% of four-star recruits ( $n = 203$ ) and a White coach 34.9% ( $n = 109$ ). A Black coach served as the primary recruiter for 197 Black four-star recruits (68.2%) and a White coach for 92 Black four-star recruits (31.8%). A Black coach served as the primary recruiter for 26.1% of White four-star recruits ( $n = 6$ ) and a White coach for 73.9% ( $n = 17$ ). All 11 of the White quarterbacks rated as a five- or four-star were recruited by a White coach. Of the 9 Black quarterbacks rated as a five- or four-star, 4 were recruited by a Black coach and 5 were recruited by a White coach. A statistically significant relationship exists between a recruit's position and the race of the primary recruiter ( $p < .002$ ). While there were 6 Black offensive coordinators identified in this study, only 2 specifically coach the quarterback position; the other 4 coach the wide receiver position. Comparatively, 23 White offensive coordinators (79%) specifically coach the quarterback position. Not surprisingly, there is a strong statistical relationship ( $p < .001$ ) between a primary recruiter's side of the ball (i.e. offense or defense) and the position of recruits (e.g. an offensive coach serves as the primary recruiter for a recruit in an offensive position). Across the coaching hierarchy, offensive coordinators were the only group of coaches to have a statistical relationship serving as the primary recruiter for recruits at a specific position. There is a strong statistical relationship between offensive coordinators and serving as the primary recruiter for recruits at the quarterback position ( $p < .001$ ). No other group of coaches (i.e. defensive coordinator or position coach) held a statistically significant relationship to a specific position (e.g. defensive coordinators recruited all defensive positions).

A Black coach served as the primary recruiter for 56.5% of three-star recruits ( $n = 165$ ). A White coach served as the primary recruiter for 43.5% of three-star recruits ( $n =$

127). Black coaches recruited 144 (61.3%) of Black three-star recruits and White coaches recruited 91 (38.7%). Twenty-one White three-star recruits (36.8%) were recruited by a Black coach and 36 (63.2%) by a White coach. Overall, a Black coach served as the primary recruiter for 57.5% of Black recruits ( $n = 432$ ) and 28.6% of White recruits ( $n = 42$ ). A White coach served as the primary recruiter for 42.5% of Black recruits ( $n = 319$ ) and 71.4% of White recruits ( $n = 105$ ). A statistically significant relationship exists between the race of a recruit and the race of the primary recruiter ( $p < .008$ ).

## **Statistical Comparisons**

### ***Race of Recruits***

A statistically significant relationship exists between the race of a recruit and position ( $p < .001$ ). The race of quarterback recruits statistically differed from that of running backs ( $p < .022$ ), wide receivers ( $p < .001$ ), defensive lineman ( $p < .001$ ), linebackers ( $p < .001$ ), and defensive backs ( $p < .001$ ). A statistical difference did not exist between the race of quarterbacks, offensive lineman, and tight ends. Additionally, a strong relationship exists between the race of a coach and recruits playing quarterback ( $p < .001$ ) and offensive line ( $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, a relationship exists between the race of a coach and recruits playing defensive line ( $p < .001$ ) and defensive back ( $p < .001$ ). White coaches were more likely to recruit the positions of quarterback and offensive line while Black coaches were more likely to recruit the positions of defensive line and defensive back.

### ***Coach & Recruit Demographic Backgrounds***

A statistically significant relationship exists between the Black population of recruits' hometowns and the race of primary recruiters ( $p < .009$ ). Recruits from areas

with a greater Black population were more likely to be recruited by a Black coach. Conversely, there was a statistically significant relationship between the Black population of coaches' hometowns and race of recruits ( $p < .03$ ). Coaches from areas with a greater Black population were more likely to serve as the primary recruiter for Black recruits. Additionally, there was a relationship between recruits' hometown Black population and coaches' hometown Black population ( $p < .049$ ). Recruits from areas with a larger Black population were more likely to be recruited by coaches from areas with a larger Black population. A relationship also exists between coaches' hometown median annual household income and race of recruits ( $p < .053$ ). Coaches from hometowns with lower median annual household incomes were somewhat more likely to recruit Black recruits. A statistically significant relationship existed between coaches' hometown percentage living below the poverty level and recruits' hometown median annual household income ( $p < .018$ ). Coaches from hometowns with a greater percentage of the population living below the poverty level were more likely to serve as the primary recruiter for recruits from hometowns with lower median annual household incomes. Furthermore, a relationship exists between coaches and recruits' hometown percentage living below the poverty level ( $p < .009$ ). Coaches from areas with a greater percentage living below the poverty level were more likely to serve as the primary recruiter for recruits from areas with a greater percentage living below the poverty level.

