

BLACK MALE STUDENT-ATHLETE SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON
THE INFLUENCE OF ROLE STRAIN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON COMPLETING
COLLEGE AT A POWER-FIVE CONFERENCE SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the major strains that Black male student-athletes experience while attending a Division I Power-Five conference institution and the coping strategies they use to mitigate the strains while being a student and an athlete. Many scholars contend that sports are as important as academics in the lives of students. This is especially true for minorities as many believe sports provide access to academic institutions that might normally be out of reach. As the NCAA now reports that Black student-athletes exceed their White counterparts in most revenue-generating Division-I sports, their graduation rates continue to lag behind. This research used a qualitative case study approach and The Bowman Role Strain and Adaptation Model (BRSAM) as the theoretical framework to explore the strains and coping mechanisms that impact Black male student-athlete persistence.

This research identified “time” as the primary strain that is experienced by student-athletes. A lack of time subsequently creates additional strains, which included those related to academics, engagement, and meeting the expectations of their sport. The study also identified athletic student services, family support, religion and spirituality, self-motivation and resilience as coping strategies used by student-athletes to manage stress. This study has implications for increased collaboration between athletics and academics; improvement of campus-wide student counseling and advising; reducing regulations that add mental health pressures to the already unique challenges of the student-athlete experience; and improving persistence and degree attainment for Black male student-athletes.

Keywords: *African-American, African diaspora, Black male, Black male student-athletes, NCAA African-American student-athlete success, Power-Five Conference, Role Strain, Role Strain Adaptation Model*

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the little boy who did not know how to dream but learned how to and found a way to navigate the forest, escape the danger, and get to the other side. The words of this document were written thinking of my grandparents, who endured many hardships and made many sacrifices, so that their children and grandchildren could be more and do more. I honor them in this moment and forever.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my incredible wife who has been the wind in my back to push me, the wind in my face to challenge me, and the wind beneath me to lift me when only the two of us could be found for support. I have always been blessed to have her in my life and as my wife. I am the luckiest person in the world to have the privilege of calling you my best and closest friend.

Additionally, I dedicate this to my daughter, T'Anna, for just being the wonderful young lady that she is. I pray that she will find inspiration from my journey, and her mother's, to be a life-long learner and have great educational excursions of her own. The ball is now in her hands.

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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

For centuries, sports and athletic prowess have played a major cultural role in American society. While most individuals will acknowledge the recreational value of sports, scholars and parents alike have long debated the actual impact of sports on the overall development and success of youth and young adults. Not only is it suggested that participation in athletic activities provides the kinds of “skills and character traits believed to be necessary for academic success, including leadership abilities, discipline, self-control and cooperation” (Clay, 2007, p. 3), but some also contend that sports are especially important for minority populations, since athletic skills often lead to opportunities for higher education and access to academic institutions that would normally be out of reach to some because of their unfortunate life situations (Charleston, Jackson, Adserias, & Lang, 2015). While the collective benefits of participating in sports may be well documented, the actual impact of sports on an individual’s academic achievements and social development often vary by race and/or gender. This is particularly evident in male student-athletes of color.

Statement of the Problem

As of 2021, there were nearly 25,000 Black male student-athletes competing in NCAA Division I athletics (NCAA, 2021). This number includes student-athletes from both Power-Five and non-Power-Five conference schools. In 2018, Shaun Harper published an updated version of his 2012-2016 study *Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequalities in NCAA Division I Sports*. Of the 65 classified Power-Five athletic conference institutions reviewed by Harper,

some 40% of them saw a decline in Black male student-athlete graduation rates from 2016 to 2018. Additionally, “59% of the universities graduated Black male student-athletes at rates lower than Black undergraduate men who were not members of intercollegiate sports teams” (p.3). From a social standpoint, the implications associated with promoting athletics as being key to accessing higher education and potential wealth is concerning for student-athletes of color and for putting to bed old racial stereotypes that suggest that males of color are not capable of learning but are better suited for performing. Harper (2018) gives credence to this statement in his reference to the following within his report:

More than 30 years ago, renowned scholar-activist Harry Edwards wrote, “They must contend, of course, with the connotations and social reverberations of the traditional ‘dumb jock’ caricature. But Black student-athletes are burdened also with the insidiously racist implications of the myth of ‘innate Black athletic superiority,’ and the more blatantly racist stereotype of the ‘dumb Negro’ condemned by racial heritage to intellectual inferiority. (Harper, 2018, p. 4)

While the number of Black student-athletes has been on a consistent rise since the 1990s (NCAA Race Ethnicity Report, 2010), graduation rates of Black male student-athletes continue to lag behind their White peers. According to the NCAA’s 2021 Trends in Division I Graduation Rates report, from 2018-2021, the graduation rate of Black football players was 77% in comparison to 90% for White peers and 81% for Black basketball players in comparison to 93% for their White peers (p. 10). Given the tremendous academic, athletic, and other campus expectations placed on student-athletes, particularly in the most prestigious athletic conferences, greater attention must be given to the needs of Black male student-athletes who often have to overcome the impact of additional systemic academic and cultural challenges in order to persist to graduation. The challenges faced by Black male student-athletes as it relates to their ability to graduate at the same rate or in higher percentages than their White counterparts suggests that this demographic

is burdened with strains that impact their collegiate experience. Understanding the role strains that influence Black male student-athletes is the problem this research addresses.

According to Comeaux, Speer, Taustine, and Harrison (2011), student-athletes in Division-I revenue generating sports not only have the general pressures of being a student, but they also face the incredible demands placed upon them by their sport, including the pressures of devoting more than 40 hours a week to team practices and meetings, travel, and participation in athletic competitions. These demands create strain-inducing challenges that often deter success for student-athletes of color. However, some Black male student-athletes, in spite of the strains, find ways to cope and persist. Understanding the dynamics of race, social inequalities, and the built-in barriers to educational success that are common to many Black male student-athletes is essential to creating academic environments that support their unique needs and put them in a better position to realize their academic goals. While the number of strains can vary and are unique to each student-athlete, this research will focus on the phenomenon of role strain and how it influences Black male student-athletes' experiences, particularly for those who participate in Division-I sports, with the campus and general student population. It will also seek to identify the coping strategies that these student-athletes use to mitigate these strains, which can assist colleges and universities in deploying more inclusive research-based strategies to help underrepresented student populations realize their academic success goals at a higher rate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore, identify, and understand the concept of role strain on Black male student-athletes at a Division-I institution and how it influences their ability to engage, and persist at their institution. This research sought to increase understanding and identify different forms of role strain that impact Black male student-athlete

success and provide insight into approaches that may also help improve the overall retention and graduation rates of other Black and underrepresented student-athletes as well as students of color, who are not engaged in sports. Additionally, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by expanding the content related to the Bowman Role Strain Adaptation Model as it relates to how at-risk societal members manage the strains associated with significant life roles.

Research Questions

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), research questions in a qualitative study helped to focus the purpose of the study into clear and specific questions (p. 131).

Additionally, it was suggested that the questions associated with a qualitative research process begin with either “how” or “what” and not with “why” questions. Using the Adapted Bowman Role Strain and Adaptation Model (2006) as the primary theoretical framework, this research sought to answer the following central research questions:

1. What are the strains that Black male student athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five conference institution?; and
2. What are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student-athlete at a Power-Five conference institution?

Rationale

The primary goal for most who attend college is to graduate. Unfortunately, there are many factors that contribute to the inability for some to realize this achievement. While many athletic departments acknowledge a commitment to graduating all of its student athletes prior to leaving college or afterwards, many Black male student-athletes fail to do so and fall short of graduating at either the same percentage rate or higher than their White counterparts. According

to the NCAA's (2020) Graduation Success Rate (GSR) Trends Report, the graduation rate for Black male student-athletes was 80% in comparison to 93% for White male student-athletes. Furthermore, of the 65 Power-Five conference schools studied in Harper's (2018) study, "Black men were 2.4% of the undergraduate students at the 65 universities but comprised 55% of the football teams" (p. 3). Given the present landscape of college athletics in which universities and athletic departments are constantly seeking new opportunities to ensure their financial futures and expand their respective brands to help to drive enrollment, often at the expense of Black males collegiate athletes, Harper (2018) argued that the disproportionate ratio between traditional Black students and Black male student-athletes must be justified, along with why this same group has historically experienced lower graduation rates than their White peers.

This study sought to expand our understanding of the challenges and strains that impact Black male student-athletes and identified the coping mechanisms engaged to help bolster and drive success towards a better collegiate experience and more successful academic outcomes.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant to members of the higher education community, including athletic administrators and those who are interested in enhancing student success from an academic perspective, as well as those who are responsible for providing support services to student-athletes. Additionally, the researcher believes this research could have meaningful implications for higher education and its practitioners, which could lead to increased graduation and retention rates of minority and other underserved student groups. Finally, this study adds to the body of knowledge related to the general topics of role strain and academic success, particularly among Black male student-athletes, which is currently a topic of great concern within collegiate athletics across the country (Harper, 2018). The academic and professional background

of the researcher, who was a Black male student-athlete, at a Division I, Power-Five university, also makes this topic ideal for study and lends credibility to the completed research.

Theoretical Perspectives

While there are many theoretical constructs that have been used to study the academic achievements, emotional wherewithal, psychological condition, and social development of young Black males, this research utilized Philip Bowman's *Role Strain and Adaptation Approach: Toward a Strength-Centered Model of Well-Being and Health* (Bowman, 1989, 2006; Burt, Williams, & Smith, 2018; Burt, Williams, & Palmer, 2019) to guide the study. This model was selected as it was adapted from Bowman's original Role Strain and Adaptation Model (BRSAM) to specifically address "diversity, multilevel, and life-span issues among at risk youth" (Bowman, 2006, p. 118). Bowman's adapted model was ideal for this study as it provides a framework for understanding the "structured social inequalities" or castes, which includes "social economic status, gender sex-role status, and racial-ethnic status" (Burt et al., 2019, p. 45), that Black male athletes are saddled with, through no action of their own. According to Bowman (2006), the inequalities of race, class, and gender roles manifest in the form of strains. These strains are exacerbated by psychosocial factors that can either be mitigated or heightened via internal and external cultural factors, which can result in the adoption of either productive or risky coping strategies.

The researcher offers the following illustration to clarify the model. Stanley is a Black student-athlete in his sophomore year at ACME University. He is rated as a five-star recruit in his sport and every major school in the nation has extended him a scholarship offer. He was recruited to ACME from one of the country's most impoverished communities. Additionally, he grew up in a home where he was one of four children to a single parent. After enrolling at

ACME, Stanley would be the first person in his family to attend college. From the time he was in elementary school, until the day he graduated high school, Stanley was educated at a school by the state standards as underperforming. Contributing to this is the fact that the district in which Stanley's family has established their homestead is considered impoverished and tax receipts cannot adequately support K-12 institutions. Given the many structured inequalities that Stanley has overcome to secure his collegiate opportunity at ACME, according to the BRSAM, he will recognize his inefficiencies and immediately seek resources that will either serve as psychological strengths or adopt risky behaviors to manage his strains, or he will immediately embrace the strains he is experiencing and establish positive or negative coping strategies. The researcher used each level of Bowman's model to structure research questions that effectively identified the common strains, coping strategies, and socioeconomic factors influencing the research participants when they entered college and how each is impacting their ability to engage their collegiate experience, adopt coping strategies, and persist.

Assumptions

According to Calabrese (2006), it is common for researchers to make assumptions regarding their studies, and these assumptions, when constructed appropriately, add to the validity of a study. Considering the variety of documented obstacles that Black male student-athletes have to traverse, assumptions related to participants in this this case study include, perceived low faculty and academic expectations, insufficient preparation for college-level work, long-standing racial stereotypes, and limited understanding of cultural inequalities (Harper, 2012; Comeaux, 2018) before and while attending a major university. Additionally, there is the general assumption that the rate at which Black male student-athletes graduate is not equal to their White peers and that while many Black male student-athletes have substantial strains that

are associated with their socioeconomic background and their roles as students, an increasing number of them utilize coping strategies that support their ability to persist and, ultimately, graduate.

Context of the Study

Traditionally, wins and losses have been the primary means by which athletic programs have measured success. However, in the current era, “statistics on athletic graduation and retention have evolved as the main measure of athlete success or failure at NCAA Division-I member institutions” (Turner, Southhall, & Eckard, 2015, p. 2). Institutions that are classified as Division I and participate in one of the five major athletic conferences: Big Ten (Big 10), Big Twelve (Big 12), Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Pacific 12 (Pac 12), and the Southeastern Conference (SEC), represent the NCAA’s most prestigious and financially lucrative participating members. Considering the size of the NCAA, its various divisions, member institutions, and the vast number of student-athletes who participate in the organization, there have been many studies designed to understand and address the inequities at Division I NCAA member institutions (Harper, 2018). This case study focuses on one institution that is a participating member of a recognized NCAA Power-Five athletic conference. Specifically, the study focused on an SEC member institution that has enjoyed considerable athletic success in the form of regular-season wins, championships and rankings and boasts a significant number of Black male student-athletes. The SEC is comprised of 14 members that are located in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. These members include Auburn University, Louisiana State University, Mississippi State University, Texas A&M University, The University of Alabama, University of Arkansas, University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, University of

Mississippi, University of Missouri, University of South Carolina, University of Tennessee, and Vanderbilt University.

This study examined the specific case of one institution's Black male student-athletes to better understand the role strain these student-athletes endure and how it impacts their ability to engage internal and external resources and services and/or prompts them to adopt either negative or positive coping strategies, which influence their academic, athletic, and social outcomes. This qualitative study utilized interviews to collect data in support of the theoretical framework that was selected to guide the study. It is assumed that the findings from this study are beneficial towards increasing the understanding of different variations of role strain that impact Black male student-athlete success and provide insight into approaches that may also help improve the overall collegiate experience, campus engagement, graduation rates, and retention of other Black and underrepresented students, whether engaged in sports or not. Additionally, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by expanding the content related to the Bowman Role Strain Adaptation Model as it relates to how at-risk societal members manage the strains associated with their unique significant life roles. Furthermore, as of the time of this research, the researcher could not identify any previous research that utilized the Bowman Role Strain and Adaption Approach to specifically study Black student-athletes.

Definition of Key Terms

Black male student-athlete: Collegiate male athletes who are classified as either African, black or African-American, non-white, non-Asian, and non-Hispanic.

Black: "A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa (except those of Hispanic origin)" (NCAA Race Ethnic Report, 2010, p. 7).

Division I Institution: One of three NCAA member classifications that include more than 350 colleges and universities. This division is responsible for maintaining some 6,000 athletic teams and is comprised of more than 170,000 student-athletes. Additionally, this division, as stated by the NCAA, generally has “the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the most generous number of scholarships” (NCAA, 2021).

Federal Graduation Rate (FGR): Federal graduation rate assesses only first-time full-time freshmen in a given cohort and only counts them as academic successes if they graduate from their schools of initial enrollment within a six-year period. It makes no accommodation for transfers into or out of a school. The rate is very limited because it ignores the large number of transfer students in higher education, but it is still the only rate that allows a direct comparison between student-athletes and the general student body (NCAA, 2020, p. 4).

Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS): A unique subdivision of Division I institutions, as classified by the NCAA which participate in end-of-season bowl games that are not hosted by the NCAA.

Graduation Success Rate (GSR): Graduation Success Rate (GSR) begins with the federal cohort, and adds transfer students, mid-year enrollees, and non-scholarship students (in specified cases) to the sample. Student-athletes who leave a school while in good academic standing before exhausting athletics eligibility are removed from the cohort of their initial school (essentially passed to another squad’s GSR cohort if they transfer). This rate provides a complete and more accurate look at actual student-athlete success by taking into account the full variety of participants in Division I athletics and tracking their academic outcomes. (NCAA, 2020, p.4).

NCAA: The National Collegiate Athletic Association is the governing body for all intercollegiate athletics in the United States. It is charged constitutionally:

- a) To initiate, stimulate and improve intercollegiate athletics programs for student-athletes and to promote and develop educational leadership, physical fitness, athletics excellence and athletics participation as a recreational pursuit;
- b) To uphold the principle of institutional control of, and responsibility for, all intercollegiate sports in conformity with the constitution and bylaws of this Association;
- c) To encourage its members to adopt eligibility rules to comply with satisfactory standards of scholarship, sportsmanship and amateurism;
- d) To formulate, copyright and publish rules of play governing intercollegiate athletics;
- e) To preserve intercollegiate athletics records;
- f) To supervise the conduct of, and to establish eligibility standards for, regional and national athletics events under the auspices of this Association;
- g) To cooperate with other amateur athletics organizations in promoting and conducting national and international athletics events;
- h) To legislate, through bylaws or by resolutions of a Convention, upon any subject of general concern to the members related to the administration of intercollegiate athletics; and
- i) To study in general all phases of competitive intercollegiate athletics and establish standards whereby the colleges and universities of the United States can maintain their athletics programs on a high level (NCAA, 2020, p. 1).

NCAA Student Athlete: Amateur collegiate athletes who are governed by collegiate sports' national governing body, the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Power-Five Conference: An athletic conference identified as being either the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big 10, Big 12, Pacific 12, or Southeastern Conference.

Role Strain: Social constructs or roles (race, class gender, or other assigned responsibilities) that generate strains that compel student-athletes of color to activate and pull from community and individual resources that “promote adaptive coping, well-being, and health” (Bowman, 2006, p.120).

Role Strain Adaptation Model (BRSAM): Created by Philip J. Bowman and expanding upon the preexisting psychological Strength Based model, the BRSAM was designed to serve as “a lifespan framework to examine the risk factors and protective strengths as adolescents prepare for early, middle, and elder adulthood” (Bowman, 2006, p.118).

White: “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East (except those of Hispanic origin)” (NCAA Race Ethnic Report, 2010, p. 7).

Chapter Summary

There has been an interesting relationship between the nation’s institutions of higher learning and their athletic departments. The very genesis of the NCAA is a testament to the commercial and physical advantages colleges have had on student-athletes. While these advantages were initially imposed upon predominately White student-athletes, due to broad discrimination and racism at most American institutions, Black student-athletes would eventually be afforded access, and today, there are some 25,000 Black males competing on Division I Football Championship Series (FCS) teams. Unfortunately, since the NCAA started keeping graduation data, the graduation rates of Black males have continued to lag behind those of their White peers (NCAA 2016). This research explored the gender, societal, and racial strains that Black male student-athletes experience and determined if these strains played a role in their ability to engage, persist, and graduate from their respective institutions. The aim of this research was to provide insights to improve the overall collegiate experience of Black male student-athletes, other underrepresented student-athletes, and the general student body.

CHAPTER II:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

According to the NCAA Student Ethnicity Report (2010), during the 2009-2010 NCAA sports reporting year, for the first time in the history of the organization and representing a total 45.8%, African-American male Division I football student-athletes surpassed the total number of White male Division I football student-athletes. The NCAA (2020) in its student-athlete participation publication reported that for the athletic year 2018-2019, there were a total of 129 institutions that were eligible to participate in the Football Bowl Subdivision of the NCAA. These 129 institutions alone accounted for 15,710 football student-athletes. It is also reported by the NCAA (2020) in its *Probability of Competing Beyond High School Figures and Methodology* report that of 73,712 NCAA football student-athlete in all divisions, 16,380 would be considered eligible for the professional football draft, and 254 or 1.6% would actually make it to the professional ranks. This statistic suggested that the vast majority of college football players will become a professional in something other than their collegiate sport of play. While true across the collegiate sports spectrum, the implications associated with not acquiring a college degree, while participating in a NCAA sport, is significantly more drastic for Black male student-athletes.

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the role strains associated with being a Black male student-athlete who participates in a sport at Power-Five athletic conference institutions. With this in mind, the review of literature focuses on providing a thematic overview

of the social, cultural, and psychological aspects of the collegiate experience of student-athletes of color that are known to create strain-inducing challenges. Additionally, it includes the literature associated with the adopted coping strategies applied by student-athletes of color to overcome the impact of managing the strains associated with their tri-fold role of being an athlete, a racial minority, and a student. During this review, the researcher examined the existing body of knowledge, from within the structural frames of the Bowman Role-Strain and Adaptation Approach (Adapted Version), as presented by Burt et al. (2019), to understand how social stratifications, such as socio-economic status, gender-sex role status and racial-ethnic status, manifest as role strains of Black male football student-athletes and influence their ability to successfully matriculate and graduate college.

