

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON IMPROVING THE ATHLETIC
ELIGIBILITY AND RETENTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT-
ATHLETES AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

AIJALON MCLITTLE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION:
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

2026

Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan

Doctoral Advisory Committee:

Julia Smith, Ed.D., Chair
Eileen Johnson, Ph.D.
Joseph Cooper, Ph.D.

© Copyright by Aijalon McLittle, 2026
All rights reserved

To my grandmother and grandfather. May they rest in peace.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my grandparents for their unconditional love and for inspiring my learning.
May they RIP.

To my finance for being my rock and encouraging me to keep going until I reach
the finish line.

To my mother, Jeanine Mac, for all that you have done for me and my children
and inspiring my ambition.

To my daughter and son, Jamar and Jazz, for having faith in me during this
journey.

I would like to thank my Aunt Pat for loving me like your own son.

To Rochelle Taylor for motivating me and instilling the passion in me to support
student-athletes.

To Dr Tracy Hall. Thanks for your love, mentorship, and believing in my
potential.

To Dr. Miller. Thanks for being my mentor and motivating me to keep climbing
the mountain.

Thanks to my committee chair, Dr. Smith, for your unwavering support. Thank
you, Dr. Johnson, for teaching me about qualitative research in your class. Thanks to Dr.
Cooper for your support and mentorship.

To Ismael Ahmed. Thanks for your faith in me and dedicated mentorship. RIP.

Aijalon McLittle

ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON IMPROVING THE ATHLETIC ELIGIBILITY AND RETENTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT- ATHLETES AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

AIJALON MCLITTLE

Adviser: Julia Smith, Ed.D

Student-athletes experience demanding athletic and academic responsibilities while participating in varsity sports at community colleges. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American student-athletes at Midwest community colleges, specifically exploring the academic challenges and how their athletic eligibility is impacted by academic probation. This research is needed because it helps two-year colleges develop strategies to retain African American student-athletes. The Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) theory guided this research in that it can help community college educators understand the barriers and needs of African American students-athletes.

A phenomenological approach was used as a research design to learn about the lived experiences of this population of students. My work with African American student-athletes has motivated me to conduct qualitative research to gauge the “how” and “why” as it relates to student-athletes experience and academic challenges while playing

sports at community colleges. The findings revealed that the participants were unsupported in these community college spaces, endured challenges balancing both academics and sports, their athletic status was demoted, and they experienced implicit bias. The study provides implications to support and develop initiatives to improve African American student-athlete's academic outcomes. The results highlight the importance of new athletic programing and practices by community college leadership.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
LIST OF TABLES	xii
CHAPTER ONE OVERVIEW	1
Background	4
Student Retention	7
College Graduation Rates	8
African American Student-Athletes Experiences	10
Theoretical Framework: Socio-Ecological Outcome Theory	11
Theoretical Basis of Socio-Ecological Outcome Model	12
Applying Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model to Black Female Student-Athletes	16
Research Questions	18
Significance	19
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW	21
Overview	21
Experiences of African American Student-Athletes at Postsecondary Institutions	22
African American Male Student-Athletes	23
African American Female Student-Athletes	28

TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

African American Student-Athletes Experiences at Community Colleges	30
Predominantly White Institutions	32
Historical Black Colleges and Universities	35
Persistence of African American Student-Athletes in Higher Education	37
Onboarding Practices	42
Implications for The Current Study	43
CHAPTER THREE	
METHODS AND PROCEDURES	46
Research Questions	46
Researcher’s Positionality	47
Research Design	48
Research Site and Participant Selection Process	50
Interview Participant Site and Selection Process	50
Social Media Post Selection Process	53
Participants	55
Interview Participants’ Characteristics	55
Social Media Participants’ Characteristics	56
Instrumentation and Data Collection	57
Interview Protocol and Data Collection	57

TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

Social Media Post Data Collection Approach	59
Data Analysis Approach	59
CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS	64
Participants' Stories	65
Interview Participants' Stories	65
Social Media Participants' Stories	72
Thematic Findings	76
“My Support Was Abandoned”	76
“Sports Came Before Classes”	80
“Messed Me Up Mentally”	83
“My Voice Was Silenced”	85
CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION	88
Summary and Implications of Findings	88
Research Question One: Negative Impact on African American Student-Athletes Perseverance	89
Research Question Two: Improving Retention Practices at Community Colleges	91
Research Question Three: Supports Needed for African American Student-Athletes' Success	93
Research Question Four: Experiences with Academic Challenges and Suspension	95

TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

Limitations	97
Recommendations for Future Research	98
Conclusions for the Field	99
APPENDICES	
A. IRB Approval	101
B. Interview Questions	104
REFERENCES	106

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Background Characteristics for Interview Participants	56
Table 3.2	Data Codes for African American Student-Athletes	62
Table 3.3	Themes for African American Student-Athletes at Community Colleges	63

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW

The existence of community colleges sports dates back to the 1930s. In fact, in 1937 thirteen community college track and field teams attempted to join the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) but that association was not inclusive to two-year institutions joining their organization (Teague, 2012). Teague highlighted thirteen two-year college teams' collaboration to form their own community college sports association called National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) after the NCAA declined their request to join their association in 1938. The author contended that the NJCAA have created inclusive initiatives for student-athletes in collegiate athletics for over eighty-five years.