### ***Recruiting Ranking***

No statistically significant relationship exists between coaches' race and recruit star rating (i.e. five-, four-, or three-star). However, there is a significant relationship between recruit star rating and coaches' *Recruiter of the Year* ranking ( $p < .001$ ), number

of recruits signed ( $p < .01$ ), and number of Black recruits signed ( $p < .002$ ). Not surprisingly, coaches that served as the primary recruiter for five- and four-star recruits were ranked higher in the *Recruiter of the Year* rankings and signed a greater number of recruits overall and, specifically, Black recruits. The *Recruiter of the Year* ranking is also significantly related to a coach's race ( $p < .001$ ). Black coaches were more likely to be ranked higher in the *Recruiter of the Year* rankings.

### ***Former Players Recruiting Success***

It is very common for college coaches to have played college football (Ferguson, 2016). In fact, 83% ( $n = 314$ ) of coaches in this study played college football at varying levels. Thirty-nine coaches went on to play in the NFL. A statistically significant relationship exists between coaches' highest level of competition as a player and race of recruit ( $p < .007$ ), recruit star rating ( $p < .006$ ), and number of Black recruits signed ( $p < .001$ ). Coaches that had played in the NFL were more likely to serve as the primary recruiter for Black recruits, more likely to sign five- and four-star recruits, and signed a greater number of Black recruits. The position a coach played is also a significant factor in the recruitment of high school athletes. Coaches that played the quarterback position (at any level) statistically differed in the number of White players they signed than coaches that were former wide receivers ( $p < .004$ ), offensive lineman ( $p < .001$ ), linebackers ( $p < .001$ ), and defensive backs ( $p < .001$ ). Coaches that played defensive back statistically differed in the number of Black players they signed than coaches that were former quarterbacks ( $p < .004$ ), running backs ( $p < .001$ ), tight ends ( $p < .001$ ), linebackers ( $p < .042$ ), and specialists ( $p < .055$ ).



### ***Program Recruiting Success***

The football programs at University of Alabama and University of Georgia have consistently signed more five-stars than any program in college football over the past ten-years (Stephens, 2020). Not surprisingly, there is a statistically significant relationship between coaches from both University of Alabama and University of Georgia and recruit star rating ( $p < .001$ ). Alabama and Georgia football coaches statistically differed from coaches at the 12 other SEC football programs in the number of five-star recruits they signed. Coaches from Vanderbilt University, the SEC's lone private institution, statistically differed from all other SEC coaches in the number of White recruits they signed ( $p < .003$ ).

### **Discussion**

The findings from this study illustrate the perpetuation of racial tasking in the designation of recruiting responsibilities among football coaching staffs in the SEC. The majority of Power-5 football players, and a greater percentage of starters (i.e. players making a significant impact on the outcome of a game), are Black. There is an inherent, and perhaps conscious, emphasis placed on recruiting Black football players given the impact they have on the outcome of a game. This study found that Black coaches are more likely to serve as the primary recruiter for Black recruits. Additionally, Black coaches are ranked higher than White coaches in the *247Sports Recruiter of the Year* rankings. Black coaches were also found to have a greater recruiting responsibility compared to White coaches. Black coaches comprised of 47% of all coordinators and position coaches but were responsible for signing 60% of recruits. Furthermore, Black coaches served as the primary recruiter for 53% of five-star recruits, 65% of four-star

recruits, and 57% of three-star recruits. Among Black recruits, Black coaches played an even more vital role serving as the primary recruiter for 53% of Black five-star recruits, 68% of Black four-star recruits, and 61% of Black three-star recruits. This study provides evidence that Black coaches are racially tasked as *recruiters* and builds upon previous literature examining the disparate roles that Black and White football coaches occupy within college football (Turick, 2018; Turick & Bopp, 2016).

Consistent with previous research that socially-effective recruiters tend to be more effective (Magnusen et al., 2011; Magnusen et al., 2014; Treadway et al., 2014), this study found that coaches tend to recruit areas that are ethnically and socioeconomically similar to that of their own hometown. Coaches hailing from geographic areas with a large Black population are likely to serve as the primary recruiter for recruits from areas with a large Black population. Additionally, coaches from areas with low median annual household incomes and higher percentages living below the poverty level are likely to serve as the primary recruiter for recruits from areas with low median annual household incomes and higher percentages living below the poverty level. Coaches from specific areas and socioeconomic backgrounds are valuable as recruiters and serve as the primary recruiter for recruits from similar socioeconomic backgrounds (Brooks, 2021; Donohue, 2015). A shared understanding of one's life experience is leveraged in the recruiting process and further illustrates the dominate institutional logic of Power-5 athletics. The acceptance of racially tasking Black coaches into recruiting-oriented roles exemplifies the institutional logic of *jock capitalism* (Southall & Nagel, 2009). Black coaches are knowingly tasked as recruiters, a role that disproportionately limits their opportunities for advancement within the coaching profession (Hruby, 2020;

Turick & Bopp, 2016). By disproportionately tasking Black coaches as recruiters, predominately White head coaches and coordinators propagate the Power-5 institutional logic that places a high value on football success.