Historical Overview

The origin of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) can be traced back to the 26th President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. In 1905, he convened a White House meeting on the brutality of college football. It was during this meeting that he told Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, along with representatives from other well-known universities, that the game of football would either have to be rehabilitated or go away completely (Thelin, 1994). In 1910, the organization known as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States, a precursor to the NCAA, would be formally named the National Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (Thelin, 1994). Unfortunately, the undesirable aspects of sports that lead to the formation of the NCAA in 1910 have remained a common trait of sports and athletics until the present time.

In 1929, the Carnegie Foundation released their *Bulletin Number Twenty-three* report (Thelin, 1994). In this document, Howard Savage, staff member of the Carnegie Foundation for

the Advancement of Teaching, and other authors of the report, contended that collegiate athletics was commercialized and student-athletes were being subsidized or paid for their participation in sports, with little interest in academic pursuits. For decades, the commercialization of athletics and athletes has been cloaked under the guise of being just another department or part of America's academic enterprise. One of the most significant athletic investigative events of the 20th century was the Knights Commission. This Commission, according to Thelin (1994), was convened because "abuses in athletics had reached proportions threatening the very integrity of higher education," and college presidents had all but lost control of their athletic departments. Following its investigation, the Commission would report that one of the greatest mishaps that had ever happened in athletics was that faculty athletic representatives somehow had "no idea what their role was. Their role is obviously to represent academic interests, but they seem to have been co-opted by the athletic department" (Thelin, 1994. p. 2040).

The increased mingling of the academy and a highly commercialized athletic enterprise have been at the forefront of controlling the aspirations of student athletes and their families.

Dawkins, Braddock, and Celaya (2008) stated the following:

While the connection between sports participation and academic engagement needs closer examination to understand whether sports impede or enhances mobility, generally, this issue is especially important in addressing mobility aspirations of African American student-athletes and their parents who have their sights on big-time athletics with the ultimate goal of reaching the ranks of professional sports. (pp. 53-54)

By examining the literature related to the primary structural inequalities (socio-economic status, gender status, and racial-ethnic status), select role strains (difficulties), and coping strategies that are associated with being a Black male student-athlete in a Division-I program, this research provides a clearer understanding of the impact of each of these BRSAM sections on their success.

To begin to understand the societal conditions that have impacted students of color over time, one must recognize the historical circumstances that have oppressed people of color. It has only been 156 years since the end of the Civil War, the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the end of slavery, which lasted in America for some 400 years. During this time, people of African descent were intentionally prohibited from learning the basic prerequisites needed, including reading and writing, to participate in the academic process. Education has always been known to be a critical factor for economic, political, and social upward mobility. Since the end of the Civil War, African Americans have been in search of instruments that would afford them the same quality of life as their White American counterparts. With the athletic success, fame and fortune of key Black sports patriarchs such as Jackie Robinson, Jesse Owens, and Joe Louis, athletics quickly became another avenue for Black males to use in securing upward mobility. However, according to Bimper (2017), race, then and now, is “manifested in the social, cultural, economic, educational, political, and historical manners that have constituted racial inequalities and operations of society, higher education and sport” (p. 3).

In spite of the documented athletic and societal success of many professional Black athletes, inequities in their academic success over time have been a routine concern and topic of extensive study. Overall, “Black men’s dismal college enrollments, disengagement and underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues in American higher education” (Harper, 2012, p. 1). While institutions have been successful in luring Black males onto their campuses as student-athletes, as with the general Black male student population, they have consistently dropped the ball on assimilating them into the general campus community, developing adequate policies that

promote their persistence, and graduating them at the same or even higher levels than their peers (Harper, 2012).

In 2018, under the guidance of Shaun Harper, the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center produced a revised version of the University of Pennsylvania's original report on Black male student-athletes and racial inequalities in NCAA Division I College Sports. In this report of the 65 institutions that make up the Power Five conferences, Harper (2018) noted that "Black men were 2.4% of undergraduate students enrolled but comprised 55% of football teams and 56% of men's basketball teams," and after studying four separate cohorts of students, "55.2% of Black male student-athletes graduated within six years, compared to 69.3% of student-athletes overall, 60.1% of Black undergraduate men overall, and 76.3% of undergraduate students overall" (p. 3). While some researchers have argued that students, regardless of the time in which they lived or studied, remain the same, others contend that "rapidly changing conditions within society have created dramatically different circumstances for students across time and location and that student development must be considered in light of these changing scenarios" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, p. 5, 2010). When it comes to the overall college experience, existing research and data show that ethnicity, economic standing, and access to adequate pre-college academic training, not only differentiates ethnic groups, but also the attainment levels of college students (Evans et al., 2010).

The *2009-10 NCAA Student-Athlete Race and Ethnicity Report* noted that the number of Black males who are participating in NCAA Division-I football surpassed white males for the first time since the organization began tracking data in 1999. As the number of Black football players continue to rise, concerns regarding their low graduation rates have become a "lightening rod issue" (Turner, Southall, & Eckard, 2015, p. 3) within the academy and the NCAA. Bimper

(2017) suggested, “simultaneously navigating the dual worlds of being a college student and an elite level intercollegiate athlete is a testing, daily reality confronting student-athletes participating at national collegiate athletic association (NCAA) member institutions across the USA” (p. 2). As such, understanding the socially constructed idea of race and the built-in barriers to education and other societal inequalities, particularly those that Black males have endured, is essential to understanding the whole plight of Black students and increasing their college attainment and graduation rates. But, while understanding the historical challenges that have negatively impacted many Black males is one issue, exploring the challenges that face them as active student-athletes is another.

Athlete Time Commitment

According to findings from the NCAA GOALS Study of the Student-Athlete Experience (2016), college student-athletes reported spending more time on their athletic pursuits than was reported in the NCAA’s previous 2010 report on a similar topic. Southall and Weiler (2014) referred to these athletic “jobs” as making the collegiate experience much more complex for student-athletes, often resulting in the player’s mental and physical fatigue, nagging injuries, and leaving them with less time to devote to academic pursuits. The GOALS study found that Division-I football players continued to report the highest weekly time commitments to their sport during the season, averaging 42 hours per week in the 2016 study as compared to 39 hours per week in 2010. The report also noted an increase in the time that Division-I football players devoted to academics, averaging 38.5 hours per week in the 2016 study, in comparison to 35.5 hours in 2010. In the most recent NCAA Time Management (2022) report, 33 hours per week is listed as the time that athletes spend per week on athletics (p. 1). Additionally, it found that two-thirds of Division-I athletes noted devoting as much or more time to their sports during the off

season as they did during their competitive season (NCAA 2010 GOALS Study, 2016, p. 2). In its most recent 2020 edition of the Goals Study, the NCAA reported that 67% of student-athletes said that they spent as much time on “athletics during the off season as during the competition season” (NCAA 2020 Time Management, 2022, p.1). Turner et al. (2015) contended that such demanding time expectations pose a significant challenge to the academic success of black student-athletes and effect the quality of their overall college experience. This is evidenced by the fact that some 97.4% of institutions graduated black male students at much lower rates than the general undergraduate student population (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013).

Prior Academic Preparation

According to Turner et al., (2015), time commitments are only the beginning of the strains placed on black student-athletes in the academic environment, especially when many come to Division-I institutions in spite of not meeting all of the standard requirements that would ordinarily help ensure they are prepared for academic success. The academic experience for many black student-athletes induces considerable student role strain that hampers their success, because they often come underprepared for academic pursuits at large flagship institutions and their participation in sports often requires that they make academic sacrifices that they might not otherwise make if not stressed with time limitations (Turner et al., 2015). Watt and Moore (2001) noted that statistics on graduation rates among athletes have evolved as the primary measure of student-athlete success or failure at Division I institutions. The focus on graduation percentages has, in some ways, altered the academic experience for many Black male student-athletes, as some institutions have attempted to cluster these young men in academic majors that have less rigorous course content or apply significant pressure on academic support services to ensure that

athletes maintain eligibility, while not encouraging them to pursue their own personal academic goals (Turner et al., 2015).

General Campus Engagement as a Social Stressor

In spite of the benefits of meaningful campus engagement on positive educational outcomes, most Black male student athletes find that their opportunities for academically purposeful campus engagement activities are limited (Comeaux, 2018; Comeaux et al., 2011; Gayles & Hu, 2009). Clay (2007) suggested that this is due to the fact that athletic performance is often over-emphasized by the school community over the academic achievement and campus engagement of most black student-athletes. According to Comeaux et al., (2011), student-athlete involvement in campus and extra-curricular activities has a positive influence on their perceptions of campus engagement and climate experiences for students of color. Woods, McNiff, and Coleman (2018) substantiated this claim and noted that “student engagement is commonly known to be among the best predictors of learning and personal development” (p. 357) in college students. Oseguera, Merson, Harrison, and Rankin (2018) suggested that the same is true for predicting academic performance. Furthermore, active campus engagement has also been substantiated as assisting students of color with overcoming educational and socioeconomic difficulties (Harper, 2007; Harper & Griffin, 2011). Because the overall campus experience for student-athletes over the last decade has become noticeably different from that of most other members of the general student population, the NCAA has grown “increasingly concerned about the educational experience of student athletes, beyond the mere enforcement of eligibility rules and regulations” (Gayles & Hu, 2009, p. 316).

The NCAA 2010 GOALS Study indicated that the academic rigor of the institution was a major predictor of the level of student engagement for Black male student-athletes across various

athletic divisions. The more academically challenging courses are the less students are able to engage in campus events and activities outside of their sport. As such, it was recommended that NCAA Division-I institutions “provide educational activities and assist them with psychological coping mechanisms that may contribute to completing college” (Woods, McNiff, & Coleman, 2018, p. 365). Research related to the collegiate experiences of college athletes, including the experiences of student-athletes of color, continues to grow (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Harrison, 2002; Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010; Melendez, 2008; Oseguera et al., 2018; Singer, 2008). Oseguera et al. (2018) suggested that, if one is to fully understand a student-athlete’s college experience, there must not only be an understanding of their affiliation with their athletic program but also their broader campus involvement.

Gayles (2015) suggested that the challenges or strains associated with being a Division I student-athlete are many, and they have a tendency to impact the degree to which a student athlete will engage in and with the campus community (p. 209). As college athletics have continued to be subjected to intense scrutiny and regulations from various governing bodies, athletic departments have resorted to using boutique student and academic services, which isolate student-athletes from the university community and the general student experience. Kuh’s theory of student engagement (2001) supports the idea that student involvement is important because students learn from what they do in college. It further suggests that students who invest time and energy in studying and participating in meaningful activities, such as student organizations and group study sessions, tend to enjoy overall higher levels of engagement on campus (Woods et al., 2018). Additionally, allowing students the opportunity to build positive relationships with teachers and other caring adults is another critical aspect of campus life,

especially for those who grew up in disadvantaged homes and communities, which is often the case for some black athletes (Song, Doll, & Marth, 2013).

Helping student-athletes, including those of color, recognize the value of how experiences outside of athletics contribute to their success and prepare them for life beyond collegiate athletics is important, since the majority of student-athletes will never join the professional ranks of the sports in which they participate. The data suggest that only 2% of college football players will play the sport at the professional level (NCAA, 2022). As such, it is increasingly more important that students get the most out of their college experience. Clay (2007) noted that due to high focus on athletics and the “low number of participants that transition from college to professional sports, the majority of these student athletes are often left without the educational and social development needed to successfully transition from the playing field to non-athletic work environments (p. 4).

Adaptive Strengths for Coping

Despite the challenges that face Division-I student-athletes, Turner et al. (2015) contended that “Black males, including college athletes, often succeed not because of, but in spite of their schools” (p. 5). This idea is consistent with the Bowman Role Strain and Adaptation Model (Bowman, 1989, 2006) in that individuals who experience strain and difficulties in their roles often turn to coping strategies, whether adaptive or risky, to cope with the strain. Among student-athletes, four primary adaptive strategies are prevalent, including the use of academic services and support, reliance on family engagement, and general self-motivation and resilience.

Academic Services and Support

Rankin et al. (2016) described the relationship between athletics and academics as an “uneasy marriage” (p. 705). Because of the difficulty of balancing athletic responsibilities with academic requirements at competitive Division-I institutions, the first resource that student-athletes are generally introduced to is that of an academic support team (Rubin & Moses, 2017). This team of tutors, academic counselors, attendance checkers and learning specialists are considered “necessary” in some instances since an increasing number of student-athletes, particularly black athletes, come to Division-I universities either “academically underprepared” or via offers of conditional admission (Rubin & Moses, 2017, p. 317). The need to cope with the academic strain that comes with being a student-athlete by taking advantage of academic services is critical for many athletes, not just so they can fit in with their college classmates but also so they can remain eligible to participate in the sport that is funding their educational pursuits (Rubin & Moses, 2017). While the focus for most institutions is to keep student-athletes eligible by providing academic support services, the National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals (N4A, 2018) contend that the strategies provided by academic resources should be designed to help student-athletes take more responsibility for their own academic pursuits, personal passions and career interests.

Family Engagement

Taking responsibility for one’s own academic goals does not mean that student-athletes of color must attempt to address the challenges of college alone. According to Lowe et al. (2018), parents are essential sources of support for students transitioning to intercollegiate athletics (p. 243). It is a widely held belief that parental and family involvement are important factors in academic achievement for students from all backgrounds (Clay, 2007). As is the case

for other members of the general collegiate student population, family ties can also play a major role in the success of Black student-athletes at Division-I institutions. Patton, Harris, Ranero-Ramirez, Villacampa, and Lui (2015) have suggested the responsibility of taking care of family and oneself can often be a primary factor for why some individuals of color even go to college. Besides the mere enjoyment of playing a particular sport or simply competing at the next level, many Black student-athletes come to Division-I institutions, in consultation with their families, treating sport as a form of personal and economic investment (Horner, McLeod, & Ternes, 2016). While research by Clay (2007) has suggested that the parents of Black student-athletes stress the importance of academics over athletics, other scholars note that Black parents are often more prone to push their children into participation in athletics with the goal of athletics success at the professional level in mind (Edwards, 2000; Eitle & Eitle, 2002). So, parents or families are often a motivating factor for some student-athletes to do well in school or excel in their athletic pursuits with the hopes of advancing to the pros.

With so much focus on the benefits of the college experience for the Black student-athlete and their families, family engagement and support can be a major source of helping these athletes cope with the strains of participating in very competitive Division-I athletics programs. In research conducted by Horner, McLeod, and Ternes (2016), many Division-I athletes are motivated to persevere beyond the challenges of being a student-athlete because of the desire to relieve their parents of the burden of paying for college or in hopes of engaging in a professional career that will offer them and their families a better quality of life.

Self-Motivation and Resilience

Scholars contend that the development of discipline, high self-esteem, self-control and delayed gratification are qualities that are important for students to develop and increase their

chances for academic success (Clay 2007; Sampson, 2002). According to Gayles (2015), a student's belief in their ability to be successful is rooted in their past experiences of success and failure, which often helps them "persist and experience less stress and anxiety, particularly if difficulties arise" (p. 214). As student-athletes, Black males often engage in self-motivation and other acts of resiliency as part of the process of role adaptation as described by Bowman (2006) in seeking to deal with role difficulty. Gayles (2015) noted, however, that a student-athlete's ability to use this approach as an adaptive strategy depends on their "self-efficacy" or belief in their ability to complete a goal successfully.

In 2005, Gaston and Gayles used Bandura's self-efficacy theory to measure academic and athletic motivation. According to Gayles (2015), the researchers found that while student-athletes may possess high belief in their athletic abilities, they were not so confident in their abilities in the academic arena. As a result, Gayles (2015) suggested that finding ways to help student-athletes "boost their self-efficacy beliefs, particularly in the academic domain, is warranted" (p. 214).

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Institutions and their respective athletic departments will continue to recruit and admit Black male applicants. Being fully aware of the implications associated with the social stratification of this group, via ethnic or racial background, gender, and socioeconomic status, is essential for athletic and campus administrators to fully understand how to deploy the assets needed to identify harmful strains, support their strengths, and mitigate risk, so they can successfully graduate. With this in mind, the researcher has elected to use the adapted version of the Bowman Role Strain and Adaptation Model (ABRSAM) as modified by Burt et al. (2019) to help guide this study. Figure 1 illustrates a visual depiction of the adapted BRASM. Philip

Bowman suggested that his original model “provided psychologists, counselors, educators, and other professionals with an integrative conceptual framework for examining human strengths within helping relationships” (Bowman, 2006, p. 118). Bowman expanded his strength-based model (SBM) to specifically address “diversity, multilevel, and life-span issues among at risk youth” (Bowman, 2006, p. 118) and created the *Role Strain Adaptation Approach: Toward a Strength-Centered Model of Well-Being and Health* (Bowman, 2006, p. 120). While its previous iterations included adjustments to accommodate educational outcomes, Burt et al. (2018) suggested that an adaptation to Bowman’s original work was needed to address their research on Black male engineering students. The researcher used this adapted version to study Black male student-athletes. Figure 1 illustrates the adapted model.

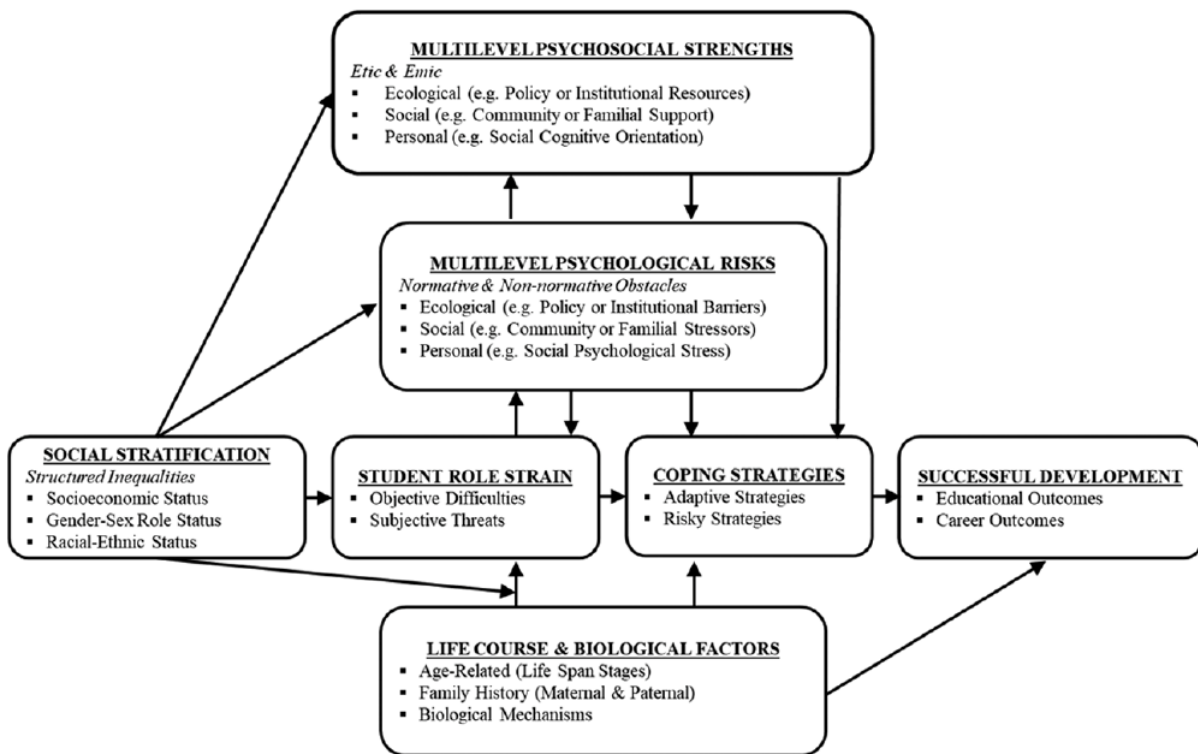


Figure 1. Bowman role-strain and adaption approach (adapted version) (Burt et al., 2019)

This research examined the existing body of knowledge concerning how social stratifications that consist of economics, gender-sex role, racial-ethnic and other external and internal psychological factors influence Black male student-athletes' ability to successfully succeed as an athlete and a student. While searching for ideas that would provide perspectives for thinking about role strain specific to Black male student-athletes in Division I sports, Bowman's ABR SAM was selected as an ideal framework to serve as a guide in further creating a conceptual model to enhance understanding of this research. The ABR SAM suggests that Black male student-athletes, regardless of the inequalities associated with their social stratification alignment, can find multi-level psychological strengths, that exist within their athletic environment, family support structure, and from other personal affiliations, to bolster success. Similar to multilevel psychological strengths, the model also suggests that Black male student-athletes, regardless of the inequalities associated with their social stratification alignment, are also subject to multilevel psychological risk factors, which are manifested within their athletic environment, family support structure, from other personal affiliations, and can contribute to a failed collegiate experience. Psychological risk factors associated with Black male student athletes have the potential to intensify the effect of a role strain and lead to the selection of either adaptive or risky coping strategies. The ABR SAM also suggests that the educational outcomes associated with Black male student-athletes will be directly contingent upon the strategies they select to overcome the impact of a particular role strain. The researcher conducted this study using the variables associated with the appropriate level or tier of the adapted model. As the adapted model and Burt et al. (2019) have indicated, there are both social and psychological influences that directly contribute to the success of Black males. The researcher used these sections of the model as guides to identify strains experienced by student-athletes as well as the

coping strategies adopted by Black male student-athletes to overcome those strains and develop a visual model that depicts the salient strains that are associated with being a Black male student-athlete at a Division-I institution.