There are several advantages to student-athletes playing college sports at two-year institutions. Support of the athletic department and staff at the community college results in good graduation rates in addition to diversity and inclusion on these campuses. Another benefit is the students' ability to enhance their time management skills and utilize resources to maintain a good GPA. Additionally, participating in college athletics increases their sociability and lets student-athletes feel welcomed in their campus community. Most importantly, these student-athletes are able to receive recognition at the national level for their accolades.

Participation in athletics, particularly for African American student-athletes, can be challenging. Playing on sports teams and enrollment in classes can be an overwhelming experience and can lead to being placed on academic probation. In fact,

this balance can be a barrier for African American student-athletes due to the lack of support of coaches, faculty, and staff at these junior colleges. Ineligibility is not only felt on a personal level by the individual student-athlete, but the impact may be far reaching to the team, coaching staff, and ultimately the college's athletic program. Ineligibility can affect the team because these student-athletes build strong relationships with their teammates. Coaching staff are also impacted by ineligibility because these coaches are mentors and often father figures to these student-athletes. Also, it becomes a challenge for coaching staff to develop new team strategies to be competitive when they lose a star athlete. Finally, the athletic programs are impacted by ineligibility because they promote goals to help their student-athletes experience successful academic accomplishments. However, when student-athletes become ineligible to play sports, senior leadership at the community colleges rely on the athletic program to utilize resources to help student-athletes get back to good academic standing. Student-athletes, coaches, and athletic departments must form a collaborative partnership to deter ineligibility.

African American community college student-athletes are at risk for academic probation. According Simiyu (2012), several factors pose challenges to many African American college student-athletes, both male and female. The continuous social and cultural challenges faced by African American student-athletes stem from them being motivated and diligent about participating in sports compared to their lack of determination to maintain their educational responsibilities (Harrison et al., 2002), which leads to academic probation and eligibility issues. Simiyu expressed the importance of developing skills outside of sports that will help these African American student-athletes be successful in a college environment.

The purpose of this research study is to explore experiences impacting athletic eligibility and retention of African American student-athletes at community colleges. It is significant for this population to learn how to balance both academics and sports. This study will focus on African American male and female student-athletes who were suspended from their sport because of academic probation. Specifically, I would like to examine the support resources available to the African American student-athletes during their academic struggles. I also will explore community college's initiatives to improve the academic outcomes of African American male and female student-athletes.

My work with African American student-athletes has motivated me to conduct qualitative research to gauge the "how" and "why" as it relates to student-athletes experience and academic challenges while playing sports at community colleges. Qualitative research will allow me to gain a deeper understanding of these student-athletes' struggles and establish questions that help understand their human experience, which quantitative studies cannot examine through numbers (Kozleski, 2017). My future research will collect data to gather in-depth insights into the arduous issues African American student-athletes retention and scholastic challenges. Learning about their experiences can help athletic departments at junior colleges develop support initiatives to improve academic success rates. Gaining knowledge of the lived experiences of African American student-athletes can enhance the research at the community college level. Trying to live up to the expectations as student-athletes can impact this populations' academic outcomes.

Background

Some of the first Black¹ student-athletes participated in college sports in the early 1900's. William Edward White and William Henry Lewis were the first Black students to play collegiate sports (Lapchick, 2008). White played baseball for Brown University in 1879, and Lewis played football for Harvard while attending law school in 1892 (Lapchick, 2008). Due to the discrimination and segregation in our history, records were not kept about these student-athletes (Lapchick, 2008). During this period, Black student-athletes experienced overt racism that in some cases strengthened their resolve and in other cases may have led to the withdrawal in the athletic arena. It is important to note the antiblackness during the history of collegiate sports. Antiblackness is a term meaning disassociation from all things appropriated to the African American culture (Dancy et al., 2018). Despite barriers and racism, African American student-athletes have made their presence known in collegiate sports. However, they are prone to academic obstacles while playing sports.