A trend worth noting is the migration of coaches in positions of advancement. Coordinators in this study had tended to hire one or more assistant coach from the previous coaching staff they worked on. A similar trend exists among head coaching hirings. This trend represents career advancement for all coaches involved (e.g. a coordinator becoming a head coach hires their assistant coach to be a coordinator). A similar trend exists at other hierarchical levels within coaching staffs (e.g. assistant coaches hired to be coordinators typically hire their former graduate assistants as assistant coaches). At each varying hierarchical level within coaching staff hirings, a migration pattern exists that pairs coaches to one another; the advancement of one coach positively correlates to the advancement of another coach. Within this migration, coaches are often connected by race. White coaches tend to *bring along* other White coaches when they are hired in a position of advancement. A similar pattern exists among Black coaches and is consistent with previous literature (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005). While not entirely surprising, the phenomenon illustrates disparate opportunities for advancement in coaching ranks among Power-5 college football programs. White coaches are hired more often than Black coaches as coordinators and head coaches; positions of authority, leadership, and influence. Yet, White coaches hired as coordinators and head coaches tend to bring along other White coaches to the new football program in a position of advancement. This trend disproportionately affects the opportunities for Black coaches to

advance to higher ranking positions on a college football coaching staff when compared to their White counterparts.

This study revealed that often a precursor to becoming an assistant coach was being a graduate assistant coach. Per NCAA rules, there are only four graduate assistant positions on each coaching staff and they are extremely coveted positions (American Football Coaches Association [AFCA], 2020). While sought after, graduate assistant positions in this study tended to be held by former quarterbacks. In fact, 25% of graduate assistant coaches were former college quarterbacks. There are a number of reasons quarterbacks might be valued as graduate assistants (e.g. the knowledge of play-calling and schematic tendencies that are necessary to playing the quarterback position). However, the racial composition of the quarterback position in college football reveals there are more White quarterbacks than Black (Siler, 2019). Similarly, this study found that 11 of the 13 graduate assistant coaches that were former college quarterbacks were White. As graduate assistant coaches are more likely to be former quarterbacks than any other position and the position of quarterback is traditionally White, opportunities to become a graduate assistant coach may disproportionately affect Black coaching candidates seeking entry into the profession. Being a graduate assistant coach is often a precursor to entering the coaching *ranks* yet, the hiring process may be systematically discriminatory towards non-quarterbacks and, therefore, Black coaches.

### **Conclusion and Future Research**

While conversations surrounding equity in coaching hirings are commonplace, they are typically situated in providing equal opportunity for coaches to interview for positions of advancement (e.g. The Rooney Rule). However, this study's findings

illustrate systemically discriminatory practices that are present among college football coaching hirings that disproportionately affect the opportunities for advancement for members of a coaching staff that are Black. While the opportunities to interview for positions of advancement may be *equal* under policies such as The Rooney Rule, this trend illustrates the importance of examining the equitable opportunities for advancement available (rather, not available) to Black college football coaches.

An examination of the intersection of race, coaching rank, and opportunity for career advancement has potential implications across multiple subfields within the broader field of sport management. From a practical standpoint, sports are something that *we* can understand while discussing race and confronting racial issues within American society can often be a difficult conversation. However, separating sports and race devalues our understanding of either and compartmentalizes issues that transcend sport as endemic to American society. Examining potentially racially motivated practices among college football staffing calls attention to social issues within the context of sport. Future research examining the interest convergence principle in relation to college football coaches' opportunities for advancement would be valuable in further uncovering the nature of college football hiring decisions.

Table 4.1: Racial Composition of Coaches

Coach Title	# White	% White	# Black	% Black
Head Coach	26	93%	2	7%
Coordinator	50	75%	17	25%
Offensive Coordinator	29	83%	6	17%
Defensive Coordinator	21	66%	11	34%
Position Coach	98	47%	112	53%
Graduate Assistant (GA)	43	59%	30	41%
Offensive GA	24	73%	9	27%
Defensive GA	13	38%	21	62%

Table 4.2: Background of Coaches' Hometowns

Coach Title	Age	% High School Graduates	Annual Household Income	% Below Poverty Level	Population	Black Population	% Black Population	White Population	% White Population
Position Coaches	36.3	85.4%	\$50,499	20.9%	287,821	62,072	21.6%	155,263	53.9%
Position Coaches (Black)	36.2	85.0%	\$51,335	20.9%	223,598	55,753	24.9%	120,718	54%
Position Coaches (White)	36.4	85.7%	\$49,595	21.0%	357,395	68,918	19.3%	192,687	53.9%
Coordinators	36.5	84.7%	\$49,354	21.0%	141,850	44,631	31.5%	79,093	55.8%
Coordinators (Black)	38.4	85.7%	\$46,931	20.9%	139,409	36,788	26.4%	82,944	59.5%
Coordinators (White)	35.8	84.3%	\$50,323	21.1%	142,827	47,768	33.4%	77,552	54.3%