Aside from a lack of confidence to excel in the classroom (Gayles, 2015, p. 214), time, academics, engagement, and sport of choice are typical strain-inducing variables that student-athletes must accommodate using various coping mechanisms and approaches. Adding to this uneasiness are the pressures that come from the coaching staff and others, who are paid professionals, responsible for keeping the student-athlete engaged in a learning environment that is closely linked to their athletic pursuits.

Time is identified as the source from which most student athletes' primary challenges or strains originate. According to Turner et al. (2015), the critical nature of time is significant since "time demands faced by these athletes force them to make academic sacrifices" that they might not otherwise have to make if they did not have the dual role of student and athlete (p. 14). Other strains, which include fulfilling academic responsibilities, addressing the need or desire to be an engaged student, and meeting the mental and physical challenges of playing their respective sport, are often viewed as major weights or pressures that student-athletes must shoulder in order to be successful. As noted previously, oversight organizations such as the NCAA appear to have an understanding of the reality that these primary and secondary strains can cause and have aggressively sought to foster the development of academic resources for student-athletes that allow them to be more directly involved in taking responsibility for their own academic interests and personal and professional goals as opposed to administrators, coaches and athletics departments (N4A, 2018).

In spite of these efforts, the tug of war that comes with simultaneously being a student and an athlete forces these individuals to seek out meaningful supports and coping strategies to help them overcome the impact of their student-athlete role strain. Academic support services often fill the confidence gap that Black student-athletes lack when coming to large flagship institutions, thus providing the resources they need to successfully persist as a student and not just as athletes (Rubin & Moses, 2017). Family involvement is often a major coping mechanism for Black student-athletes as they are motivated to not only live up to the high expectations of family as it relates to their academic success but also because they recognize that their success could possibly mean a better quality of life for themselves and their loved ones if they are able to earn a college degree and/or move on the professional ranks of their sport (Horner, McLeod, & Ternes, 2016). Finally, self-efficacy and a student-athlete's individual resiliency are also key coping strategies because, according to Bowman (2006), Black male athletes often use self-motivation and other acts of resiliency as a standard process of role adaptation when they find themselves in situations of personal pressure or strain.

Chapter Summary

As the number of black student-athletes has increased, concerns regarding the low numbers of Division-I black male athletes who graduate have continued to be a "lightening rod issue" (Turner, et al., 2015, p. 3). According to Comeaux, Speer, Taustine and Harrison (2011), student-athletes in Division-I revenue generating sports not only have the general pressures of being students, but they also face the incredible demands placed upon them by their sport, including the pressures of devoting more than 40 hours a week to team practices and meetings, travel, and participation in athletic competitions. These demands create strain-inducing challenges that often deter success for this student population. However, Black male student-

athletes, in spite of the strains, find ways to cope and persist. Some of these coping strategies include use of academic services and support, reliance on family engagement, and general self-motivation and resilience. Also, the issues of Black male student retention and graduation need to be more effectively and consistently addressed. As articulated in this review of the literature, finding a meaningful way to mitigate and resolve poor K-12 academic preparation for underrepresented groups, before being selected to attend a four-year institution, is imperative for alleviating some of the academic strain experienced by Black male student athletes. A lack of academic training and time constraints often compel student-athletes to sacrifice the selection of more rigorous academic disciplines, for the sake of being compliant athletically, which, in the long-term, does a disservice to the student-athletes and a society that could benefit from more diverse professionals with academic credentials in more advanced disciplines.

While these efforts would assist academically, it would have little impact on their primary strain of time. Having enough time to adequately prepare for their sport of play, meeting their general class obligations, and participating in normal campus engagement activities as a student, are issues that must also be addressed. Research has shown that peer-to-peer academic engagement, whether discussing concepts, sharing notes, studying for exams, or just competing academically, increases retention and persistence. Institutions must resolve the issue of time for student-athletes and explore opportunities for them to actively engage in the college experience, both academically and socially.

CHAPTER III:
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Recruiting, retaining, and graduating Black male students and student-athletes continues to be of concern for most American institutions of higher learning. While research on Black student-athletes and other underrepresented minority groups has been conducted for many years, Harper (2018) suggested that “problems as pervasive as the underrepresentation of Black men in the undergraduate student population at predominantly white universities, their overrepresentation on revenue-generating NCAA Division I sports teams, and their comparatively lower six-year graduation rates warrant a multidimensional response” (p. 15). This study sought to understand the influence of role strain on Black male student-athletes at a Division I Power-Five institution, and the coping mechanisms which they deploy to mitigate the impact of the strains they experience while being a student and an athlete. A qualitative methodology was used to conduct the research. Additionally, the researcher used interviews to collect data from currently enrolled Black male student-athletes. Interview sessions were conducted either in face-to-face settings, via Zoom video conference, or by phone to collect data. Field notes were taken, while also using audio and/or video aids to capture participant responses. This study was also guided by IRB approved interview protocols.

This chapter presents the methodology used to guide this research, and includes: (a) the research design, (b) the case study approach, (c) an overview of participant criteria, (d) data collection procedures, (e) one-on-one interviews, (f) criteria for judging soundness and validity,

(g) data analysis, (h) trustworthiness, (i) ethical considerations, (j) positionality, (k) delimitations, (l) limitations, and (m) chapter summary.

Research Design

This research was conducted using qualitative research methodology. Specifically, the researcher used a case study research design. A case study design was explicitly chosen to investigate the central phenomena of role strain and coping mechanisms, in a bounded system, comprised of Black male student-athletes, from one institution, and all attending within a specified period of time. The goal of the study was to explore the research problem intimately and from the participants' perspective. A qualitative approach for collecting data was considered as ideal to answer the two primary research questions that guided the study:

1. What are the strains that Black male student-athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five conference institution?; and
2. What are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student-athlete at a Power-Five conference institution?

The Case Study Approach

While considering the research questions, this study sought to investigate the influence of role strain on Black male student-athletes within the bounded context of their athletic and campus affiliations, gender, institution, race, sport, and the time in which they attended the institution. As such, an explanatory case study approach was used to optimize this research. According to Holley and Harris (2019), an explanatory case study seeks to “explain recurring themes related to the issue being studied and to identify plausible relationships shaping the phenomenon” (p. 118).

Defining A Case Study and Offering a Rationale for Its Use

Yin (2018) formally defined a case study as “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 14). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) defined a case study as a detailed investigation of a bounded system that is based on the collection of broad data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bonded system” (p. 37). Bounded implies that the case of study is distinguishable by time, place, or some other unique differentiators that can be isolated and studied. Yin (2018) suggested that the utilization of case studies for research in disciplines associated with the social sciences is a common practice and they show “the explanatory and not just descriptive or explorative functions of a single-case study” (Yin, 2018, p. 6). Holley and Harris (2019) also contended that “the case study approach often offers the best vehicle for examining complex social units or organizations” (p. 90). Considering the nature of a case study is to examine and understand the nuances of a specific case (Holley & Harris, 2019), a case study approach connects well with understanding the athletic department, the specific group of athletes, and the sports in which they participated, to understand how role strain influences their ability to function as a student and the coping mechanisms they use to accommodate the stress.

Additionally, given the researcher’s prior affiliation as a student-athlete and having previously experienced the phenomenon under study, the researcher was deliberate in his efforts to avoid unintentionally influencing participant responses. Given this research was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic and specific COVID regulations were still in effect, the researcher could not conduct the interview sessions in an appropriate or consistent facility that

was a common place for the participants to gather. Following the required COVID regulations and also working to ensure the participants' safety, the researcher conducted interviews via face-to-face, Zoom, and traditional phone conversations to collect data, which allowed participants multiple options from which they could participate in the study, based on their availability and their level of comfort.

Participants

The researcher identified Black male student-athletes, from an institution located in the southeastern United States, that is a member of a Power-Five athletic conference, and who were classified as either freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors, in terms of playing eligibility, to participate in this study. Eighty-two percent of the participants reported coming from a two-parent home where financial resources were not an issue. Similarly, higher education or some other professional qualifications, such as military training, were prevalent among the parents of the population sample. Many participants in the sample also reported having acquired a formal K-12 education that provided a solid academic foundation for them to effectively manage college-level coursework. In fact, many of participants reported entering college with grade point averages that were 3.0 or higher, and some freely added that they had a history of being high academic achievers. The academic majors of the study participants included business administration, entrepreneurship, kinesiology, and public health. Table 1 shows a detailed view of the participants' profile information.

For the purpose of this research, the researcher used the NCAA's adopted definition of "Black, non-Hispanic" student-athletes to identify Black subjects for this study. The NCAA defines Black, non-Hispanic as "a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa (except those of Hispanic origin)" (NCAA Race Ethnic Report, 2010, p. 7). To avoid

compliance concerns and to ensure participant eligibility for this study, the researcher used the identified school’s athletic department administrators to identify and verify potential participants who would meet the bounded parameters identified for this study.

Table 1

Role Strain Participants and Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Sport	Classification	Major	Household
Anthony	Football	Sophomore	Business	One
Bart	Track and Field	Junior	Kinesiology	Two
Chad	Track and Field	Junior	Kinesiology	Two
Darrell	Football	Senior	Business	Two
Eddie	Basketball	Senior	Business	Two
Frank	Basketball	Sophomore	Kinesiology	Two
Greg	Basketball	Sophomore	Business	Two
Hans	Basketball	Sophomore	Kinesiology	One
Israel	Basketball	Freshman	Business	One
Johnathan	Football	Sophomore	Public Health	Two
Ken	Football	Freshman	Entrepreneurship	Two

Student-athletes who requested to participate but had not been identified by the athletic administrator were also considered, only after confirming that they met the study requirements. The athletics department’s representative coordinated with the institution’s athletic compliance office to be sure that the research and contact with current student-athletes were within the norms of NCAA and institutional regulations. Given the research was conducted using current student-athletes, the researcher worked to safeguard the integrity of the interview process and to validate

the participation of a student-athlete. The institution's athletics department's academic counseling and advising office coordinated with the institution's athletic compliance coordinator and coaches to secure their endorsement of the study. After establishing a relationship with the athletic staff, two emails were sent to all Black male student-athletes asking them to participate in the study. Additionally, other athletics administrators verbally asked some Black male athletes to participate. All participants were issued informed consent forms and no interview was initiated without a signed and verified informed consent form.

In accordance with Yin (2018), all correspondence with the participants provided insight into the nature of the research as it was presented in the data collection protocols (p. 94). It was guided by the necessary documentation to confirm the participants' consent to engage in the study. All consent forms were structured in accordance with standards established by the institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The required and approved IRB consent documentation for this study is included as Appendix D.

Data Collection

This research utilized qualitative case study methodology, which consisted of one-on-one interviews to collect data and answer the following research questions: 1) what are the strains that Black male student-athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five conference institution?; and 2) what are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student athlete at a Power-Five conference institution? This approach allowed the researcher to explore the problem of why the graduation rates of Black male student-athletes continue to lag behind their White peers and “develop a detailed understanding of the central phenomenon” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 16) of role strain. Data gathering was guided by specific research protocols, designed to collect and analyze the

retrieved data as outlined by Creswell and Guetterman (2019), Holley and Harris (2019), and Yin (2018). The adapted version of the Bowman Role Strain and Adaptation Model (ABRASM) by Burt et al. (2019) was selected as the theoretical framework to help guide this study. This framework was selected as it “emphasizes the social and psychological (i.e., psychosocial) resources that individuals often draw from to succeed (Burt et al., 2018, pp. 972-973), and it provides “a life-span framework to better examine the operation of psychosocial risks and protective cultural strengths as youth prepare for early, middle, and elder adulthood” (Bowman, 2006, p. 119). While keeping the overall purpose of answering the two research questions in mind, the researcher utilized the core components of the ABRASM to categorize the data collection questions into themes for the interview questions. Appendix E provides a visual representation of how the data collection questions were organized.

In support of this research project, the research institution’s Athletic Academic Services office sent email solicitations to a total of 301 student-athletes on two occasions. The email transmissions included all male student-athletes and did not directly target only Black student-athletes. It should be noted that the researcher did not receive a single interview participant from the email solicitations. After receiving no participants from the email campaigns, the researcher resorted to staking out frequently visited locations of athletes and soliciting Black student-athletes as they arrived and gave the researcher an opportunity to present the research. This approach yielded nearly 30 affirmations to participate in the research, however, many of the participants did not follow-through with their commitments. As a result, the researcher interviewed a total of 11 Black male student-athletes.

Sampling for Interviews

The researcher used critical and purposeful sampling to identify interview participants for one-on-one interview sessions, as articulated by Creswell and Guetterman (2019) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Snowballing was also used for the purposes of securing additional participants for the study by engaging existing participants and their relationships with other Black male student-athletes. Critical sampling is defined by Creswell and Guetterman (2019) as a strategy that studies an acute number of participants from an extraordinary case, because studying the specific group provides the researcher with an enhanced learning experience of the central phenomenon. Considering the intent of this research was to study a critical sample of Black male student-athletes from a Power-Five conference school, the researcher believed this sampling technique would further aid in understanding the research phenomena. Purposeful sampling involves intentionally selecting the participants and the research site for the purpose of understanding the phenomenon of study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This approach afforded the researcher with the ability to select and use research participants who were the most knowledgeable about the topic of study. Purposeful sampling requires the researcher to select participants and research sites because they are more likely to maintain the data needed to answer the research questions about the central phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The research institution's athletics department's academic counseling and advising center, athletics administrators, and key faculty members were selected as partners to assist in identifying Black or Black male student-athletes who fit the parameters of the study, to share their perspectives related to the research topic and how they either successfully addressed the issue of role strain for the purpose of understanding how the phenomenon influences their ability

or made the decision to engage the campus and persist and the coping mechanisms they traditionally gravitate towards to mitigate the impact of their role strains.

Utilizing the rationale of Yin (2018), the researcher created a detailed interview protocol to guide the data collection process and maintain order within the individual interview data collection sessions. The protocol, which did not differ between participants, added to the overall consistency and reliability of the data collection process. The interview protocol and interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), a qualitative study “may use several one-on-one interviews (p. 218). They noted, however, that such interviews are best with participants who are well spoken and not hesitant to comfortably share their ideas. This was the case with the participants of this research. Overall, participants for the interview sessions were selected from the sports of basketball, football, and track and field. Other sports, such as baseball, golf and tennis were not included, as the institution of study had only two Black baseball players and no Black male student-athletes in the remaining sports. Isolating Black males exclusively for this research reduced the total number of athletes available for the project. While there is no hard rule regarding a specified number of interviews to conduct, a total of eleven athletes participated in this study. Although, many accepted the informed consent and agreed to participate, they ultimately did not and gave no reason for their decision. Considering this research offered no gifts, financial rewards, or other incentives for participating out of concerns related to violating NCAA regulations, perhaps, more would have participated with a financial incentive. Also, considering this research was asking student athletes for the one thing they had the least of and was rarely in control of, their time, this is also viewed as another reason for the sample size.

One-On-One Interviews

The primary approach for gathering data for this study was one-on-one interviews. According to Holley and Harris (2019), interviews are useful while conducting qualitative research as it provides the researcher with the ability to consider the respondents' words and their meaning from within the context that they are spoken. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that asking good questions is essential to collecting good data when conducting qualitative research, especially when interviewing participants. When constructing research questions, how and why questions are suggested as being a proper format and this research adhered to this requirement. However, during the data collection process, it is suggested that researchers use open-ended and less structured questions (Holley & Harris, 2019). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the researcher can determine the type of interview to use when collecting qualitative data by deciding how they would like the structure of the interview process to take place. While many options exist for categorizing interviews, three common structures are recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016): highly structured or standard, semi-structured, and unrestricted or informal. For the purposes of this research, a semi-structured interview format was utilized. A semi-structured interview calls for a mix of structured and semi-structured interview questions, the latter having no predetermined wording or order, but both seek to ask questions that will explore the research question(s) under study. While the researcher utilized several predeveloped questions that were asked of all participants, the interviews also included less structured follow-up questions that were prompted by participant responses. To ensure the

approach captured all of the non-structured follow-up questions, with the interviewee's permission, the researcher recorded the interview sessions using multiple recording devices.

One-on-one interviews were conducted exclusively by the researcher, and due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were offered the option of virtual participation or meeting in a designated location where the researcher and participant were appropriately masked and socially distanced to ensure health and safety. Considering some of these interviews were conducted virtually, the researcher provided informed consent forms either directly to a specified athletics administrator, who presented them to the respective participants, or directly to the athlete participant. Upon securing the signature of the participant, the administrator returned the signed consent form to the researcher prior to his engaging in any data collection activity. The participants engaged in responding to a list of open-ended questions that were predeveloped and approved by the IRB. Approved IRB interview protocols are found in Appendix C. The interview process involved the researcher following an interview protocol, consistent with Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) instructions and an outlined series of questions. Similar to Burt et al. (2019) the same interview protocol was used for all participants and was "intentionally designed to be general at first before probing into more sensitive questions" (50). The researcher used the same approved protocol for each participant, but also asked additional questions when needed to either help clarify original questions or encourage participants to expound on a particular response.

Questions for this research were developed with the intent of collecting data that would be connected to the BRSAM's "Social Stratification, Multilevel Psychological Strengths, Multilevel Psychological Risks, Student Role Strain, and Coping Strategies" functional elements, as shown in Appendix E. Examples of select interview questions included, "how would you

describe your childhood upbringing in terms of family structure;” “how would you describe your engagement within the broader campus community;” “how often do you utilize the athletic academic center;” “how often do you utilize campus academic services outside of athletics;” “what are the greatest challenges or stressors you face as a student and athlete of color;” and “what strategies or resources do you use to cope with stress you feel as a student and athlete?” The length of the interviews with the participants lasted for 37 minutes on average. Participants were transparent about the limited amount of time they had to give to the research project.

Data Analysis

According to Yin (2018), researchers who engage in collecting data for the purposes of case study investigations often do so without having a clear idea as to how the collected data will be analyzed. This is possibly explained due to limited research experience of new scholars. Holley and Harris (2019) suggested that budding scholars typically exhibit emotions of insecurity regarding how to successfully conduct a detailed case study inquiry and have preconceived anxieties about what the research findings might yield. Engaging in research with a strict commitment to impartiality is essential to the discovery elements of any research project, and Holley and Harris (2019) suggested that the researcher should “think about analysis as a process of discovery (p. 154), without knowing exactly where it will carry you. Given that this research project was qualitative, being committed to impartiality was even more important as qualitative research “is best suited for research problems in which you do not know the variables and need to explore” (Creswell, p. 45, 2005). As it is with most research, “analyzing data requires understanding how to make sense of text and images so that you can form answers to your research questions” (Creswell & Guetterman, p. 236, 2019).

Regardless, if a research project is quantitative or qualitative in nature, a prescribed set of steps are commonly used to guide the research project. Historically, this process has been called the “scientific method” and involves identifying the research problem, making predictions, collecting data, and analyzing data (Creswell & Guetterman, p. 7, 2019). Similar to the prescribed method for guiding the individual elements of a research project, researchers have also developed à la carte approaches for successfully conducting each step of the scientific method. In terms of analyzing data, scholars agree that examining qualitative data involves understanding how to make sense of data sources so the researcher can answer their research questions (Creswell, 2005; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Holley & Harris, 2019; Yin, 2018). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggested using six steps in analyzing qualitative data. They include “organizing, coding, using codes to generate themes, representing findings through narratives and visuals, interpreting the meanings, and validating the accuracy of the findings” (p. 237). However, for the purposes of this research, the researcher followed the 11 steps for analyzing data as recommended by Holley and Harris (2019): (a) organize the data; (b) create a list of etic codes bases on the literature and framework; (c) complete a round of coding using these codes; (d) do a second round of coding using open coding; (e) continue subsequent rounds of coding until all potential important ideas have been identified; (f) review codes and adjust as needed; (g) begin grouping codes together; (h) create categories for the groups of codes; (i) create a graphic organizer of the categories and codes; (j) order categories, codes, and quotations into a logical structure; and (k) begin writing the findings chapter (pp. 160-166). A visual example of this process is included as Appendix F, and the yielded themes from analyzing the collected data is included as Appendix G.

Judging Soundness and Validity

Qualitative research must be collected using a high standard of ethics and includes procedures that will certify its validity. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) referred to validity as ensuring the truth and trustworthiness of research findings and the extent to which the study can be replicated and yield the same results of the original study. Additionally, the researchers support this belief and suggest that “throughout the process of data collection and analysis, you need to make sure that your findings and interpretations are accurate” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 261). However, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static” (p. 250). Recommended strategies for assuring the validity of research data includes conducting external audits, member checking, and triangulation. Engaging an external auditor requires the researcher to solicitate the services of an external party to review the research either during or after the data collection process. An external auditor will seek to communicate and respond to whether “the findings are grounded in data, if inferences are logical, are the themes appropriate, can inquiry decisions and methodological shifts be justified, what is the degree of research bias, and what strategies are used for increasing credibility” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2016, p. 262). Member checking involves the researcher incorporating participants of the research to affirm topic headings, transcripts notes and subject categories. “At the basic level, member checking involves sending a transcript of an interview to participants and asking them to clarify their responses” (Holley & Harris, 2019, pp. 167-168). Finally, triangulation means using multiple sources and methods to collect research data. According to Holley and Harris (2019), triangulation proves to be a crucial element in a rigorous, well-prepared, and insightful dissertation study” (p. 167). During this research, the researcher used field notes and interviews and also member checking to affirm the

trustworthiness and dependability of the data collected. In addition to asking good data collection questions, listening closely to participants and being able to adapt to unforeseen changes as the study moves forward are important aspects of effective research studies.

Ethical Considerations

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contended, “To a large extent the validity and reliability of a study depends on the ethics of the investigator (p. 260). Yin (2018) suggested that the essential aspects of a case study would be “negated if the researcher only seeks to use a case study to substantiate a preconceived position”, disregarding ethical standards (p. 85). Maintaining an ethical study was particularly important for this research, given the researcher’s prior affiliation with the case study’s central phenomenon, as well as being a Black male and former student-athlete, while attending a major university in the southeastern United States and being affiliated with a Power-Five athletic conference. The researcher understood the significance of conducting this study without bias and with a high degree of scholarly integrity. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), while ethical standards for conducting research have been established by many associations, institutions, and organizations, “actual ethical practice comes down to the individual researcher’s own values and ethics” (p. 258).

Aside from the researcher’s personal ethical values, the researcher also submitted the appropriate materials as they were required by the Institutional Review Board of the host university. Given the unique nature of the participants of this study, it was possible that the NCAA could have required the completion of an ethical standards form. The goal of the researcher in this study was to protect and minimize the risk for each participant and to operate from within the established ethical requirements of the university. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) note the importance of informing participants of the study’s purpose, gathering

information ethically, and maintaining confidentiality. They also urge researchers not to cheat or share participants' information. The researcher proactively addressed these issues before initiating all data collection protocols.

Positionality

A critical aspect of qualitative research, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is the extent to which a researcher can impact the study to which they are bringing their experience. Disclosing positionality, according to Holley and Harris (2019), gives the researcher an opportunity to share with the reader how the researcher's positionality relates to the study and its conclusions (p. 169). Considering this, a full positionality disclosure can bring validity and ethical consideration to the study.

As such, the academic and professional background of the researcher is a primary driving force behind this study. As a Black male, who participated in Division-I football at a Power-Five conference and public flagship institution with high expectations of its athletic program, the researcher has first-hand experience of the various strains that are placed on athletes at a BCS-level institution. Additionally, the researcher understands the challenges of performing on the field while also trying to remain eligible to play, engaging in traditional student experiences, and seeking to improve their quality of life and that of their family through athletics. The researcher also successfully completed his degree before beginning a professional career in the National Football League, has had work experiences in both the higher education and corporate sectors, and has gone on to complete academic study in higher education at the graduate level.

Delimitations

This study was intended to examine how social stratification, such as economics, gender, and race, are manifested in the form of role strains in Black male student-athletes and how these

strains influence their ability to successfully engage within the campus community and persist to graduation. Given that a case study approach was used for this research, the study was delimited to Black male student-athletes from one institution. While there are Black male student athletes in every university classification at the institution of study, this study was delimited geographically to the southeastern United States and also delimited to institutions with the Power-Five athletic conference school affiliation.

Limitations

Considering every study has its limitations (Holley & Harris, 2018), the researcher anticipated that this research would also have certain limitations due to how it was designed. Limitations are explained by Calabrese (2006) as “potential weaknesses in the study’s research design or methodology that restrict the study’s scope” (p. 12). Identifying these weaknesses are critical as they have the ability to “influence the extent to which the study is transferable or can be applied to professional practice” (Holley & Harris, 2019, p. 122).

The primary limitation of this study was the fact that it investigated only one Power-Five conference program of the 65 institutions in the elite Power-Five athletic category. This left the study vulnerable to the possibility of drawing conclusions from data that might not be completely indicative of the total group of Power-Five institutions. Secondly, this study sought to investigate the impact of role strain of Black male student-athletes at Power-Five institutions. In doing so, the nature of this research does not account for the similar experiences of other student-athletes of color, both male and female, and student athletes of other racial identities, who either share or have similar cultural and socioeconomic experiences and also have similar strains associated with their roles as both a student and an athlete. Third, this research is bounded by the time that student-athletes entered the university’s athletic department. A comprehensive longitudinal study

could prove useful in understanding the central phenomenon and yield greater insights concerning more institutions and more student-athlete groups.

Chapter Summary

Chapter III of this research presented the methods used for collecting data that could answer the research questions: 1) what are the strains that Black male student athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five conference institution?; and 2) what are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student-athlete at a Power-Five conference institution?

The researcher utilized a qualitative case study methodology that included one-on-one interviews to collect data. Given the unique nature of the case study, the researcher formed a partnership with key athletic administrators, faculty, and staff members of the host institution to identify and recruit research participants for the study. Critical and purposeful sampling techniques were utilized to identify prospects and snowballing was also used to increase the number of participants. The data collection procedure consisted of one-on-one interviews and was guided by an approved IRB protocol. Member checking, field notes and interviews were used as tools to validate the accuracy of the collected data. The chapter concluded with the researcher's disclosing his positionality to the research and how his previous involvement as a student-athlete, from a Power-Five conference, could influence the research. Ethical considerations, delimitations, and limitations of the research were also appropriately addressed.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter IV of this study presents the research findings. This research was conducted using an explanatory case study design to identify and explain recurring themes related to the phenomenon of role strain on Black male student-athletes and to identify the coping mechanisms they deploy to mitigate them. Black males, despite being more numerous than their White peers in NCAA Division I sports, continue to lag behind and graduate at a lower rate (NCAA Race Ethnicity Report, 2010). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore, identify, and understand the concept of role strain on Black male student-athletes at a Division-I institution and how it influences their ability to engage and persist at their institution. It endeavored to answer the central research questions: 1) what are the strains that Black male student-athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five conference institution?; and 2) what are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student-athlete at a Power-Five conference institution?

Utilizing the Bowman Role Strain and Adaption Model as a Theoretical Framework to guide the study, the researcher used the individual frames of the model to deductively construct interview questions to collect data (see Appendix E). At the conclusion of the data collection process, the researcher utilized the responses of the participants to carry out a series of inductive coding sessions to understand, make meaning, and identify themes and codes to present within these findings. Resulting from this process were five overarching themes that included eight

critical aspects of student-athlete role strains and coping mechanisms. Themes were derived from the researcher's original round of inductive coding based on the participants' responses and yielded 120 second- and third-tier codes (see Appendix G). Consistent with the understanding of most qualitative researchers, "data analysis requires determining what data proves relevant to research focus" (Holley & Harris, 2019, p. 154).

At the heart of this study were data gathered from the interviews conducted with the research participants. Their responses as well as details related to their personal and demographic backgrounds not only revealed information central to the research topic but also allowed the researcher to unfold a compelling story about the overall strains that Black male student-athletes at Power-Five institutions experience and the coping strategies they generally employ to mitigate the challenges that they face. While brief narrative profiles are provided for each of the participants as part of this chapter, the researcher felt it important to preface these narratives with some general information regarding the participants' families, their educational background, what shapes their perspectives and behaviors, along with insight into their personal and professional aspirations and what motivates them to persist as college students.

Regardless of the general stereotypes of Black male athletes as "dumb jocks" or the idea that they are recruited to major Division I universities primarily because of their "athletic superiority" (Harper, 2018), the participants of this study demonstrated a keen awareness of and appreciation for the educational benefits that were being afforded to them and the expectation that they make the most of their college experience, both academically and athletically to ensure a brighter future. And even though the participants represented different sports and were coming from different parts of the country and had different academic classifications, they all shared the common bond of family, which not only served as a major source of support and motivation for

them, but also provided them with a sense of responsibility to honor the sacrifices of those who came before them and did not have access to the opportunities that were now available to them as student-athletes.

The participants in this research came from both single-parent and two-parent families. In all cases, the presence and influence of the mother was of particular importance to the student-athlete in terms of how they dealt with strains and challenges as well as what motivated them to persist in their academic, athletic, and personal endeavors. The educational background of the parent(s) played an important role in their overall outlook on education as well as had a significant influence on how they prioritized their academic responsibilities. Additionally, the socio-economic background from which the student-athletes came, along with their prior educational, financial and racial experiences, impacted their perspectives on life, how they approached their college experience, and offered insight into how the strains and coping mechanisms differed among student-athletes, depending on their previous experiences and support structures. Finally, participant responses shed considerable light on the aspirations of the student-athletes in the study and the factors that motivated them to persist and contemplate life beyond their role as a student-athlete.

While the data gathered from the study participants yielded many themes and codes, five overarching themes were identified as germane to the focus of this research and the research questions: (a) student-athlete role strain and their objective difficulties, (b) campus engagement: an ecological and personal risk, (c) student-athlete coping strategies, (d) family and family structure: an etic strength, and (e) athletic student services: an emic institutional resource. These primary themes are discussed in greater detail in the research findings, starting with how they are represented within the participant profiles and perspectives that follow.

Participant Profiles

As required by the bounded nature of this research, 100% of the participants were Black male student-athletes with ancestry of African descent. The research pool represents scholarship and non-scholarship athletes from the sports of basketball, football, and track and field.

Additionally, it also includes all academic classifications and shows the parental makeup of the participants' households and the acquired education levels of each parent (see Table 2). The following reflects brief profiles of each of the research participants.

Table 2

Expanded Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Sport	Classification	Scholarship	Household	Mother's Education	Father's Education
Anthony	Football	Sophomore	Yes	Mother	Bachelor's	NA
Bart	Track and Field	Junior	Yes	Two-Parents	HS	Military
Chad	Track and Field	Junior	Yes	Two-Parents	Bachelor's	Military
Darrell	Football	Senior	No	Two-Parents	Associates	Bachelor's
Eddie	Basketball	Senior	Yes	Two-Parents	-	Technical
Frank	Basketball	Sophomore	Yes	Two-Parents	Bachelor's	Technical
Greg	Basketball	Sophomore	Yes	Two-Parents	HS	Bachelor's
Hans	Basketball	Sophomore	Yes	Mother	-	NA
Israel	Basketball	Freshman	Yes	Mother	HS	NA
Johnathan	Football	Sophomore	No	Two-Parents	Military	Military
Ken	Football	Freshman	No	Two-Parents	HS	Bachelor's

Notes. HS=High School. Dash (-) = Data not provided. Technical= Associates degree or other technical training.

Anthony

Anthony is a sophomore majoring in business administration. He is from the southeastern United States, where he lives with his mother, who is a single parent. He has no siblings.

Anthony's mother is a college graduate and has provided a middle-class lifestyle for the family.

Anthony was a standout student-athlete and earned a full athletic scholarship to play the sport of football. Anthony credits his mother for introducing him to many sports. He said that she would do this to keep him active and engaged with constructive extracurricular activities to mitigate the pull to run with the wrong crowds. He is a confident and successful athlete but lacks the same confidence in the classroom. He considers himself as having been a good high school student academically and "did what I needed to do to get the grades I needed" to excel academically and athletically. He finds college, especially managing the time he needs for school and his sport, to be challenging.

As a result, he spends no time engaging with the faculty or the general campus community. However, he is committed to graduating because that was his promise to his mother and that is also her expectation of him. His mother serves as his motivation which stems from the nurturing relationship that he has received from her and the bond that they have established as a family cohort of two. He aspires to be a professional athlete to provide for himself and for his mother, as she has done for him.

Bart

Bart is a junior track and field student-athlete. When asked to describe his childhood upbringing, he said "I have two loving parents, two older half siblings, and grew up middle-class in a suburban area." He believes that his predominantly White high school did a "wonderful job" in preparing him for college and believes he could "not have asked for anything better." Bart is

accustomed to living in a very structured environment as his family has military ties. He has lived on or near military bases for most of his life and has adopted many of the military's regimented practices in responding to his academic and athletic responsibilities. He credits his father with steering him towards athletics. His father has always viewed athletics as a means to an end for securing an education, at no additional cost to the family. Bart is also committed to this idea and contends that his day-to-day motivation is staying eligible to keep his scholarship because, "I can't let that be the one reason why I have to go back home."

Chad

"I feel like my parents gave me every opportunity to succeed," said Chad in expressing his feelings about his middle-class upbringing with his two parents. However, he also feels that his race had an influence on his living and learning conditions as he felt the pressure of stereotyping as an athlete and a student. As an incoming freshman, he expected athletic student services to be an integral part his academic success. As a junior, he still visits with his academic advisor and tutor multiple times per week. The support services offered by the department of athletics are critical and trusted resources for Chad. Academic or other student support services offered by the campus at large are not considered as an option for him. Excelling as a student, for the purpose of guaranteeing himself a productive future outside of sports, is his motivation.

Darrell

Darrell is an academic high achiever but classifies himself as a "lazy student." However, he is a graduating senior and finished his business administration course work in less than four years. He is a non-scholarship football student-athlete and has been playing the sport since the ninth grade. He credits his dad for encouraging him to play football, with the expectation that he "never quits." He spent the majority of his K-12 years in schools where he and a select few were

the only people of color. Being reared in an upper-middle class home, with educated parents, afforded him the opportunity to live in above-average housing and have access to good school districts. While being only one of three students of color in his high school classes, he believes that his race did not play a significant part in his living and learning conditions:

I would not say that it played a major stance. Growing up, at one point, I was the only black on my soccer team and there were three black people in my grade. It was me and two other boys who excelled when it came to academics. Usually, we were the only ones [Blacks] in the classes that we were taking. I don't think that my race hindered me from learning at all, and I don't think that it has played a role in where I have stayed.

Entering the university, his expectation was to graduate. He credits the quality of the business school and the student support services, specifically offered within athletics, as the reasons why he knew he would persist to graduation. "If I fail, it is because I chose to fail. I have all of the required help that I need" to succeed.

Eddie

Family is a significant part of Eddie's life. He is from a large family in the South where Christian values guided his rearing and day-to-day life. His high school had a majority Black composition; however, his academic classes consisted of 50/50 Black to White students. Family and their support remain significant for Eddie. In fact, so significant, that where he decided to attend college and play his sport of basketball was contingent upon their ability to watch and attend his games:

Family has always been a part of my decision for selecting a school to play, because I want for them to be able to attend the games. This is the reason why I have branched one state away from my home state. Seeing them and their support is a big part as to why I do it.

His father is credited with introducing him to a basketball when he was as young as one year old. However, he did play other sports, including baseball, football, and soccer. Participating in sports was the primary means for him to make friends.

Academically, Eddie's high school was classified as a Blue-Ribbon school, and he acknowledges that the experience provided him with "a great education." While he attributes his athletic interest to his father, he attributes his academic motivation to his mother for her guidance. He wants to make her proud. When asked about his greatest challenges, he expressed that it is a requirement for student-athletes to make many sacrifices, which inhibits his ability to stay in "contact with family because you get locked in being an athlete. It is important to reach out to others."

Frank

Parental support and motivation have been consistent themes for Frank and how he has persisted as a student and athlete.

My parents were the main supporters for me to play basketball. They have been encouraging me throughout my life to choose what I wanted to do. They led me into the direction to securing a trainer and having the right friends around me.

Frank's parents were both educated; his mom obtained her bachelor's degree from a historically black college (HBCU) and his father studied in technical school. Their financial status was good and offered a middle-class lifestyle. He attended school where the make-up was five Whites to every one Black. While he feels that his race did not play a significant role in determining his living and learning conditions, he was aware of the fact that he "was the only black person in my classes. It did not have a big impact on me, because I conformed to what it was, and it was not a big deal to me. I have always noticed that I am one of very few Blacks in majority White classes, throughout the years." He values his rearing and appreciates his parents for holding him to a higher standard. This standard propelled him to carry an A grade-point-average throughout high school career, and he has obtained academic honors while in college. He believes that his broader campus engagement is good but could be better. Classifying himself as an introvert is his

rationale for not being as engaged as he could be. As a self-described introvert, he spends lot of time studying alone, meditating, or praying. He also uses prayer as a tool to help him cope with stress. COVID-19 restrictions and time management were articulated as difficulties for him especially because of the shutdowns and time management due to his class versus sport requirements. Additionally, he confides heavily in his sister as she helps him to keep perspective and to manage stress.

Greg

Greg is an only child and lives with both parents. They live a middle-class lifestyle and have attempted to offer him diversified living and learning experiences. This includes living in the suburbs, while attending school in the inner-city. As an inner-city school attendee, he feels his race played a role:

My race was definitely a factor of where and how I lived in the suburbs. Especially growing up between the ages of seven and 13, learning about the police system, the government, and inner-city things. Seeing how they treated minorities and African Americans in comparison to how they treated Caucasians at a young age helped. I was very fortunate that my parents taught me that at such a young age. I saw the differences. I went to a school between the second and third grade and it was a diverse school that had blacks, whites, Asians; all types of races. I saw how the teachers and faculty would treat the African Americans a little bit different.

Greg and his parents have maintained high expectations for his grades before and during college. High expectations are norms for him in the classroom and on the basketball court. As a new college student, he had high expectations for his academics and finished his first year with a GPA of 3.0.

Being a professional athlete is a life-long dream and drives his athletic motivation. However, his academic motivations are multifaceted and include being personally responsible for his academic success, meeting the expectations of his parents, and earning a degree which his

mother started but did not finish. Meditation is his primary source for dealing with stress which he contends gives his mind a break from the normal stresses of being an athlete and a student.

Hans

Hans is tough and independent. He is an only child and grew up with his mother and grandparents and had some communications with his father. From kindergarten until high school, he spent most evenings with his grandparents until his mother's workday ended. While in high school, he spent his evening "at home alone, waited for his mom to return home from work, and made his own food." Having to live a self-reliant life has empowered Hans to believe that he can do or accomplish anything. His grandparents encouraged him to play sports and do well in school because "they always talk about me having a future."