Table 4.3: Racial Composition of Recruits

Coach Title	# White	% White	# Black	% Black
Total Recruits	84	12.9%	569	87.1%
5-Stars	4	8.2%	45	91.8%
4-Stars	23	7.4%	289	92.6%
3-Stars	57	19.5%	235	80.5%



Table 4.4: Background of Recruits' Hometowns

Coach Title	Age	% High School Graduates	Annual Household Income	% Below Poverty Level	Population	Black Population	% Black Population	White Population	% White Population
Total Recruits (Black)	36.7	86.4%	\$52,837	19.4%	220,282	73,703	33.5%	111,162	50.5%
Total Recruits (White)	36.3	86.8%	\$59,638	16.8%	130,871	47,521	36.3%	70,733	54.0%
5-Stars (Black)	36.2	86.8%	\$58,213	16.9%	134,516	30,895	23.0%	75,736	56.3%
5-Stars (White)	34.8	88.4%	\$57,343	13.9%	854,450	79,875	9.3%	459,901	53.8%
4-Stars (Black)	36.6	86.2%	\$53,780	19.3%	247,169	80,320	32.5%	124,270	50.3%
4-Stars (White)	36.1	88.2%	\$54,513	17.2%	210,054	79,935	38.1%	109,898	52.3%
3-Stars (Black)	36.9	86.3%	\$50,974	20.1%	181,213	70,786	39.1%	91,460	50.5%
3-Stars (White)	36.6	85.9%	\$61,628	17.1%	95,910	32,378	33.8%	54,739	57.1%

Label	County	Area Serving	2009-2018 5-Star Recruits
1	Los Angeles County	Los Angeles, CA	48
2	Broward County	Fort Lauderdale, FL	38
3	Harris County	Houston, TX	26
4	Gwinnett County	Atlanta, GA	24
5	Dallas County	Dallas, TX	23
6	Miami-Dade County	Miami, FL	23
7	Manatee County	Bradenton, FL	21
8	Hillsborough County	Tampa, FL	20
9	Duval County	Jacksonville, FL	15
10	Tarrant County	Dallas, TX	15

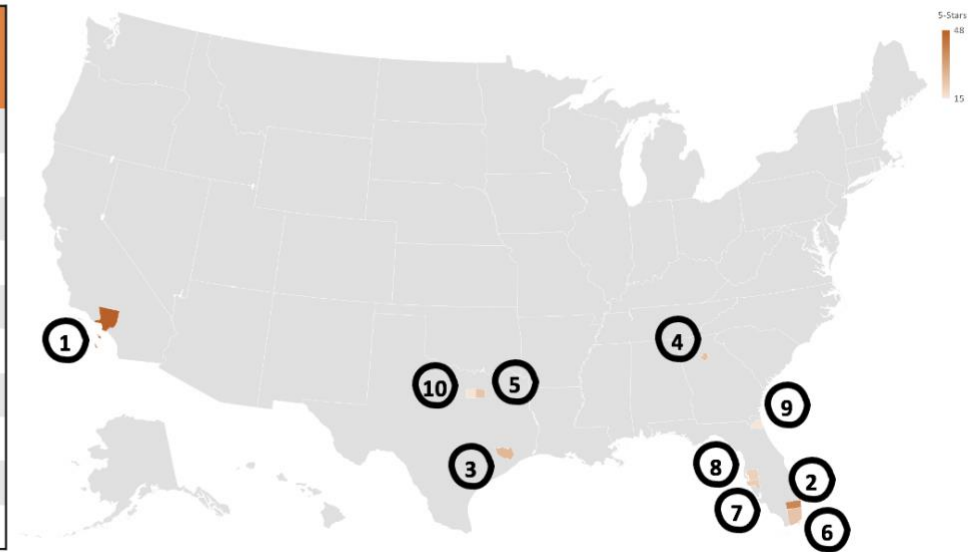


Figure 4.1: Counties with the Greatest Concentration of 5-star Recruits (Knox & Willis, n.d.)