Hans believes that his race played no role in his living and learning conditions. He believes that where he lived and where he attended school would not have changed, regardless of his race, although only three Black students attended his private school: "I felt like teachers and faculty did not show any kind of racism towards me and neither did my mom, or we would not have gone there. There were schools in the area that did have racial issues. The school I went to did not." He entered college expecting to receive the services he needed to successfully complete his course work. Hans admitted that he has never expected to graduate in four years but to enter the National Basketball Association and finish his college afterwards. He says he deals with stress as a student-athlete by not spending too much time thinking about it: "I get over it."

Israel

Israel is an intelligent individual and is pursuing a career in finance and real estate. He and his family have been enduring a great deal of financial uncertainty since his parents

divorced. “It has been a bit up and down. We have been moving around a lot because of financial reasons.”

His interest in basketball comes from his brother, who also played the sport. Israel’s original sport was soccer, and his height terminated his ability to continue playing it. While he personally has not had any identifiable racial experiences, he has witnessed it with his mother. This incident resulted in her losing her job and caused his family’s financial condition to spiral out of control.

Enduring hardship for him and his family resulted in him making a promise to his mother that he was going to graduate:

I am not going to come here just to hoop and not feel like I am better than the average student, because I am on a sports team. She knows I take my academics seriously. I am always trying to get my education because basketball will end at some point, but education will last forever, and you will have something to fall back on.

The impact of hardship on his family serves as a motivator to excel as a student. He utilizes these memories and the memories of his other successes as fuel to “just keep on going and talk positive to myself.”

Considering the financial hardship that Israel and his family have endured, he is particularly motivated to be a professional, however, his goal is to graduate and fulfill his promise to his mother and himself. To alleviate the stress that he encounters, he routinely communicates with his academic advisor. He also speaks regularly with his brother, who is also a college student and provides tips for coping or managing stress.

Johnathan

Johnathan is a sophomore football student-athlete who comes from a family of five. Neither of his parents attended a traditional college or university; however, both were affiliated with the military, and he feels “blessed to be able to come to school with the financial support that I receive from them.” Both of his parents were active in his extra curricula activities and

encouraged him to pursue his athletic aspirations. He believes that race played a part in his living and learning conditions and being vigilant about his activities and accomplishments as a Black student-athlete is important. He said his parents would often teach him of its significance:

The one thing that both of my parents told me was, as an African American, the one thing that they can't take away from you is your education. From an education standpoint, I always wanted to make sure I was on top and ahead on what I did. So, I was never behind academically.

As a freshman, his academic expectations were to maintain the academic success he had grown accustomed to in high school. So, he remains committed to “putting his classes first.”

While his academic stresses might be minimal, he believes that his greatest challenge as a student-athlete is “learning his role on the team.” Having been a good athlete at his high school, he finds himself competing against numerous athletes who are viewed as being better at his position. He also accepts the fact that he generally has no time to do anything outside of his sport requirements and school, and that includes engaging with the general campus. During moments of stress, his mom is the reliable coping mechanism he uses to put things into perspective. He understands that his parents serve as his encouragement and will usually provide good advice that will keep him ahead of any issues.

Ken

Ken is a first-year football student athlete and comes from a large family. His father was a collegiate athlete and one of his older brothers also competed in sports. It was watching them that motivated him to participate. Ken grew up in a predominately White community and was the only “black kid in anything at the school.” He contends that his conditions at his school were good and there were no issues having positive relationships within the community. He is an academic high achiever who came into the university having already taken two years of college credits. As a result, he felt like he knew what his collegiate experience would be like. However,

he was not prepared for the challenges of being a student and an athlete at a Power-5 conference institution:

People might say that is easy, but when you are student-athlete and you have 6:00 a.m. workouts, your schedule has to become tighter, because your practice starts earlier in the day around 2:00 p.m. That has been a bigger challenge, getting your work done right away, because you don't have all day to do anything else.

In his first year, the time constraints of being a student and an athlete did not have an impact on his academic performance. However, there is a chance that it could in the future, especially if the individual time he currently spends with the professors of his academic major is diminished.

Given the uniqueness of his academic major, professors are “willing to help and give you time to do one-on-one stuff with them.”

Setting a higher standard for his family academically serves as a motivation and he strives to be the first “to do it all in the family.” He also wants to make his parents proud and confides in and trusts them to serve as his guides and motivators. During times of stress, he calls them exclusively for ideas and comfort because he professes that he doesn't know how to deal with stress on his own.

Student-Athlete Strains Thematic Construct: Responding to Research Question 1

Research Question 1 centered on answering the question what are the strains that Black male student-athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five conference institution? To answer this question, fixed into the semi-structured research protocol were specific questions that probed challenges, stressors and other strain-inducing factors that were unique to the study participants as student-athletes of color (see Appendix E). The response to Research Question 1 and the findings from the data collected from study participants are outlined and discussed within the themes presented in the sections of this research titled *Student-Athlete Role Strain: Difficulties and Threats* and *Campus Engagement: An Ecological and Personal Risk*.

Student-Athlete Role Strain: Difficulties and Threats

Researchers contend that athletes typically experience restrictions on their time, lose the independence to manage a significant portion of their lives, have psychosocial issues, and a student-athlete carries the burden of being both (Puri & Sood, 2018). Gayles (2015) suggested that the challenges or strains associated with being a Division I student-athlete are many, and they tend to impact the degree to which a student-athlete will engage in and with the campus community (p. 209). In answering Research Question 1: What are the strains that Black male student-athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five conference institution?, this research identified *time* as being the primary strain, which impacted every other aspect of the student-athletes' collegiate and personal experiences. This included how they managed the demands for their classes, their sport of play, internal and external engagement, and how they maintained personal connections, including with their families. When asked, what is the greatest challenge that you face as a student-athlete, Hans replied:

Keeping up with basketball and school at the same time and managing both. I know guys think that athletes get it easy and get whatever they want, but we also have to be in the gym two or three times per day, going on road trips, and doing test and quizzes while traveling.

Taking into consideration the entire sample, nine of 11 participants identified time as their greatest challenge or stressor. Interestingly, participants felt that non-athletes or sports spectators viewed their involvement and the demands placed on them as students and athletes as easy. Eddie implied that, "trying to balance school and sports" is very complex, in addition to requiring numerous sacrifices that not only have implications on their campus requirements, but also impact how they remain in contact with family and friends.

Specifically, time management was expressed as a major hurdle to cross. Participants often itemized their mandatory daily responsibilities that included class, class assignments,

practice, study hall, tutoring, and travel. These are all aspects of the student athletes' life that have to be managed in some fashion. It was pointed out, in Bart's response, "there is no set time where they make you eat." He was suggesting that, given the fact that many of the hours in his day are spoken for with mandatory requirements, he has to be diligent to find the time in his schedule to eat and take care of his body. He continued to and say that "everyone talks about a social life, so being able to find time for yourself and social life is difficult." This alludes to the difficulties of being a student-athlete and maintaining opportunities for social engagement, general campus engagement, and social engagement with peers. While recognizing that these students want to succeed, they also have a genuine desire in the same regard to participate in a full and complete collegiate experience. This is often prohibited, however, due to a lack of hours in their student-athlete day.

The NCAA (2022) identifies the following activities in its time management guidance document to help student-athletes understand what to expect as countable athletically related activities: competition, film review, practice, strength and conditioning, and supplemental workouts. In the same document, it lists academic meetings, compliance meetings, community service, injury treatment/prevention, media activities, nutritionist sessions, prospective student-athlete host duties, sports psychologist sessions, and team fund raising as "activities that do not count towards a team or student-athlete's countable athletically related activities limit" (NCAA, 2022). It should be pointed out that many of the items listed, do not count towards a student-athletes countable athletic activities, but are requirements in which athletes are obligated to participate. The activities and time requirements as they were expressed by the participants of this study are consistent with the activities outlined by the NCAA as key components of a student-athletes schedule that must be managed for a successful full college experience.

Campus Engagement: An Ecological and Personal Risk

For most students, enjoying a full collegiate experience includes having enough time in a given day to engage with most aspects of the campus and the broader community. The realities of being a student-athlete seems to be the antithesis to meaningful engagement. Cooper (2016) proposed a definition for social engagement as creating and sustaining relationships within a social environment (p. 274). If this is used as the definition of social engagement, then the same definition might hold true for proper engagement with faculty and staff. Engagement with faculty, staff, and non-athletic colleagues “are pivotal for enhancing student athletes’ positive developmental outcomes in college” (Cooper, 2016, p. 275) and can aid in creating a well-rounded graduate capable of meeting the demands of a diverse professional environment.

Ten of 11 participants in this study started their college experience as student-athletes. One became a walk-on during the second semester of his freshman year. As such, they fully realized that their athletic involvement was only one touchpoint within a much larger organization. However, nine of 11 found themselves neither fully engaging with the general campus community, nor their faculty, or other university-wide student support services. One of the more interesting participants in this study, in terms of engagement, was Ken, who originally came to the university as a highly credentialed full-time student. Prior to his arrival on campus, he earned two years of college credits. He spent his first semester as a traditional student and won a spot on the team during their open invitation period for walk-ons in the spring. During his first semester, he was consistently involved his campus organizations. When asked to describe his engagement within the broader campus community, he would say:

There is a program called University Involvement and I was involved with them. We would meet on Wednesday nights at 6:00 p.m. If we did not have practice that day, I was involved in everything they did. Before I made the team, I was involved with them.

Ken's involvement with the broader campus community was nearly terminated because of his new connection with his athletic team. Before becoming officially involved with his official sport, he was also actively engaged with the campus's club sports program. Bearing in mind that he is a high achiever in the classroom and had previous experience indirectly engaging with faculty, Ken notes that he continues to engage with the faculty through office hours and one-on-one tutoring sessions.

As it relates to engaging with the entire campus community, Frank stands out as an outlier. His engagement included the broader campus community, faculty and staff and athletics. Of the participant's responses, eight of them responded as not engaging with the faculty and staff. Fifty-five percent reported not engaging the broader campus community, while 45% considered themselves as being engaged with their traditional campus peers. Important to highlight in the findings was the fact that 82% of the respondents reported engaging within the athletic community (see Table 3). The response "I did not know the campus services were an option to me" might be one of the reasons why 73% of the respondents were not engaging with their faculty members.

Table 3

Athlete Engagement

Participant	Campus Engagement	Faculty and Staff Engagement	Athletic Engagement
Anthony	No	No	Yes
Bart	Yes	No	Yes
Chad	No	No	Yes
Darrell	No	No	Yes
Eddie	No	No	Yes
Frank	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greg	Yes	No	Yes
Hans	Yes	Yes	No
Israel	No	No	Yes
Johnathan	No	No	Yes
Ken	Yes	Yes	No

However, Johnathan’s rationale concerning why he does not use campus academic services is perhaps a more realistic explanation:

I don’t really use the campus as much as I use the one in athletics. Since most of my days revolve around classes and athletics activities. I don’t use the campus academic center as much as I use the athletic academic center.

Given the time that he has after attending class and meeting the practice and game requirements of his sport, athletic academic services is convenient and caters to him without him having to compete with the remainder of the student body.

Student-Athlete Coping Thematic Construct: Responding to Research Question 2

Research Question 2 focused on answering the question what are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student-athlete at a Division I Power-Five conference institution? To answer this question, the researcher asked semi-structured data collection questions that probed engagement, utilization of

campus services, family involvement, motivations, and life goals (see Appendix E). The response to research question 2 and the findings from the data collected from study participants are outlined and discussed within the themes presented in the sections of this research titled *Family and Family Structure: An Etic Strength; Athletic Student Services: An Emic Institutional Resource; Self-Motivation and Resilience; and Spirituality*.

Student-Athlete Coping Strategies

Transition of any type is known to add a certain level of anxiety in most individuals. Research has shown that this is also true for student-athletes. Cosh and Tully (2015) noted that student-athletes reported having different sources of life stress during their collegiate transition than their other collegiate peers. Keeping in mind the economic, political, and social significance that many sports programs have within their local, regional, and for some, national footprints, teams and individual student-athletes are carrying heavy burdens. “To overcome the stressors associated with elite-sport competition, athletes are required to employ a variety of coping strategies” (Cosh & Tully, 2015, p. 121).

This research identifies the coping strategies used by Black male students and answers the research question: what are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student-athlete at a Power-Five conference institution? This research identified 1) academic services; 2) family; 3) self-motivation and resilience, which include degree attainment, meaningful careers, and fulfilling personal promises; and 4) spirituality as coping strategies that student-athletes use to persist.

Family and Family Structure: An Etic Strength

Succeeding for some is a matter of luck. Succeeding for others is a matter of deliberateness on the part of their family and their closest relatives. For many years, scholars

have verified that family and family support are critical variables for a dependent's short and long-term success. "Indeed, receiving support from parents is associated with lower levels of stress and increased motivation, and positive family relationships are associated with lower levels of worry" (Hussey, Donohue, Barchard, & Allen, 2019, p. 973). Frank's sentiments about his family speak to their significance in his life:

I had a great family structure and great opportunities as well because both of my parents were in my life. They created time while being off work to have interest in me and lead me through what I wanted to do, like playing basketball and helping with schoolwork. I feel like we had a good situation financially. We were not struggling or anything. We lived a middleclass life, we lived in a nice neighborhood and went to a nice public school. I did not have a rough upbringing; it was a comfortable upbringing.

Participants in this study were all eager to tout the significance of their family and its makeup, and this was particularly true when both parents were present in the home. Descriptive words such as *blessed*, *close*, *great*, *loving*, and *well respected* were often used to describe and express their feelings about their parents. Within the sample, 73% reported coming from homes comprised of both parents. Frank noted that he had "great opportunities because both of my parents were in my life." He seemed to be suggesting that without both of his parents, he would not have had great opportunities. Understanding that this research was studying Black student-athletes, from the same institution, with the same educational opportunities, it was not plausible to think the respondents coming from a single-parent home were somehow at a disadvantage and should not have either been in attendance at the institution or playing a college sport. Hans provided the perspective for understanding how the parental gaps were filled: "I still had my grandparents on the side to help take care of me when I came home from school and they let me stay over and have some of their food. At nighttime, my mom would pick me up."

For the 27% of respondents who were from single-parent homes, without some form of added support, economic and housing hardships were articulated. For Israel, being from a single-

parent home, with no other bridge support mechanism, resulted in their financial status being a “bit up and down,” which included instability in their housing arrangements. For Hans, his grandparents bridged most of the single-parent gap that he experienced and provided the afterschool support and nurturing that his mother could not, because she was working. Of the respondents that were from single-parent homes, two-thirds of their highest educational levels were either high school or not reported.

Based on the responses from this research, family not only served as a major source of support for student-athletes but also as a source of motivation. While many perceive student-athletes as self-centered and ego centric, those who were a part of the study demonstrated considerable consideration for their family support and noted that their sacrifices and investments motivated them to want to be successful. Bart said that he is motivated by his family’s commitment to him and his siblings and their support served to motivate him to excel and persist:

The sacrifices that they have made for me and my siblings is part of what keeps me going. Now that I am older, I understand what they went through and all that they did, having two jobs and doing extra stuff just for me.

The intentional commitment and sacrifices made on behalf of student-athletes by their families were articulated in a heartfelt and unpretentious manner. Bart, like other respondents routinely expressed how their families motivated and influenced them. Frank said his family “keeps him driven and focused.” Eddie articulated that his parents had intentionally set a high academic bar for him as they acquired their academic credentials, and that was his motivation. Hans summed it up for nearly all the respondents. When asked, how are you influenced by your parents or other family members, he stated, “A lot comes from my family. I know the amount of effort my mom has put into getting me into this spot, and that’s a big thing.”

Family as motivation and support. For many student-athletes, the genesis of their passion or involvement with a sport can be traced to a family member during their developmental years. The involvement of family in the lives of their children's academic and athletic journeys can carry over into college. According to Schaeperkoetter, Bass, and Gordon (2015), a family's "involvement in children's decisions related to sports continues with the college selection process of prospective NCAA student-athletes" (p. 266). As families have been associated with the athletic involvement of their children throughout the course of their development, it is not unreasonable to think that they would continue to play an influential role in a student-athlete's college experience. Many of the participants identified family as a primary source for coping with the strains associated with their involvement as a student-athlete. Ken, a freshman respondent in this study mentioned the significance of his reliance on his mom and dad for managing his stress. He said they were critical to him because he did not know how to deal with stress by himself. Scholars suggest that freshman or young student-athletes demonstrate having a tough time managing the transition to college, but usually start to develop reliable coping strategies as they mature within the university.

Based on participant responses, mothers were a consistent point of contact for most student-athletes in the time of trouble, even when the participants were coming from two-parent homes. Providing and caring for "mom" was the usual reason for coping and persisting when a participant was from a single-parent home. Johnathan professed that he always called his mother as a means of coping. "My mom always finds a way to calm me down." Hans fondly recalled "the amount of effort his mother had put into positioning him as a student-athlete at a major university. Having been cared for by his grandparents, while his mother worked, he also stated that he is encouraged by his grandparents because "they always talked about me having a

future.” Consistent communications with their families were identified as being important not only for the encouragement they received but also for keeping their parents and other family members apprised of their successes or struggles. Ken, a freshman reported always calling his dad or mom for advice or solutions when he is stressed. He acknowledged that he didn’t know how to deal with issues himself. Bart, relies on his family, but differently than the other respondents. He implied if he is stressed about his academic performance, he couldn’t communicate with his parents “because, when they stress out, I stress out, which does not help out my performance.” He added however, that the sacrifices that his parents have made for him and his siblings are what keeps him going.

While family, in many instances, has a positive influence on a student-athlete’s ability to cope with various strains and challenges, as indicated in Bart’s response as well as in other responses, there are nuances associated with family involvement in a student-athlete’s experience. Unreasonable expectations or an over-involvement by the family can also negatively impact a student athlete’s ability to manage stresses, especially when it comes to academic failures, socialization and general engagement issues, and their ability to cope with every-day mental health challenges.

Athletic Student Services: An Emic Institutional Resource

While it could be argued that it is not intentional, student-athletes, and especially those competing in higher profiled sports like football and basketball, are set aside as special on most college campuses. Darrell said it best as he attempted to articulate the hierarchy of student life on his campus, “The vision on campus is student-athletes, Greek life, and then everybody who is not involved in the top two.”

It is well known that student-athletes are saddled with additional burdens that traditional students do not have to manage. One of the more significant responsibilities is remaining eligible to participate in their sport, based on the rules as they have been established by the NCAA and their respective institutions. According to Shaw, Moiseichik, Blunt-Vinti, and Stokowski (2019), this could include carrying a certain GPA, completing a minimum number of credit hours per semester, or even declaring a major within a certain time (p. 165). While to a certain degree, some of these standards are requirements of traditional students, they are not as stringent as they are for student-athletes. To help balance the academic load associated with being a student and an athlete, institutions spend millions of dollars annually on academic student support service initiatives and personnel (Shaw et al., 2019), and these efforts are having an impact. According to the NCAA's 2018-21, Four-Class Division I Graduation Rates for 2011-2014 Entering Cohorts, the GSR for all Division I student-athletes was 89%. Additionally, the GSR for every racial group had also increased over the same period. "In order to avoid penalties, athletic academic advisors are under pressure to ensure their student-athletes are eligible for competition" and they "must determine a way to protect the eligibility of their student-athletes" (Stokowski, Dittmore, & Li, 2019, p. 174) and their overall academic achievements.

Based on the feedback from participants in the study, the investments that institutions are making in athletic student support services and the people they hire to manage the academic and mental health aspects of their student-athletes' well-being are positively impacting student-athlete outcomes. This was effectively communicated in Darrell's response when he was asked how he engaged with the faculty, staff, and other members of the student body:

Everything that I need in academics, I could get it in that building [athletic student services]. In that building, you can get one-on-one tutoring or anything else that you really need. The only time that you will need to go and talk to a teacher is if your advisor or tutor tells you that you need to go and talk to the teacher.

Darrell was zealous about athletic student support services. In fact, the manner in which the unit was constructed, to accommodate the living and learning aspects of the student-athlete's life, was the reason he chose to attend the institution. The center is perhaps the most visited facility in a student-athlete's academic experience, other than the facility of their sport of play. Israel commented, "I use the academic center every day. That is where my tutoring is." Ninety percent of the respondents communicated that they use the academic center on a regular basis for tutoring, quiet study time and space, group study hall with their team peers, and to just have a reassuring conversation with their advisor. Given the trust that student-athletes develop with their advisors, it appears that they also use them as surrogate mental health coaches. Some respondents reported using their advisors during moments of their greatest stress. They reported calling them or dropping in to speak about their issues and how their guidance would help them to better manage their concerns, both academically and personally, before continuing on with their responsibilities as a student-athlete.

In the current era, there are very few institutions, in any NCAA category, that do not have academic support centers that are designated exclusively for athletics. These units are supported by well-trained professionals who understand the challenges faced by student-athletes. The results and significance of their work is found in Darrell's response when asked how often he utilizes the academic center or other campus support resources:

I look in the academic counseling building first if I need help with anything. Everything that is offered by the university is offered solely to athletes in that building. There is no need for us to go outside of that building, unless you want to join a study group. I use that building for everything that I need.

This sentiment, as expressed by Darrell, was nearly unanimous among this study's sample population. They all showed a deep confidence and commitment to the athletic academic center and the staff's genuine concern for their well-being. They all appeared to have an assurance that

their academic needs were going to be managed, without question, and the results would keep them eligible and on track to meet their academic, personal, and sporting needs. Maintaining or increasing their academic performance from high school was also a significant concern for all of the participants. Most entered the university with GPAs that were 3.0 or higher. However, some entered knowing they would need the help of athletic student services to maintain academic standards at the college level. Chad's response to a question regarding his expectations for academic success as an incoming freshman exemplifies the need:

My expectation was I felt like I needed tutoring all the time, because I knew I was going to be busy with practice and not having time to do my work as other people who don't play sports do. I felt like for academic success, it was good to get help when you need it. I go to tutoring two to three times a week. I see my academic advisor all the time. They can help me out with academics, so I can stay on top of academics and track.

"The initial academic background of college athletes plays a large part in their overall academic success" (Oseguera et al., 2018, p.121). The specialized work of athletic student services is viewed by the participants of this study as an essential and necessary function for filling or bridging the academic gaps that they brought with them from high school and also for maintaining their preexisting high academic standards. Many of the participants of this study reported entering college having been decorated academic achievers in addition to their above-average athletic achievements. As an example, Ken stated that he had "always tried to get good grades" and before enrolling in the university, he had "already taken two years of college" credits while in high school. Darrell suggested that his primary motivation for entering college was to graduate first and "if I fail, it is only because I chose to fail. I have all of the required help that I need" at the university and within athletic student services. In addition to assisting student-athletes in addressing known academic gaps that may exist, many of the respondents, like

Johnathan, admitted that, whether the Center was needed to fill a gap or not, they used it to their advantage because of its convenience and it was the smart thing to do.

Tutoring and advising. Providing robust academic support services is often a major selling point, especially with parents, for major universities when they are recruiting high-profile student-athletes. Participants in this study reported entering college knowing that they would need athletic student services to succeed academically. The academic center was recognized by many participants as the place where any need they may have as a student can be met. Bart's sentiments about the center were "I look to the academic counseling building first, if I need help with anything." Other participants reported communicating with the academic advisors during moments of stress. They suggested that their advisors make themselves available to them on short notice and will offer them an ear to understand their issues, both academically and personally, and work with them to take a step back and recalibrate. The participants maintained a high level of trust and confidence in their advisors. Given the nature of their responses in regards to them, they not only recognized them in the capacity of an academic advisor, but also as a trusted mental health advisor.

Tutoring services offered by athletic academic services are another heavily utilized service. Chad entered the university knowing he would need tutoring, because of the time his sport would demand. He stated that he used the service two to three times per week. While research has suggested that academic advisors have resorted to clustering majors, in an attempt to mitigate the logistical issues associated with managing the academic needs of student-athletes, the need for academic tutors across the athletic academic enterprises continues to be a highly used and needed service.

Self-Motivations and Resilience

According to the participants in the study, the dream of being a professional athlete, along with making their parents proud, earning and keeping their scholarships, earning a college degree, and sustaining a family legacy were first-tier motivations that induced coping. They also emerged as major themes from the participants' responses. Table 4 shows the motivations as they were articulated by participants. Each participant acknowledged one or more principle motivations as being the driving force behind their desire to excel as a student, athlete, or both. Making their mothers or parents proud was a consistent motivator. Additionally, being a professional athlete and making their life's work as an athletic meaningful, having personal wealth, and degree attainment were consistent first-, second-, or third-tier motivations.

Table 4

Black Student-Athlete Coping Motivation Tiers

Participant	Motivation 1	Motivation 2	Motivation 3
Anthony	Mother	Professional Athlete	Graduation
Bart	Scholarship	Professional Athlete	-
Chad	Graduating	Family Achievements	Professional Athlete
Darrell	Academics	-	-
Eddie	Mother	Education	Professional Athlete
Frank	Academics	Mother	Professional Athlete
Greg	Family Expectations	Professional Athlete	Out do Parents
Hans	Grandparents	Professional Athlete	-
Israel	Positive Thinking	Professional Athlete	Graduation
Johnathan	Parents	Professional Athlete	-
Ken	Career	Personal Fulfillment	Professional Athlete

Bart was committed to staying the course because he was appreciative of the fact that he could earn a scholarship to attend his university. Additionally, he was committed to honoring his father's commitment for making career decisions solely for his educational benefit and that of his siblings. For Hans, making the hardships and sacrifices of his mother payoff and acknowledging the hopes of his grandparents that he would find professional success drives him to cope with his stresses. Darrell's motivation was strictly to graduate. Of all the participants, he displayed motivation and resolve in his rationale for degree attainment that only his words could explain: "One is to say I did it. Two is the paycheck that you earn with a college degree. My motivation is my future. I want to live a costly life, so I am preparing myself to live that life." Israel commits himself to positive thinking as he encounters stress. During these times of self-reflection, he strives to remember how far he has come and where he desires to go.

Spirituality

Aside from expressing the significance of their family's role in their rearing and collegiate experiences, the participants faith and spiritual commitments also emerged as a coping mechanism. Eddie was proud to report that he grew up in a Christian home and he finds time to read the Bible during times of stress. It was interesting, however, that he did not report communicating with them during moments of stress for counselling or encouragement. Furthermore, he was also deliberate to say he meditates a lot when under stress and suggested that meditating and praying were not synonymous. Frank on the other hand, speaks with his mother for guidance and "goes to God" routinely as a means of coping. "That is one way in which I figure out how to get through things." As noted previously, Bart does not communicate with his parents about the stresses in his life. He contends that as they become stressed, his stresses are magnified. So, he relies on "religion, prayer and the bible" to mitigate or cope with

his stress. “I put all my faith in the Lord. That is what gets me through my stress and life is prayer.” Like Eddie, he also mentioned that he meditates.

Pulling It Together

The visual framework presented in Figure 2 was adapted from Johnson’s 2019 Student-Athlete Role Strain and Coping Framework and shows the primary strain of time at the center or core of the athlete’s efforts.

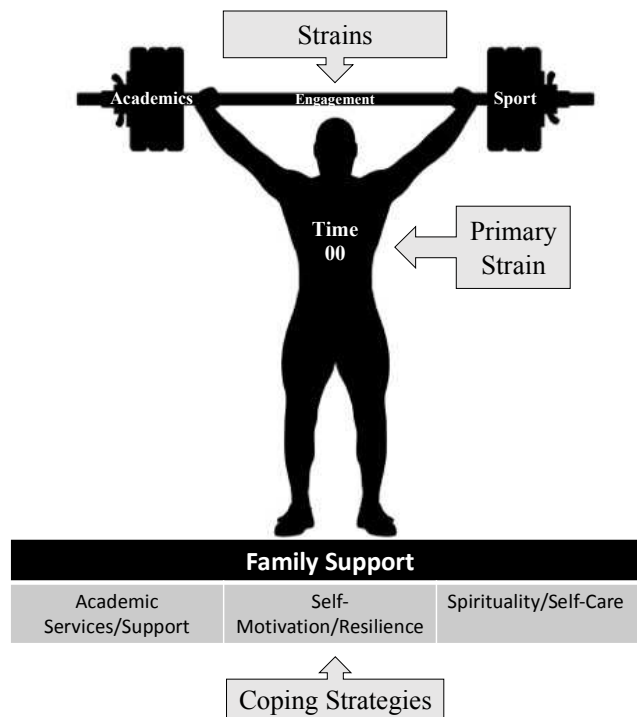


Figure 2. Black male student-athlete role strain and coping framework

According to Turner et al. (2015), the critical nature of time is significant since “time demands faced by these athletes force them to make academic sacrifices” that they might not otherwise have to make if they did not have the dual role of student and athlete (p. 14). Other major strains, which include fulfilling academic responsibilities, addressing the need or desire to be an engaged student and meeting the mental and physical challenges of playing their respective sport, are often viewed as major weights or pressures that student-athletes must

shoulder in order to be successful. Oversight organizations, such as the NCAA, appear to have an understanding of the reality that these primary and secondary strains can cause and have aggressively sought to foster the development of academic resources for student-athletes that allow them to be more directly involved in taking responsibility for their own academic interests and personal and professional goals as opposed to administrators, coaches and athletics departments (N4A, 2018).

Despite these efforts, the tug of war that comes with simultaneously being a student and an athlete forces these individuals to seek out meaningful supports and coping strategies to help them overcome the impact of their student-athlete role strain. As such, the *Black Male Student Athlete Role Strain and Coping Framework* illustrates a foundation for the athlete that includes academic services, family involvement, self-motivation and resilience, and spirituality as the building blocks that Black male student-athletes at Division-I institutions often use as principle coping mechanisms. Academic support services often fill the confidence gap that Black student-athletes lack when coming to large flagship institutions, thus providing the resources they need to successfully persist as a student and not just as athletes (Rubin & Moses, 2017). Family involvement is often a major coping mechanism for African-American student-athletes as they are motivated to not only live up to the high expectations of family as it relates to their academic success but also because they recognize that their success could possibly mean a better quality of life for themselves and their loved ones if they are able to earn a college degree and/or move on to the professional ranks of their sport (Horner, McLeod, & Ternes, 2016). Personal motivation and individual resilience are also key coping strategies because, “positive mental health in student athletes increase their resilience” (Puri & Sood, 2018, p. 613). Black male athletes often use self-motivation and other acts of resiliency as a standard process of role adaptation when

they find themselves in situations of personal pressure or strain. Religion and spirituality serve as one of the core rearing principles for many families. The spiritual connections, norms and relationship that are established between a believer and their God transcend age, grade, and title. For athletes, these connections have been found to serve as and provide viable coping tools as they encounter stress, manifesting resilience and a hopefulness for better days (Noh & Shahdan, 2020).

Chapter Summary

Chapter IV of this study presented the research findings of this explanatory case study design to identify and explain recurring themes related to the phenomenon of role strain on Black male student-athletes. It provided the supporting data to answer the two primary research questions of the study: (a) what are the strains that Black male student-athletes experience at Division I Power-Five conference institutions?; (b) what are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student-athlete at a Power-Five conference institution? The researcher identified 12 primary themes that contained 120 second-and third-tier codes. Six overarching themes emerged that were germane to answering the research question: (a) student-athlete role strain and their objective difficulties, (b) campus engagement: an ecological and personal risk, (c) family and family structure: an etic strength, (d) athletic student services: an emic institutional resource, (e) self-motivation and resilience, and (f) spirituality. The study identified *time* as the primary strain that causes additional strains in academics, campus engagement, and their sport. It identified academic services, family, personal motivation, and spirituality as adaptive coping tools. Finally, the chapter concludes with a graphic illustration that brings the strains and the adaptive coping tools

together. The final chapter of this study will present the interpretation of this data and provide recommendations for implementation and future study.

CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This qualitative study sought to explore and understand the concept of role strain on Black male student-athletes at a Division-I institution and the coping mechanisms that they utilize to meet their expectations as student-athletes and, ultimately, persist at their institution. This research brings into greater focus the phenomenon known as *role strain* and its impact on Black male student-athlete success and provides insight into approaches that may also help improve the overall retention and graduation rates of other Black student-athletes as well as those within the general student population who have similar strains and challenges within the academic environment. The final chapter of this research provides a discussion on the significance of the findings of this study, using the two primary research questions and the resulting themes as guideposts; an overview of the implications of the study and the potential impact and use of the findings for improving black student-athlete outcomes; limitations of the study; and recommendations for future research and finally, the researcher presents some concluding thoughts related to the study and the research experience.

Discussion

This study was guided by two primary research questions:

1. What are the strains that Black male student-athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five Conference institution?; and

2. What are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student-athlete at a Power-Five conference institution?

Answering these questions were central to shedding light on the problems articulated in this research and to understanding the phenomenon of role strain and its influence on Black male student-athletes.

It is a well-researched and published fact that when comparing Black student-athletes with their White or other racial peers, gaps exist among the educational outcomes (Harper, 2018; Jolly, Cooper, & Thompson, 2020; NCAA, 2010; NCAA, 2020). The participants of this study were of the same ethnic and gender status, and all classified as black and males. According to Cooper et al. (2019), Black male student-athletes, who were committed to achieving their sports goals at a high level while also working to stay on top of their academic requirements and satisfying the demands of a hectic athletic schedule, experienced heightened stress. Manifestations of that stress can be seen in how they engaged their sport and how they engaged within the general campus community as well as the external community. “Student engagement is commonly known to be among the best predictors of learning and personal development” (Woods, McNiff, & Coleman, 2018, p. 357) in college students. According to Oseguera et al. (2018), the same is true for predicting academic performance. Others contend that when students are engaged academically and socially with the broader campus, they are more successful and yield positive post-college outcomes (Woods, Price, & Crosby, 2019).

While the participants of this study did not see their race as having had a significant impact on their living and learning conditions before and during their collegiate experience, the bounded nature of this study, the methodology and theoretical framework used, and the structure

of the interviews, would support securing the details for understanding the distinctive strains and coping mechanism experienced and used by Black male student-athletes.

Strains

Time and Academics

Leaving the confines of the natural and nurturing environment of home for college is a stressful endeavor for many college students. However, when you consider this occurrence for an underrepresented minority group, such as Black male student-athletes, stress can be exacerbated due to the high academic and sport expectations that they place on themselves and by those that are imposed by their athletic department and teaching faculty. It is suggested by Charleston et al. (2019), that Black male student-athletes may very well suffer “double jeopardy” as they enter college. In other words, as their race and gender identities intersect with their athletic identity and its requirements, there is a high probability that one or both of their reasons for going to college will be sacrificed. The tug of war between academics and sports for the daily time and attention of a student-athlete often forces them to sacrifice their success in one area for success in another. In many instances, the research suggests, the sacrifice is typically in the classroom for the benefit of athletic success (Cosh & Tully, 2015; Jennings, Henderson, Erla, Abraham, & Gillum, 2018).

While time is often a concept that many students take for granted, the student-athlete does not have the luxury of disregarding or mismanaging time. This has been true for many years. In Cosh and Tully’s (2015) study on the stressors, coping, and support mechanisms for student-athletes, they found that student-athletes encountered considerable difficulties trying to coordinate the mandatory time requirements of practice and other sports-related activities, while also trying to accommodate their course schedule and other academic expectations of the

university. Furthermore, time management is a common and consistent strain that student-athletes are urged to consider when contemplating and preparing for college life. In its guide to college-bound student-athletes, the NCAA makes specific mention of “time management” as a key to success, especially for students who play Division I sports (NCAA, 2020). Limiting the amount of time that student-athletes can spend on “countable athletically related activities” (CARA), as defined by the NCAA, acknowledges the NCAA’s recognition of the fact that student-athletes have an abundance of other important athletic and academic responsibilities that demand their time as well. The activities that officially take up a Division I student-athletes’ time outside of the classroom such as competition, practice, strength and conditioning, supplemental workouts and film review, merely scratch the surface of the many other important activities that serve as strains on their lives as Division I student-athletes at high-profile, Power-Five institutions of higher learning.

As noted by Burden, Tremayne, and Marsh (2004), the combination of college athletics and education is stressful and highly demanding and often requires student-athletes to sacrifice their educational attainment as they prioritize the demands of their sport. The core strain of time not only impacts their ability to engage in the commonplace athletic activities mentioned above, but also, based on participant responses in this study, it influences the extent to which they can engage in other important but routine, activities such as studying, eating, sleeping, enjoying a social life, and maintaining their overall mental health, all of which have short- and long-term implications for a student’s general wellbeing. In addition to time, participants cited issues of academic performance and expectations related to their effective engagement, with a variety of different stakeholders, as being added strains to the already heavy load of being an athlete.

Scholars contend that Black male athletes are put under extreme pressure to succeed athletically rather than scholastically (Beaman, 2010; Beamon & Bell, 2006, Charleston et al., 2019; Edwards, 2000; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; 2005; Jackson & Moore, 2008). While the literature suggests that student-athletes are often not as motivated to perform academically in comparison to their nonathletic counterparts (Lucas & Lovaglia, 2002), the majority of the student-athletes in this study acknowledged having high personal academic standards and noted their acceptance of the pressures placed upon them by their parents and other family members, because they wanted to make good on the sacrifices and investments made in support of their success and future well-being. Hearing and seeing the participants' commit to persevering because of their families is consistent with research. Family is best described as the *push and the pull* when it comes to providing the motivation needed for a Black male student-athletes to achieve academically. Possey-Maddox (2017) suggested that family engagement in education outcomes is considered the lynchpin for increasing educational attainment in students and Black male student-athletes.

Time and Engagement

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has defined student engagement as “educational practices that are strongly associated with high levels of learning and personal development” (Kuh, 2001, p.12; Yee, 2016, p. 832). Correspondingly, for other researchers, engagement is defined as “the level of mental and physical commitment a student is willing to exert in their academic experience” (Jolly, Cooper, & Chepyator-Thompson, 2020, p. 76). Proper engagement across the collegiate enterprise is critical for students to better understand the academy and to expand the learning experience. Having been alive for less than two decades, students coming into college know very little about themselves, often view the world from the

perspective of others, and have little idea as to where they really want to go in life. The results of this study found that, Black student-athletes, in spite of excelling at a high academic level, engaged very little with their instructors, other than during class periods. They also interacted very little with their non-athletic campus peers and relied nearly exclusively on support services of the athletic academic center for academic services. They also regularly defined engagement as associating with their sport peers or student-athletes from other sports leaving them with significant gaps in learning opportunities that occur through engagement within the broader campus community. Considering the participants of this study were all underrepresented minorities and attending a Power-Five conference school, which is also considered to be a primary white institution (PWI), a majority of their faculty members are going to also be White. Research suggests that many White faculty members tend to have biases against student-athletes as a whole and assume Black student-athletes, in particular, are underprepared academically when they arrive to campus (Charleston et al., 2015; Comeaux, 2010;). These assumptions can be further compounded as Black male student-athletes merely attend class and not interact with their faculty members during office hours, class excursions, or group study sessions. The position has been taken that athletic academic centers on many campuses have replaced the teaching and advising done by faculty in the campus academic centers (Rubin & Moses, 2017).

Generally, student-athlete engagement with faculty has its challenges, but engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic was altogether different for student-athletes. In an attempt to keep athletic enterprises functioning, student-athletes were placed into *athletic bubbles* that further exacerbated the student-athlete's ability to engage with faculty, the external community, and even their families. During this research, COVID-19 was mentioned as a difficulty, however,

it was not a prevalent theme, considering that a majority of the respondents noted that they exclusively engaged within their athletic peer groups before the pandemic.

As mentioned earlier, time is the culprit that is taking the full collegiate experience away from Black male student-athletes and other student-athletes in general. Many of the participants of this study expressed an interest and a desire to engage the whole campus community. The question was, however, where were they going to find the time on their schedules to accommodate it.