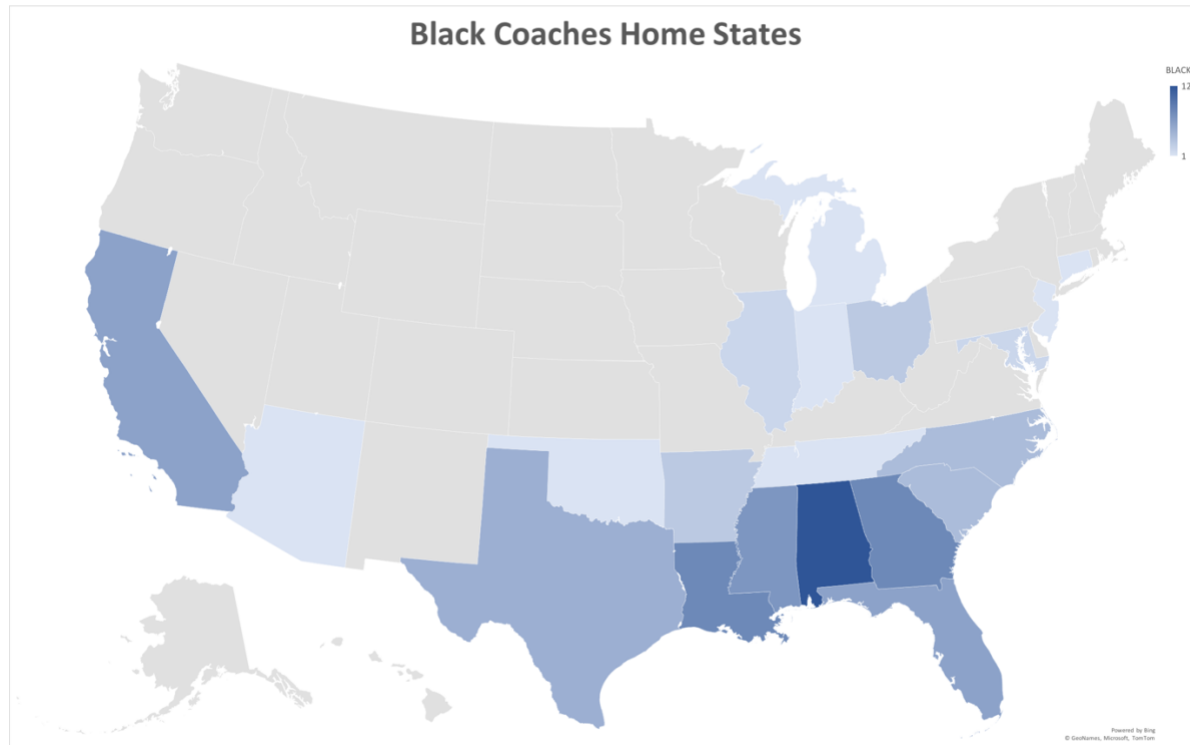


Figure 4.2: Black Coaches Home States

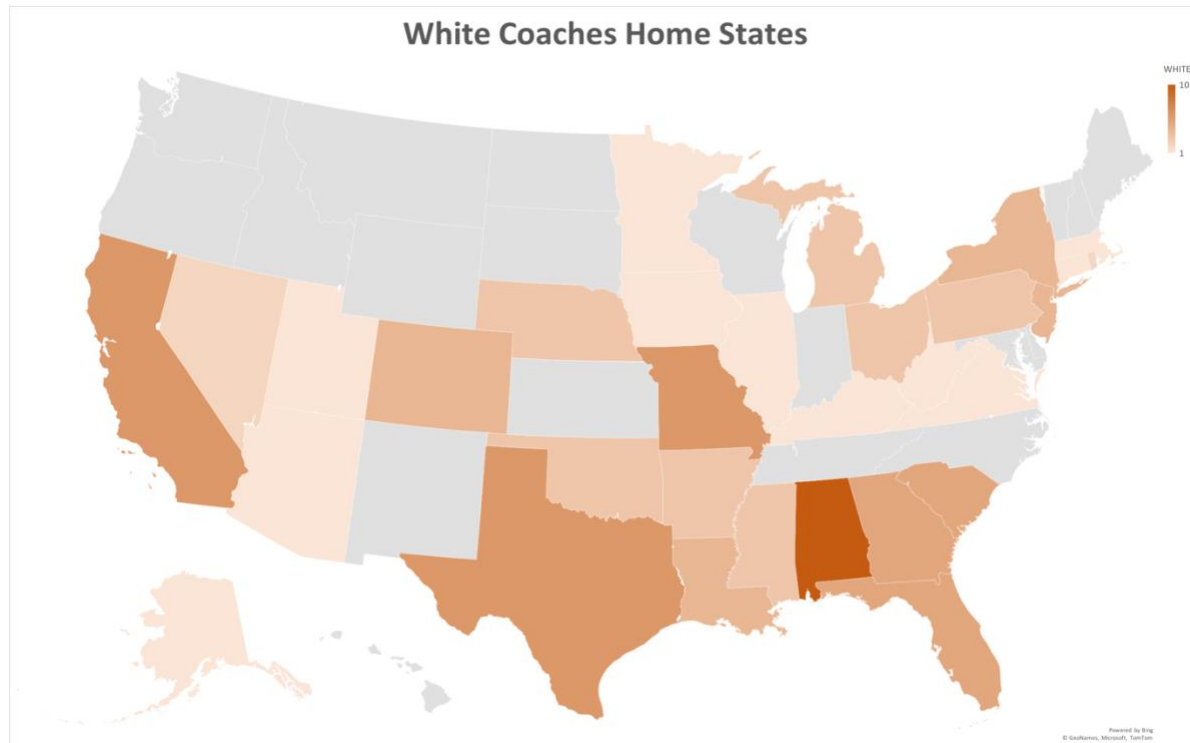


Figure 4.3: White Coaches Home States

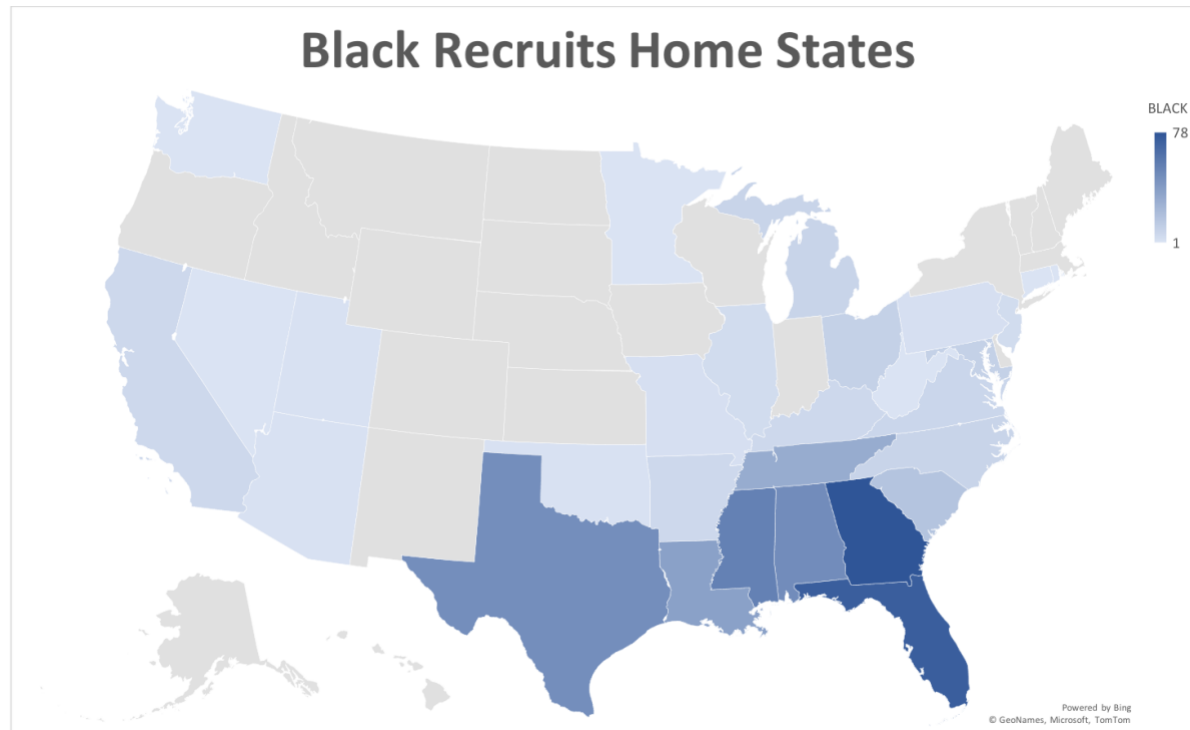


Figure 4.4: Black Recruits Home States

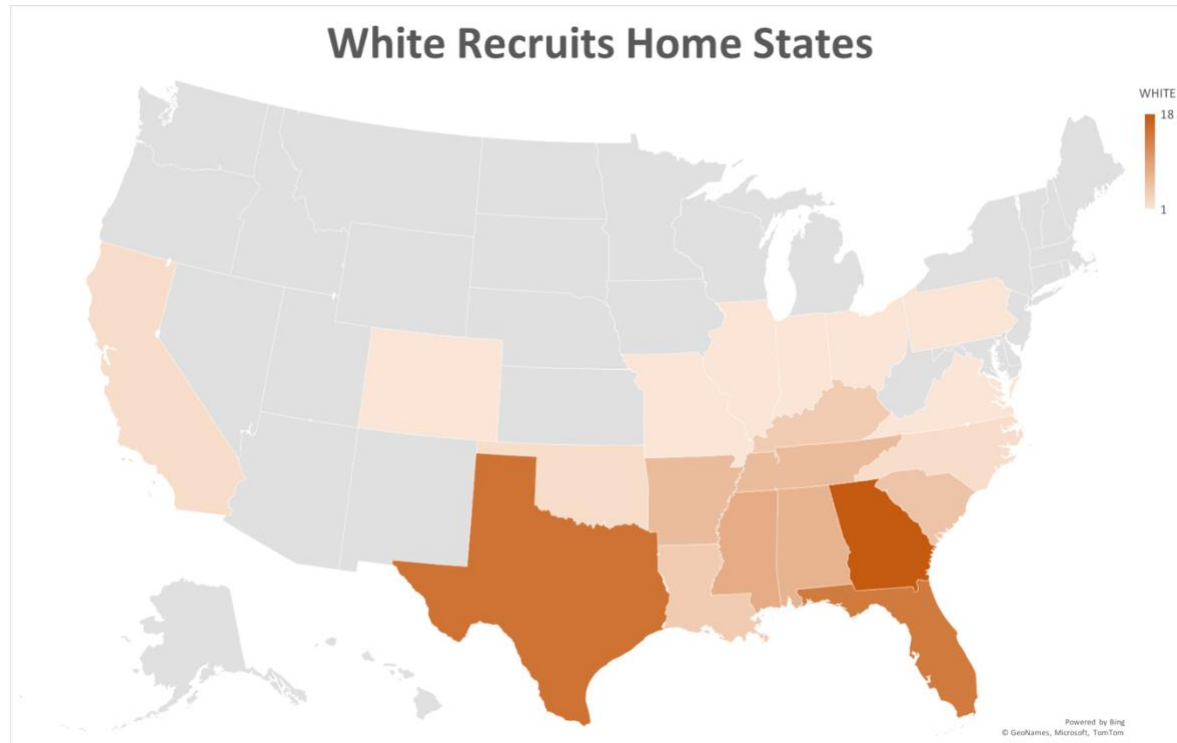


Figure 4.5: White Recruits Home States

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### **Power-5 Dominant Institutional Logic**

The dominant Power-5 institutional logic has been dubbed *jock capitalism* (Southall & Nagel, 2009). *Big-time* college sport emphasizes winning football and men's basketball games in order to generate revenue (Caro, 2012). However, prioritizing *winning* above all else has cultivated a subculture within college athletics that feels constrained by NCAA governance (Santomier et al., 1980; Southall et al., 2005). As Martin (1992) noted, organizational members that feel disconnected from organizational values may develop a counterculture that assumes deviant behavior and practices. In Power-5 college football and men's basketball, the formulated culture in pursuit of success (i.e., winning) has promoted what are viewed as deviant practices within college sport. In 2017, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) implicated college basketball coaches from across the country in schemes to entice recruits to campus with monetary benefits (Forde, 2021). In 2010, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was embroiled in an academic scandal (Murphy, 2019). Baylor University, the 5<sup>th</sup> largest Christian college or university in the United States, was found to have fostered a culture that tolerated sexual assault by several football players. The University's Board of Regents allege that former head football coach Art Briles ignored "reports of misconduct such as drug use, physical assault, domestic violence, brandishing of guns, indecent exposure and academic fraud" (Schlabach & Lavigne, 2020, para. 6). At Pennsylvania

State University, football coach Jerry Sandusky sexual abused 10 young boys over the course of 15-years with the football program. Head football coach Joe Paterno and other high ranking athletic department and University officials knowingly employed Sandusky and attempted to cover up the allegations of sexual misconduct to protect the coach (Chappell, 2012). In 2016, multiple men's basketball recruits informed NCAA investigators that while visiting the University of Louisville the basketball program provided female escorts at on-campus parties in athlete dormitories and paid for prostitutes to have sex with recruits (Barr, 2016). Seemingly every season, a Power-5 football or men's basketball program is exposed for deviant organizational behavior. In the cases of many Power-5 scandals, the enticement of prospective athletes (i.e. recruits) is the impetus for engaging in deviant activity.

The relationship between successful recruiting and winning is well-documented (Bergman & Logan, 2016; Caro, 2012; Caro & Benton, 2012; Dronyk-Trosper & Stitzel, 2017; Elliott, 2020; Langelett, 2003; Pitts & Evans, 2016). As the dominant institutional logic in Power-5 athletics emphasizes *winning* (i.e. revenue generation), specifically in football and men's basketball, the importance of successful recruiting cannot be understated. Power-5 football programs invest heavily in recruiting by building multi-million-dollar facilities and stadiums and allocating millions of dollars to recruiting efforts; 95% of Power-5 football programs spend over a million dollars on recruiting annually (Ching, 2018). Power-5 football head coaches invest both financially and physically in recruiting as successful recruits is positively related to winning football games and winning football games increases the likelihood of job retention for head coaches (Maxcy, 2013). As the byproduct of *jock capitalism*, heavily invested



institutional actors engulfed in their athletic roles may engage in deviant behaviors and practices. This deviance set the stage for the 3 studies that comprise this dissertation.