Sport of Play

Leaving home and entering college is one of the most stressful experiences that a freshman collegiate athlete will face. According to Jennings, Henderson, Erla, Abraham, and Gillum (2018), stress is not isolated to the college classroom for students-athletes, it is also found on the field of play as well. Understanding the current athletic environment and the demands for success, often classified as winning championships, the driver of athletic achievement includes coaches, staff, and even the student-athletes themselves. Student-athletes earning the opportunity to compete while attending a Power-Five conference institution are, in more instances than not, recognized as being among the best athletes at their respective positions and within their geographical footprint. As such, they are usually awarded a full scholarship to attend the university as a student and an athlete. This opportunity comes with the obligations and stress of honoring agreed upon commitments to academics and athletics. Other unique stresses for student-athletes identified by Jennings et al. (2018) included “poor preparation, injury, performance expectations, and rivalry” (p. 246). The participants of this study acknowledged their understanding of these stressors, including knowing their role on the team, meeting the expectation of coaches, injury, and the stress of sporting success to enter the professional ranks.

Coming out of high school, student-athletes quickly learn that coaching philosophies differ among coaches, and student-athletes respond differently to these styles. Additionally, Cosh and Tully (2015) indicated that coaches and their styles of communicating with student-athletes often contribute to student-athlete stress and their eventual burnout. It has already been stated that student-athletes find it hard to accommodate both their academic and sports requirement schedules, and this difficulty forces them to prioritize academics or their sport. Given the style or philosophy of a coach in regards to academics and whether a student-athlete has been afforded a scholarship, it could be suggested that the athlete would prioritize the demands of his sport in lieu of their academic expectations. However, of the participants contributing to this study, 100% of them indicated that they were not only academically eligible, but also excelling in their classes and maintaining 3.0 GPAs or higher.

Coping Mechanisms

Whether in the classroom or in athletic competition, performing at a superior level is highly unlikely if student-athletes have not found a viable source to mitigate and/or eliminate the stresses that are associated with their involvement as a student-athlete. The literature is consistent that student-athletes, regardless of ethnicity or gender, resort to coping strategies to underpin their academic and athletic efforts. The central adaptive coping strategies utilized by the participants of this study included athletic academic services, self-motivation, religion and spirituality, and family support. Consistent with the literature, younger student-athletes enter their universities lacking the coping skills to fully adapt to their sport and life as a college student. As a first-generation college graduate and former student-athlete, the researcher can attest to the validity of these statements. The participants of this study also indicated having

difficulties coping as they entered the university, but eventually developed tools that could help them manage as they aged and became more knowledgeable about the college environment.

Family Support

For most, the push towards college and the prompting to play a sport starts within the family. The required support for encouragement and financing that are needed to excel are almost always derived from a student-athlete's family. Family in this study was a recurring theme that was associated with key phrases such as, *comfort, love, motivation, nurturing, resources, and structure*. Family is also a central theme within the research as it talks about the coping mechanisms that are deployed by student-athletes for the purpose of coping with strains brought on because of their activities as a student and an athlete (Clay 2007; Sampson, 2002). Family can create an environment that can motivate positive academic and athletic experiences (Hussey et al., 2019). Many of the participants of this study reported calling their moms and dads as a first option when dealing with stress. Usually, these sessions resulted in the participants calming down, taking a step back to put things into perspective, and internalizing the wisdom that their parents would impart. For the researcher, without family, to lift me during moments of my greatest challenges and obstacles, academic and athletic success would not have been attainable. The sacrifices borne by the families of the participants of this study served as motivation for them to press forward. Gaining similar or higher academic achievements than in high school or than those achieved by family members was also a rationale for coping and persisting academically. As the researcher stated earlier, he was a first-generation college graduate. Setting a new standard for all of his relatives that would follow behind him was a driving force for coping and persisting through his athletic and academic challenges. So, in

addition to what my family was doing for me, I was also driven by what I was doing for them to enhance our family's name and well-being.

Athletic Student Support Services

Keeping student-athletes eligible to participate in their sport and on track to complete the academic requirements of the university and the NCAA is a primary focus of Athletic Student Support offices on many college campuses. For many years, institutions have been spending millions to supply the units with the personnel and tools to support an academic experience that surpasses the other academic resources of the campus on which it sits. The literature on the topic suggests “academic advisors play a vital role in student success” (Shaw et al., 2019, p. 165). In fact, nearly 100 percent of the participants of this study reported utilizing athletic academic services exclusively for any student resource needs they might have. They were completely confident regarding the quality of care and service they would receive and were devoted to working with their individual academic advisors and tutors. While all students, including student-athletes, are subject to the overarching academic and student policies and procedures of the University, at the institution under study, there were no formal crossover- or dual-reporting structures between general campus academic services and athletic academic support services. While this service might appear to be a rejection of similar campus offerings, they are paramount to the ongoing success of student-athletes in the classroom and on the field of play.

Self-Motivation and Resilience

A core strength for being successful is believing in oneself and finding the inner strength to excel in important personal endeavors. However, it is suggested that students' involvement with athletics makes them susceptible to mental health issues and pose significant threats to their ability to succeed (Gouttebauge et al., 2019; Oramas, 2021). Aside from the family, and the

support services offered by student-athletes' respective institutions, Gayles (2015) suggests that a student's belief in their ability to be successful is rooted in their past experiences of success and failure, which often helps them "persist and experience less stress and anxiety, particularly if difficulties arise" (p. 214). A resolve for the outcomes of the experiences that they successfully endured, whether past academic hardships, injuries or other life circumstances, was a motivation and coping mechanism that respondents of this research steadily referenced.

As a former Black male student-athlete, the researcher can confirm that hardships, obstacles, and a constant barrage of issues, both academically and socially, inundated my life and collegiate experience. Nevertheless, I felt the only option was to persist, just as I had during every other life hardship. Persisting was never easy, but it was certainly achievable, because I had persevered many times before. A resolve and resilience, resulting in an unwavering persistence created a pliable and determined young adult who would use the strength of winning in the classroom, on the field of play, and at life to consistently say to himself, "you can do it." While short and simple, the researcher heard the respondents of this study affirm that by using the same energy and words to keep going and cope with the challenges of their everyday existence.

Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality, regardless of the form, exist in every human society (Noh & Shahdan, 2020). Specifically, religion and spirituality are at the core of many Black families' existence (Burt et al., 2019; Herndon, 2003; Mattis, 2000), and they use it to draw comfort, guidance, and substance from a higher authority with whom they have come to develop a personal and sustained relationship. It was from the intimacy of this bond that the researcher heard the participants of this study say they went to prayer and meditation in times of their

greatest stress. Religion and spirituality have also been a cornerstone of the researcher's athletic and personal journey as well. For him, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes was one of the spiritual groups that he affiliated with as a student-athlete. This association provided peer association from an athletic and a spiritual perspective and provided an outlet to share student-athlete hardships with those which could offer support and solutions based on their personal and spiritual experiences. While the participants did not specifically reference specific religious affiliations, it was well articulated from the respondents of this study that they relied on the wisdom and tenets of their faith to cope as students and athletes.

While addressing the phenomenon of role strain from within the context of Black male student-athletes, the respondents revealed that some strains or stresses extended well beyond the boundaries of their daily routine and required coping mechanisms beyond the tangible supports provided to student-athletes through organized support services. Some strains were more emotionally ingrained requiring the student-athletes to draw on less tangible forms of support, such as religion and spirituality, to manage their psychological or emotional needs. Religion and spirituality, according to Noh and Shahdan (2020), are known to provide means for coping with stress and other mental syndromes and improving overall wellbeing. The respondents of this study, who expressed a consistent reliance on their spirituality, were resolved that their faith was an important coping mechanism for various aspects of stress that they faced as a student-athlete (Livingston, 2020). The life of a student-athlete is filled with unanticipated events and outcomes. For many, an unexpected injury, the loss of playing time, failing a class, or a defeat during competition, is the difference between making it one additional day or throwing in the towel. For the student-athletes in this study, prayer and a dependence on guidance and support from a

higher source that they have grown to rely on, represents a trusted coping mechanism beyond many of the other resources available to them.

Implications

A transition to college life can be stressful for any student at a major high-profile university with rigorous academic requirements, but when you add additional responsibilities like participating in a highly-competitive athletic program that has a long history of national success, the expectations associated with being a student and an athlete can be overwhelming. Black male student-athletes at Division I, Power-Five conference institutions face these pressures, along with a variety of other cultural, racial and socioeconomic stressors and stereotypes that are unique to their collegiate experience. This research, which identifies the strains associated with Black male student-athletes and the coping mechanisms that they utilize to persist in the college environment, has significant implications for both policy and practice within the higher education environment.

From a policy perspective, this study has significant implications for campus-wide student counseling and advising. It is clear, by measure of student outcomes, that athletics departments know how to successfully administer an academic advising and student academic counseling experience for student-athletes. Their efforts in this area tend to surpass that of the general campus's abilities. Despite the many challenges faced by student-athletes, especially those of color, student-athlete graduation rates exceed those of the general student population. Expanding collaboration between the Provost's Office/Academic Affairs and Athletics academics departments could go a long way in assisting the campus in taking advantage of athletic department student services methodologies, advising practices, and policy structures that could significantly enhance student persistence and degree attainment across the entire campus.

Additionally, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed the extreme needs and concerns among students for additional mental health services and support. These have been amplified for student-athletes, who have the added pressure of performing competitively in settings that allow for greater scrutiny not only within the academic environment but also more publicly through various forms of media. These mental health stresses do not account for the added complexities faced by certain student-athletes such as Black males, who must contend with the added pressure of stereotypes and low expectations from faculty and even their college peers. The NCAA and campuses alike have increased their public support for addressing the mental health needs of student-athletes and reducing the stigma associated with seeking and receiving mental health support. By understanding the strains faced by Black male student-athletes and the primary ways in which they cope, both positively and negatively, the NCAA and campus communities can rethink policies and regulations that add pressure to the unique challenges of its student-athletes and develop better management strategies and resources that fit the unique needs of student-athletes, based on their sport and time commitments as well as the general demographics of the athletes themselves.

From a practice perspective the implications are many. Since the 1900s, athletics oversight organizations, scholars and administrators have been searching for innovative ways to seamlessly weave intercollegiate athletics into the finer fabric of the academic enterprise. Finding solutions to this long-time issue could provide major benefits for the entire academic community, particularly Black male student-athletes, who often transition to Division I, Power-Five athletic programs not fully prepared to deal with the complex and, often, very public expectations of their new life as a high-profile student-athlete. Opportunities exist for increased collaboration among academic and athletic personnel by creating more effective academic resources and

support services that foster greater collaboration between student-athletes and their collegiate peers as well as with faculty, groups that often see student-athletes as receiving more favorable treatment on campus than other students or than they deserve. As an example, since it is widely known that degree clustering or the selection of common majors often happens among student-athletes, athletic student support services and the university could partner to offer faculty tutoring for some of the most popular majors among student-athletes and include students from the general student body who are majoring in those fields in an effort to not only enhance student-athlete engagement with their faculty but also with their peers. These joint efforts would not only contribute to student-athletes remaining eligible to play their sports but also provide them with increased opportunities to be engaged with individuals outside of athletes while building their confidence and success in their chosen field of study. Increased collaboration between university and athletic academics would also provide yet another productive coping mechanism for black student-athletes, who are often misunderstood or treated differently because of limited exposure to majority faculty, staff, and students.

Theoretical Implications

Given that black male student-athletes now exceed white males in NCAA Division-I athletics, studying this critical demographic group is paramount to understanding their pre-college and existing collegiate experiences. This study explored the strains that Black male-student-athletes bear because of their role as both students and athletes and the coping mechanisms they deploy as part of those roles. The Adapted Bowman Role Strain and Adaptation Model (ABRASM) serves as an ideal framework that could be utilized by administrators to help understand and address the general psychological well-being and success needs of individuals who have experienced social inequalities such as student-athletes of color.

This framework contends that student-athletes will automatically seek ways to cope with the strains that come with successfully navigating their dual role. The framework has also been utilized to study the racialized multi-level challenges that marginalized students must overcome to succeed (Burt et al, 2019). As it relates to outcomes in education, although the ABRASM has been used to understand role strain and the success of students of color in specific disciplines, the model has implications for underrepresented student-athletes as well. It suggests that Black male student-athletes, regardless of the inequalities associated with their social stratification alignment, are subject to complex psychological risk factors, which are manifested within their athletic environment, family support structures, and from other personal affiliations. These can contribute to a failed collegiate experience. The framework also suggests that Black male student-athletes, regardless of the inequalities associated with their social stratification alignment, can find multi-level psychological strengths, that exist within their athletic environment, family support structures, and from other personal affiliations to bolster their success. The model contends that the multi-level strengths may come from either emic or etic strength sources. Emic strengths are categorized as those that are community specific and etic strengths are labeled as universal to the entire university community of students (Burt et al., 2019; Bowman, 2006). The ABRASM assumes that emic and etic psychological strengths are homogenous for students as a whole. Representing a gap in the model, this research recognizes that the framework looks primarily at the influences of social and psychological factors on students in general, but it does not apply them specifically to the student-athlete, who must be understood on multiple levels. As an example, the ABRASM suggests that academic student services should be considered an “etic psychological strength” that is universal to all students attending the university. The findings of this research suggest that, given the exclusive nature of

academic, tutoring, and other services provided to student-athletes from athletic student support services, these resources for student-athletes are “emic psychological strengths” which would normally be considered etic strengths in-terms of how the model is constructed. This suggests that the framework can be further adapted to accommodate the unique ecological, social, and personal multi-level psychological strengths and risk for minority student-athletes.

Knowing that Black male student-athletes often rely on academic support services, family involvement, self-motivation, and their spirituality to cope with the strains of being a student-athlete suggests that high-profile and other institutions should consider changes in their support strategies to better meet the needs of these diverse students, if these components are not currently a part of their programs and resources.

Utilizing the theoretical framework and data presented in this study to assist Black male student-athletes in recognizing the salient strains of their role and educating them in the implementation of positive adaptive strategies, can lead to meaningful increases in student success metrics and in their lives after college. As this research was focused on Black males in Division I athletics, if successful, efforts related to this study could be expanded to include Black males at non-Division I institutions as well as female minority athletes and other underrepresented minority groups across the academy.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the bounded nature of this study, the possibility exists to expand the research to include black female student-athletes, other underrepresented minority groups, or a comparison of role strains and coping mechanisms within an entire athletic enterprise. More specifically, the following recommendations are presented for future research related to this topic.

A mixed-methods study could be conducted to capture the broader experiences of a larger population of minority male student-athletes. This could include interviews to further illuminate student-athlete experiences, focus groups to make meaning of participants' experiences as a group, documents analysis to fill in details and add validity to understanding the student-athlete experience, and a quantitative analysis. Given that this research identified time as the primary strain experienced by Black male student-athletes, there is a high probability that time will be an issue for other minority student-athletes. Using a mix-methods approach, which would add a quantitative component for collecting data, could add value to the qualitative data that is often abbreviated because of the limited time that student-athletes have to devote to providing responses as part of the study, while also casting a much broader net for collecting other relevant student-athlete data.

Additionally, a more detailed examination of “within group” experiences of Black student-athletes, by sport, could be conducted since each sport has unique strains, influences, experiences and coping mechanisms among its student-athletes. The data of this research project identified “sport of play” as a salient strain experienced by Black male student-athletes. The contributors of this study participated in the sports of basketball, football, and track and field. Expanding the research to study Black male student-athletes, while being sport specific, could be advantageous for understanding how and why a particular sport of play add strains to the student-athlete experience.

Lastly, a comparative study to explore the experiences of different men of color (i.e., Black LatinX, Pacific Islanders, etc.) to better understand how the strains and coping mechanisms differ among diverse male student-athlete populations could be conducted. As suggested by the BRASM, social stratifications among racial groups serve as the genesis for

multilevel psychological strengths, multilevel psychological risks, role strains, and coping mechanisms. Duplication of this study, with the intent of studying other student-athlete racial groups, could either substantiate the findings of this study as being consistent or identify variances within the alternative study group.

Final Note

As noted earlier in the study, the researcher is a Black male, former student-athlete who participated at a Power-Five conference institution and was faced with a host of academic and athletic challenges throughout his college experience. Being the first in my family to graduate from a major research university and participate in a nationally ranked athletic program, I wanted to better understand the mechanisms that allow individuals like to me to persist and graduate in an effort to help other student-athletes and the universities that recruit them. I entered this study fully expecting to find young men who were very much like myself but facing an entire suite of even newer and more pressing challenges and strains than I did.

Unlike my experience, a majority of Black male participants in this study were coming from college-educated families that included both parents. The stability of this structure enabled the participants to flourish academically, athletically, and socially. Understanding the impact of having educated parents and witnessing the results and power associated with supportive and involved family members who are investing in the lives of these black student-athletes was incredibly insightful and motivational. Finally, I was beyond impressed with the commitment that the university studied had for bridging the gaps that student-athletes might encounter. Athletic student services was a resource that consistently worked to the good of the student-athletes interviewed and the results can be seen in their responses. While Black male student-

athletes might not be graduating at the same levels as their other athletic peers, with increased understanding of their challenges and needs, I am confident they will in the not too distant future.

Conclusion

Since the 1900s, American institutions and organizing bodies have been on a constant search for innovative ways to seamlessly weave intercollegiate athletics into the overall fabric of the academic enterprise. While the partnership between athletics and the academy has come a long way, as Rankin et al. (2016) suggested, the relationship between athletics and academics remains an “uneasy marriage” (p. 705). Considering the realized revenue derived from the successful administration of high-profile Division-I athletics programs, the researcher is left to wonder why visible tension continues to exist between athletics and the academic enterprises. There are clear synergies associated with successfully getting the student support services model correct for the entire campus and for all students. Doing so would mean an institution would be able to offer the student success rates experienced within athletics to all student customers and to the benefit of all stakeholders. Additionally, deploying a uniformed approach for managing the stresses experienced by underrepresented minority groups across the campus, with the similar outcomes as athletics, an institution could transform its retention and graduation outcomes.

Answering the research questions of (a) what are the strains that Black male student-athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five conference institution?; and (b) what are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student-athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student athlete at a Power-Five conference institution? This research found that Black student-athletes have to endure the primary strain of time and not having enough hours in a day to satisfy the demands of being a student, engaging socially, and being an expert at their sport of play. They have manage these strains by adopting coping strategies that include

academic advising, relying on family support, deploying self-motivation skills, and relying on their spiritual and inner beliefs to persist.

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APPENDIX A:
IRB APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA® | Office of the Vice President for
Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

August 12, 2021

Tony Johnson
Department of Educational Leadership, Policy and Technology Studies
College of Education
The University of Alabama
Box 870302

Re: IRB # 21-03-4456: "African-American Male Student-Athlete Success: A Qualitative Case Study on the Influence of Role Strain and Its Implications on Completing College at a Power-5 Conference School"

Dear Tony Johnson:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your protocol has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46.104(d)(2) as outlined below:


(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

The approval for your application will lapse on August 11, 2022. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the annual report to the IRB as required by the University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

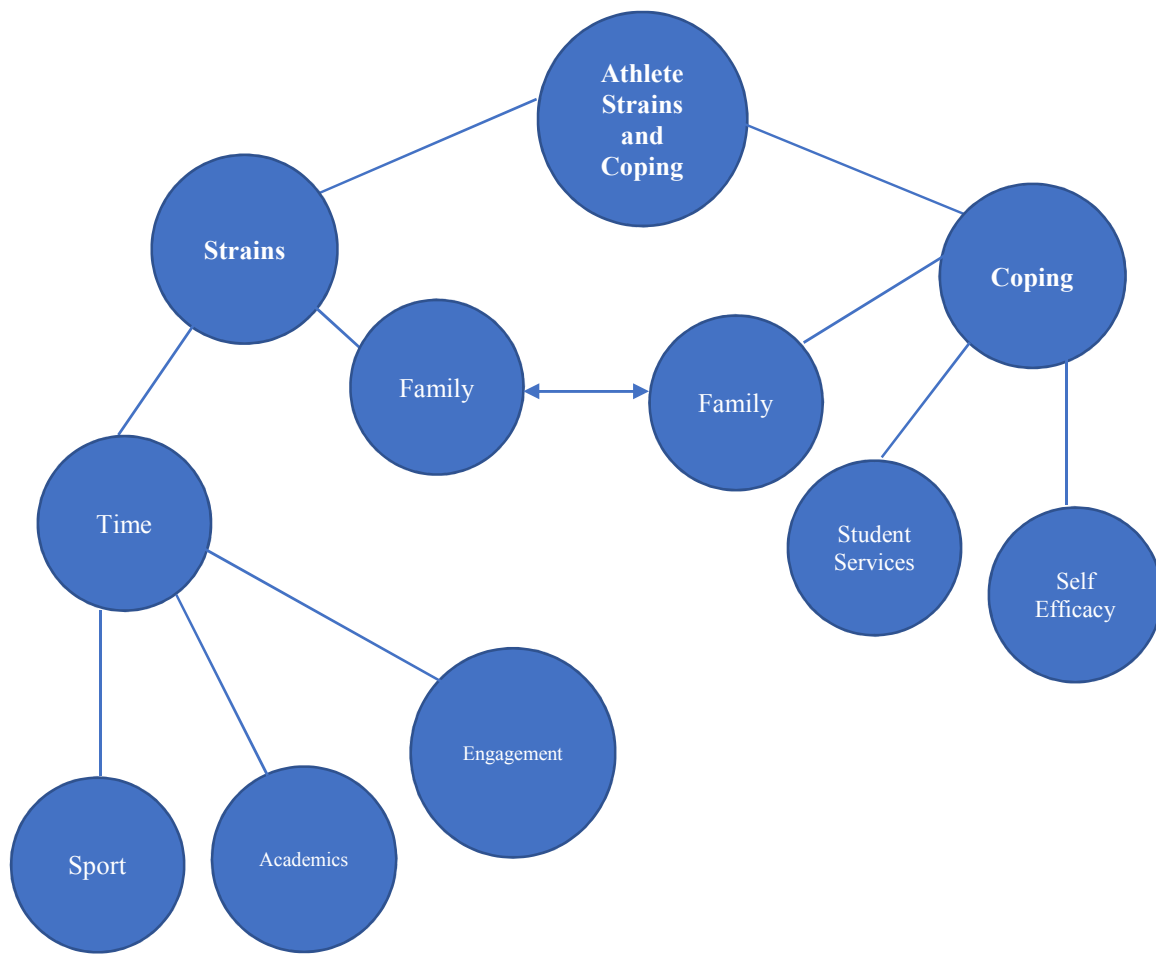
Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Good luck with your research.


Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CDM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer

Jessup Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127
205-348-8461 | Fax 205-348-7189 | Toll Free 1-877-820-3066

APPENDIX B:
LITERATURE MAP



APPENDIX C:
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Title of Research:

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE STUDENT ATHLETE SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF ROLE STRAIN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON COMPLETING COLLEGE AT A POWER-5 CONFERENCE SCHOOL

Time of Interview: Start _____ Finish _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Facilitator: _____

Type of Interview: Semi-Structured

Interviewee ID: _____

- **Thank You and Rationale for The Study**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. I recognize the significance of your time, especially considering the demands on your daily schedule. This research will seek to explore and understand the concept of role strain on African-American male student-athletes and how it influences their ability to succeed in college. For this research, role strain is defined as “the stress or strain that one might experience in meeting the social, cultural, academic and athletic roles expected of them.” In particular, this study seeks to identify the strains that African-American athletes have to endure in their role as a racial minority and student athlete and the coping mechanisms they deploy to succeed or cope within the campus environment. Also, I have received informed consent documents from you consenting to your participation in this research.

- **Student Disclaimer**

As you know, I am a doctoral student in The University of Alabama’s Executive Higher Education Administration program. I am conducting this research to complete the required dissertation project to finish my degree program. The information obtained during this interview will be utilized solely for my dissertation research and will not be shared with any other parties.

- **Audio video procedure/consent form/AV test**

Before we begin, I must ask for your permission and signature to record our session. All of the information collected and recorded will be kept anonymous and confidential and used solely to conduct this research. This interview should last for approximately 45 minutes or less, depending on your responses. As expected, you have the right to not answer any question(s) to which you would not like to respond. You may also choose to discontinue your participation in the interview process at any time. Just to confirm, there are no incentives for participating in this interview process. Do you have any questions about this interview protocol? If not, I would like to begin our interview.

Interview questions:

1. How would you describe your childhood upbringing in terms of family structure and economic circumstances?
2. What factors influenced you to choose [Name of Institution] for your higher education studies? What were your biggest concerns as you prepared to attend this institution?
3. What role did your family or friends play in encouraging you to play your chosen sport at this institution?
4. During your time there, how would you describe your engagement within the broader campus community, beyond athletics?
5. How would you characterize your relationships with faculty, staff and other members of the general student body?
6. How did you communicate with your teammates about your academic successes and challenges?
7. How did you communicate with your parents or other relatives about your academic progress?
8. How often did you utilize the athletics department academic center or other student support resources?
9. How did you utilize campus academic services outside of the athletics department while being enrolled as a student?
10. How would you describe your motivation to perform in the classroom and on the field of play within your sport? Would you have described yourself as being more comfortable in the academic or athletic realm?
11. What were your thoughts regarding the completion of your degree and your perspectives about a future as a professional athlete as you matriculated at the institution? What future academic or professional goals were foremost in your mind when you were a student?
12. What role did your race play in determining your general living and learning conditions from the time you were a child to the present day?
13. What were the greatest challenges or stressors you faced as a student-athlete? (These could be academic, athletic or personal.)
14. What strategies or resources did you use to help you cope with stresses that you felt as an athlete and a minority?
15. To what extent do you feel you have achieved your academic goals? What, if any, specific regrets do you have?

Closing Comments

This concludes the questions that I have for you at this time. I appreciate your time and participation. Do you have any questions for me regarding this session or my research or would you like to add anything that you did not have an opportunity to share earlier in the session? As a reminder, your responses will be kept confidential. With your permission, may I contact you again, if needed, to clarify certain responses? Thank you.

APPENDIX D:
INFORMED CONSENT

Please read this informed consent carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Consent Form Key Information:

- Participate in a 60-minute one-on-one interview session.
- All information will remain confidential to this research.
- No information collected that will connect identity with responses

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore, identify, and understand the concept of role strain on African-American male student-athletes at a Division-I institution and how it influences their ability to engage, persist, and graduate. The research is expected to increase understanding and identify different forms of role strain that impact African-American male student-athlete success and provide insight into approaches that may also help improve the overall retention and graduation rates of other African-American and underrepresented students, who are not engaged in sports.

What you will do in the study: The researcher will conduct qualitative case study research using one-on-one interviews to collect data and answer the following research questions: 1. What are the strains that Black male student athletes experience at a Division I Power-Five Conference institution? 2. What are the adaptive coping strategies used by Black male student athletes to mitigate the strains associated with being a student athlete at a Power-Five conference institution? Data gathering will be guided by specific research protocols that are designed to collect the data for this research project. In the event that virtual platforms are used to conduct the interview session, the sessions will be recorded (audio and video), allowing the researcher time to accurately analyze and capture data. Face-to-face interviews will be audio taped for post-interview analyzing and coding.

Time required: The study will require about 1 hour of your time.

Risks: There are no foreseen risks associated with this research.

Benefits: There are no monetary benefits associated with you participating in this research. However, it is expected that this research will have meaningful implications for higher education and its practitioners, which could lead to increased graduation and retention rates of minority and other underserved student groups.

Confidentiality: Records identifying you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law and will not be made available publicly or shared with other individuals or organizations. Your confidentiality will

also be protected by separating signed consents from interview materials, using pseudonyms or identification numbers for participants in reporting the results, keeping both audio files and transcriptions in a locked drawer, and the destruction of recordings a year after the study has been completed. Additionally, the only persons with access to the study documents or recordings will be the investigator, Tony V. Johnson, and Dissertation Chair, Dr. Frankie Santos Laanan, who will be overseeing the research. Following the successful defense of this research, all audio and videotaped recordings will be disposed of via electronic deletion techniques in accordance with the timeline previously mentioned.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary, and you may decline to participate in any aspect of the interview process at any time.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. In the event you decide to withdraw from this study, all audio and video recordings of you and your comments will be destroyed.

How to withdraw from the study:

If you want to withdraw from the study, ask the researcher to stop and clearly tell the researcher that you wish to withdraw from the study. You can withdraw at any time either during the data collection period or afterward. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

Compensation/Reimbursement: You will receive no payment or other form of compensation for participating in the study.

If you have questions about the study or need to report a study-related issue please contact, contact:

Principal Investigator: Tony V. Johnson

Title: Dissertation Doctoral Student

Department Name: Educational Leadership, Policy and Technology Studies

Telephone: 205-394-9763

Email address: tvjohnson2@crimson.ua.edu

Faculty Advisor's Name: Dr. Frankie Santos Laanan

Department Name: Educational Leadership, Policy and Technology Studies

Telephone: 205-348-5811

Email address: laanan@ua.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, would like to make suggestions or file complaints and concerns about the research study, please contact:

Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at <http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/>. You may email the Office for Research Compliance at rscompliance@research.ua.edu.

Agreement:

€ I agree to participate in the research study described above.

€ I do not agree to participate in the research study described above.

€ I agree to video and audio recording in the research study described above.

€ I do not agree to video and audio recording in the research study described above.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Print Name of Research Participant

Signature of Investigator or other Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Print Name of Investigator or other Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX E:

DATA COLLECTION QUESTION ORGANIZATION (INTERVIEW)

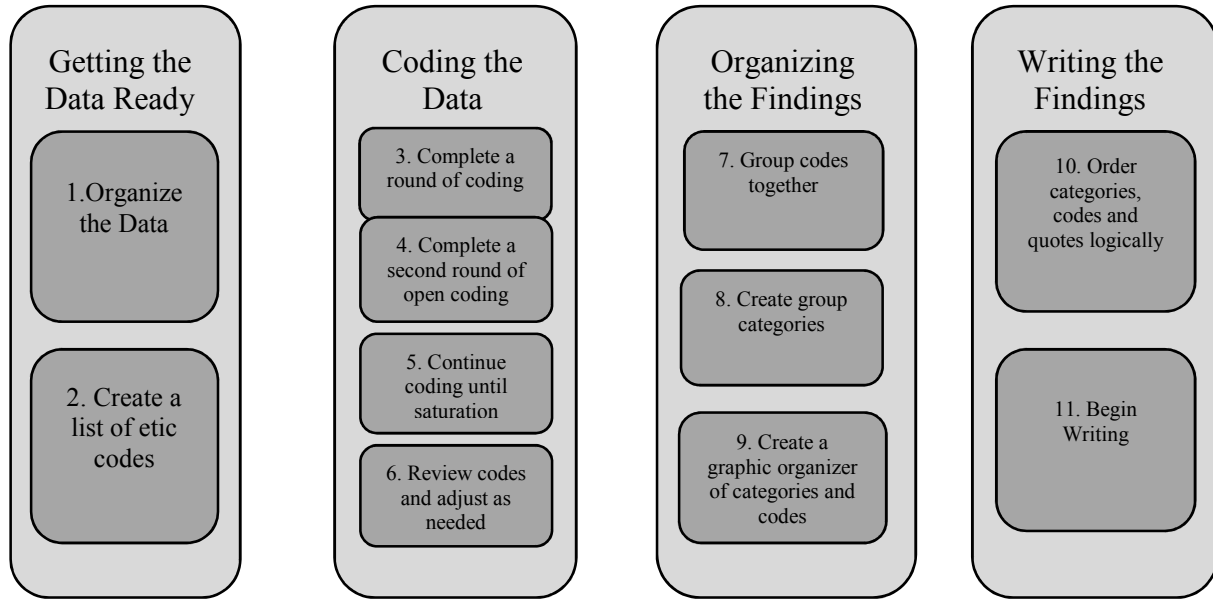
Social Stratification	Multilevel Psychological Strengths	Multilevel Psychological Risk	Student Role Strain	Coping Strategies
What were your biggest concerns as you prepared to attend this university?	What role did your family or friends play in encouraging you to play football at the college level?	How would you describe your engagement within the broader campus community?	How would you describe your engagement within the broader campus community?	How would you describe your engagement within the broader campus community?
What role did your family or friends play in encouraging you to play football at the college level?	How would you describe your engagement within the broader campus community?	How often do you utilize your athletic academic center or other student support services?	How would you describe your motivation to perform in the classroom and sport?	How often do you utilize your athletic academic center or other student support services?
What factors influenced you to attend this university?	How did you communicate with your teammates about your academic successes and challenges?	With whom do you communicate about your academic success or challenges?	Would you describe yourself as being more comfortable in the academic or athletic realm?	How often do you utilize campus academic services outside of the athletics department?
What are your thoughts regarding the completion or your college degree?	How often do you utilize your athletic academic center or other student support services?	How often do you utilize campus academic services outside of the athletics department?	What are the greatest challenges or stressors you face as a student and athlete of color?	How did you communicate with your teammates about your academic successes and challenges?
What are the greatest challenges or stressors you face as a student and athlete of color?	How would you describe your motivation to perform in the classroom and sport?	How would you describe your motivation to perform in the classroom and sport?	What academic goals do you have? How will you accomplish them?	What strategies or resources do you use to cope with stress you feel as a student and athlete?
What academic goals do you have? How will you accomplish them?	What are your thoughts regarding the completion or your college degree?	What are your thoughts regarding the completion or your college degree?	How would you characterize your relationships with faculty, staff, and other members of the general student body?	What academic goals do you have? How will you accomplish them?
How would you describe your childhood upbringing in terms of family structure	What future academic or professional goals are foremost in your mind?	What future academic or professional goals are foremost in your mind?	To what extent do you feel you achieved your academic goals? What, if any,	

and economic circumstances?			specific regrets do you have?	
What role did your race play in determining your general living and learning conditions from the time you were a child to the present day?	What strategies or resources do you use to cope with stress you feel as a student and athlete?	What strategies or resources do you use to cope with stress you feel as a student and athlete?		
	What academic goals do you have? How will you accomplish them?	What academic goals do you have? How will you accomplish them?		
	How would you characterize your relationships with faculty, staff, and other members of the general student body?	How would you characterize your relationships with faculty, staff, and other members of the general student body?		

*Some questions are designed to generate multiple responses for more than one ABRAM category.

APPENDIX F:

STAGES OF DATA ANALYSIS



(Holley & Harris, 2019)

APPENDIX G:
THEME CODE BOOK

Level				
1	2	3		Theme
1.00				Family Impact
	1.05			<i>Family Structure</i>
		1.051		Both Parents (Stability and confidence)
		1.052		Single Parents (struggles)
		1.053		Other Family Members (Support)
	1.10			<i>Family Academic History</i>
		1.101		College Both Parents
		1.102		College Dad Only
		1.103		College Mom Only
		1.104		Military (one or both)
	1.15			<i>Financial Stability</i>
		1.151		Stable
		1.152		Unstable
	1.20			<i>Role of Family in Sport Choice</i>
		1.201		Family Legacy Athlete
		1.202		Parental/Family Encouragement
		1.203		None/Self Driven
2.0				School Background
	2.05			Public
	2.10			Private/Prep
3.0				Major
	3.05			Business Administration
	3.10			Kinesiology
	3.15			New College/Entrepreneurship
	3.20			Public Health
4.0				Race as a Strain
	4.05			Yes

	4.10			No
5.0				Academic Expectations
	5.05			Graduate
	5.10			Do well academically/focus on grades
	5.15			Focus on professional career
	5.20			Academics and Athletic Success
	5.25			Unclear
6.0				Challenges
	6.05			<i>Time/Scheduling</i>
		6.051		Class
		6.052		Practice
		6.053		Studying/Tutoring
		6.054		Eating/Nutrition
		6.055		Social Life
		6.056		Rest
		6.057		Travel
		6.058		Workouts
	6.10			Outside Distractions
	6.15			<i>Transition to College Athletics</i>
		6.151		Competition
		6.152		Athletic Role/Meeting Expectations
		6.153		Internal/External Criticism
	6.20			<i>Workload</i>
		6.201		Academic Load
		6.202		Athletic Load
	6.25			<i>Mental Health</i>
		6.251		COVID
	6.30			Maintaining Family and Other Connections
	6.35			Injury
7.0				Engagement
	7.05			Classroom
	7.10			Fans
	7.15			Community
	7.20			Social
	7.25			Work
	7.30			Greek Life
	7.35			Campus Sponsored Programs
	7.40			<i>Athletic Peers Only</i>
		7.401		Athletic Dining
	7.45			<i>Limited engagement with Faculty and Staff</i>

		7.451		Office Hours (as needed)
		7.452		Engagement Via Email
		7.453		Engagement Via Assignment Feedback
	7.50			Negatively Impacted by COVID
	7.55			Introverted (Do not seek routine engagement)
	7.60			Too Busy to Engage
8.00				Communication (Coping)
	8.05			Group Study Hall/Assignments Discussions
	8.10			<i>Athletic Peer Support</i>
		8.101		Academic Honors (School/Conference)
		8.102		Sports
		8.103		Life
		8.104		Academics
			8.1041	How to Study
	8.15			Avoid Communicating/Internalizing Thoughts and Feelings
	8.20			Coaches and Faculty
	8.25			<i>Do you Communicate about Academics with Parents</i>
		8.251		<i>Yes</i>
				Academic performance/Grades
				Graduation
				Mental Health
				Academic Challenges
		8.252		<i>No</i>
				Too Stressful
9.00				Motivation Strategies
	9.05			<i>Future Aspirations</i>
		9.051		Professional Athletics
				Career Aspirations
	9.10			Graduation /Degree Attainment
	9.15			Parental/Family Expectations and Sacrifices
	9.20			Positive Thinking
	9.25			High Personal Standards/Personal fulfillment
	9.30			Keeping Scholarship

	9.35			Improving Athletic Performance
	9.40			Setting a standard for the family/Role Model
	9.45			Financial Stability
10.00				Utilization of Athletic Student Services (Coping)
	10.05			<i>Frequency</i>
		10.051		Frequently (3-5x per week or more)
		10.052		Fair Amount (1-2 per week or less)
		10.053		Rarely/Never
	10.10			<i>Services Used</i>
		10.101		Group Study Hall
		10.102		Tutoring
		10.103		Advising and Counseling
		10.104		Printing
		10.105		Study Rooms
11.00				Utilization of Campus Student Services
	11.05			<i>Frequency</i>
		11.051		Frequently (3-5x per week or more)
		11.052		Fair Amount (1-2 per week or less)
		11.053		Rarely/Never
	11.10			<i>Services Used</i>
		11.101		Library
		11.102		Faculty Tutoring
		11.103		Veterans Affairs Center
12.00				Coping Strategies
	12.05			Communicate with Parents/Family
	12.10			Take a Break
	12.15			Work proactively to avoid Stress
	12.20			Take it/Get Over It
	12.25			Drugs
	12.30			Isolate Self
	12.35			Video Games
	12.40			Hangout with Friends
	12.45			Walking, Meditating/Reflecting on Life
	12.50			Spirituality/Connecting with God
	12.55			Disconnecting from Electronics and social media
	12.60			Connecting with friends via social media

APPENDIX H:
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

<Date>

Dear < Insert Name>,

My name is Tony Johnson, and I am a doctoral student at The University of Alabama and a former student-athlete. I am conducting dissertation research on “African-American Male Student-Athlete Success: A Qualitative Case Study on the Influence of Role Strain and Its Implications on Completing College at a Power-5 Conference School”.

The purpose of my research is to explore, identify, and understand the concept of role strain on African-American male student-athletes at a Division-I institution and how it influences their ability to engage, persist, and ultimately graduate. This research is expected to increase understanding and identify different forms of role strain that impact African-American male student-athlete success and provide insight into approaches that may help improve the overall retention and graduation rates of other African-American and underrepresented students.

You are receiving this communication because I believe you may qualify to participate in my study. As such, I am writing to ask if you would participate in this study via an interview, which will take approximately 60 minutes of your time and pose no personal risk to you as a participant. To ensure confidentiality, you will be assigned a pseudonym and your actual name will not be used in the study. If it is advantageous for you, the interview can be conducted face-to-face, while practicing social distancing; via Zoom, with your camera on or off; or by phone.

If you are willing to participate, please respond by email, to confirm your participation. After receiving your positive reply, I will send an official informed consent form. Upon receiving the informed consent form, please sign and return it via email or I can arrange a time for hand delivery. After receiving your signed consent form, I would like to schedule a time for our interview immediately.

If you have any questions, please contact me a tvjohnson2@crimson.ua.edu or at [REDACTED] I am looking forward to your reply.

All the best,

Tony V. Johnson
Doctoral Student
Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Technologies Studies
The University of Alabama