While recruiting is heavily publicized in sport media and followed closely by ravenous fanbases, not much is known about the specifics of the recruiting process. Sport media tends to cover *macro*-stories such as where a recruit is taking an official visit or which program signed the highest ranked recruiting class. As the majority of youth athletes are not recruited to play sports in college, the minutia of the recruiting process is relatively unknown. Relying on my intimate knowledge of the recruiting process in Power-5 football, I sought to expose commonplace recruiting practices and behaviors in each study included in this dissertation. When analyzed through an institutional logic framework it is apparent that the findings of each study illustrate the promulgation of *jock capitalism* in SEC football. Official visits were found to serve as ceremonial facades that glorify the demands of being a college athlete by focusing primarily on social and athletic activities; providing recruits with an inaccurate expectation as to the demands of being a college athlete, specifically in the context of academics. Power-5 football players graduate at much lower rates than their peers (Corr et al., 2019; Corr, Eckard et al., 2020) and may enter college underprepared to succeed academically (Hock, 1998; Peters, 2013). The Power-5 dominant institutional logic and the importance of signing the *top* recruits pressures recruiters to mythicize the life of a college athlete by designing official visits to focus primarily on social and athletic activities. Engulfed in their role as *college football recruiter*, recruiters unconsciously adhere and indoctrinate recruits to the Power-5 dominant institutional logic. Recruiters, and recruiting, serves to exploit the glorified status that Power-5 football players enjoy on college campuses in the United States as a

means to entice recruits to sign with their program. By neglecting the academic rigors of college, Power-5 football recruits enter college unprepared and unmotivated academically. As the majority of Power-5 college football players, and thus recruits, are Black, the Power-5 college football recruiting process disproportionately negatively affects Black athletes.

Black coaches are disproportionately targeted within the recruiting process as well. As Hawkins (2010) noted, Black football coaches serve as the gatekeepers for recruiting Black recruits that, in turn, play college football under the leadership of White head coaches and coordinators. Black coaches are racially tasked as recruiters which disproportionately negatively affects opportunities for advancement within the coaching profession (Turick, 2018; Turick & Bopp, 2016). This dissertation concludes the dominant Power-5 institutional logic permeates an ideology that “race gets race,” which results in the disproportionate deployment of Black coaches to sign Black recruits. Additionally, the socioeconomic status of coaches and recruits are exploited. Coaches from areas with large Black populations, lower median annual household incomes, and higher percentages living below the poverty level are utilized to sign recruits from statistically similar areas. While further examination is needed, it perceivably is in the interest of predominantly White administrators (i.e. athletic directors), head football coaches, and coordinators to not employ Black football coaches above the rank of position, or assistant, coach.

## **Conclusion**

While working in college football recruiting in the SEC was an extremely stimulating career, my indoctrination into the Power-5 dominant institutional logic led me

to engage in deviant practices and behaviors under the guise of the espoused ideals central to NCAA, Power-5, and SEC athletics. I knowingly committed NCAA violations and, to this day, justify the reasoning behind committing them. I knowingly leveraged coaches' race and socioeconomic backgrounds when determining geographic recruiting areas. I knowingly formulated official visits to reflect the glorified status college football players at SEC institutions enjoy. Engulfed in my role as recruiter, I ignored many of my moral sensibilities to sign the best recruits. After all, signing the best recruits is the job of any Power-5 football recruiter.

In many ways, the composition of this dissertation was an extremely cathartic process. I routinely grapple with the decisions, behaviors, and practices I either openly initiated or engaged as a recruiter. Exposing various elements of the recruiting process that are commonplace across Power-5 football was intensely gratifying. While in 2021 broad NCAA reform is being pursued by legislators (i.e. name, image, and likeness) and the merit of NCAA regulations argued before the Supreme Court (i.e. *NCAA v. Alston*, 2021), the NCAA and its institutional members, lawmakers, and invested organizational actors should advocate for increased dedication to the espoused NCAA values of promoting educational opportunities for college athletes. Jock capitalism promotes deviant practices that devalue the academic experiences and opportunities for meaningful educational attainment among Power-5 football and men's basketball players. Given that the majority of marginalized Power-5 college football and men's basketball players are Black, decision makers should commit to initiatives that enhance the value of educational attainment and academic success among administrators and football and men's basketball coaches, players, and recruits. In the wake of the Summer of 2020 social justice

movement, college athletic departments and football programs should reexamine hiring practices to ensure that coaching responsibilities are based on merit rather than race. Demarginalizing Black coaches as recruiters may lead to a more equitable distribution of Black and White coaches in Power-5 college football.

College athletics recruiting is a fundamental component to NCAA athletics. College athletics provides opportunities for many recruits to attend prestigious colleges and universities they may not have had the opportunity to attend otherwise. Many Black coaches from certain socioeconomic backgrounds played college football and are indicative of the upward social mobility that college athletics can offer. However, given the findings of this dissertation, the recruiting process is only partially benefitting football recruits in the Power-5, and the SEC specifically. The recruiting process has a disproportionately negative effect on Black coaches and players and serves to underprepare recruits for the academic rigors of higher education. While the NCAA *champions* a value system predicated on academic and equitable opportunities, the prioritization of winning football games and revenue generation have influenced the recruiting process. To accomplish both adequately preparing Power-5 football recruits for college and attaining the equitable distribution of Black and White head football coaches and coordinators, stakeholders must pivot from the recruiting process as an extension of the money-making enterprise of college athletics. An altruistic shift towards the welfare of recruits would lead to the recruiting process being truly beneficial to recruits.

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