Unsatisfactory grades prevent student-athletes at colleges and universities from being eligible to participate in their sports. Student-athlete's grades are reviewed at the end of the semester to determine if they are eligible to continue playing on the team (NJCAA, 2024). According to NJCAA eligibility rules, student-athletes who fall below a 2.0 GPA are given an ineligibility status by the director of athletics. The director then sends that eligibility information to each coach and coaches are required to make players

¹ My research study focuses on African American student-athletes; however, the terms Black and African American are used interchangeably in this dissertation based on the sources.

sit out of the games. After the student-athlete raises their GPA back above a 2.0, they are reinstated to play on their teams.

Several factors contribute to a student-athlete not being eligible to participate in their sports. Student-athletes who do not meet standards are ruled ineligible and placed on probation. Misconduct on the college's campus or fighting a team player or opponent can lead to ineligibility. Also, plagiarism in the classroom will result in a suspension from sports and ineligible status. Colleges are also strict on student-athletes taking pay from outside individuals not associated with the college. These violations can temporarily prohibit a student-athlete from partaking in the sport that they love.

Black student-athletes experience academic challenges and eligibility issues for several reasons. According to Kissinger and Miller (2009), student-athletes often endure these six challenges:

- keeping a balance between sports and academics
- bracing for athletic success versus failure from an emotional stability perspective
- building good relationship with stakeholders
- participating in social activities that neglect athletic duties
- accepting the end of a college athletic career
- focusing on physical health while contemplating the possibility of injuries (p.18).

In addition to these challenges, student-athletes struggle with time management. Godfrey (2010) emphasized that the biggest challenge that affects student-athletes' academics is "time constraints" that lead to class challenges and a loss of focus on academic goals in addition to being overwhelmed (p.19).

Black male and female student-athletes endure these academic challenges more than their White peers, especially at the community college level (Hagedorn et al., 2002). There are several reasons why this challenge is more pervasive among African American student-athletes. According to Hagedorn et al. (2002), “Black students are about 22% more likely than their White peers to quit college prior to goal completion” (p. 245). These challenges may be the result of the African American student-athlete's ineffective attempts to balance the demands of their collegiate athletic schedule alongside their academic responsibilities. For example, basketball student-athletes travel out of the state to play other teams in their conference. Practice and games can be exhausting at times for these student-athletes. These sports responsibilities and enervation can result in the student-athletes not collecting their homework or writing their paper for a class. Student-athlete’s academic duties and the expectation of good performance while playing sports can lead to a negative impact.

More research is needed to help avoid the academic challenges and barriers of African American students. Although students of color have advanced in education, several college obstacles continue to exist. Royal et al. (2022) highlighted the opportunity gap as a barrier that students continue to face at colleges and universities. Race or low socioeconomic status are just a few factors under opportunity gap that can hinder Black students from succeeding in higher education (Royal et al., 2022). It is not the student’s fault that they were born under these circumstances. Our traditional pedagogical approach focuses on students teaching and learning, but more support is needed as a collaboration with the pedagogical approach to increase success for students of color.

Other factors that lead to students quitting college is poverty, racial discrimination, and feeling excluded on college campuses just to name a few (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). In general, there is a gap in graduation rates for students of color graduation rates compared to their White counterparts (Camardelle et al., 2022). The graduation rates of two-year junior college students were 32% percent for White students compared to 23% for Black students (NCES, 2019). Although there is research at the university level, there is limited research at the community college level.

Student Retention

Student retention in higher education is very important for the following reasons:

- Higher education institutions measure student retention rates as the number of students who enroll from one to the next year.
- Student retention in higher education is the process and a long-term goal of keeping students enrolled in colleges and universities
- Student retention has a positive impact on students' future careers.
- Student retention experiences show educators where to allocate their institution's resources in the college environment to inspire academic success. (Hagedorn et al., 2001, p. 251).

African American students, especially men, continue to have low retention rates in higher education. Hagedorn et al. (2001) argued that the combination of racism and low socioeconomic status of Black people becomes a barrier that deters success. During the first semester, some students experience academic challenges, and they become overwhelmed, which sometimes lead to Black students dropping out of school. Black students' decision to drop out impacts colleges retention rates. According to Hagedorn et

al., the connection between Black student achievement and higher education has grown. College educators continue to watch the challenges of Black students completing their higher education programs.

Poor retention rates are not just a reflection of the student struggles, but also a reflection of the institution's lack of adequate support of those students. Faculty and staff are not creating effective support initiatives to retain students of color (Colin et al., 2023). Some college's support services are not effective enough to prevent Black students leaving postsecondary institutions, especially after the first year. This period is critical to encourage our African American students to remain in college despite their encounters. To support our minority students in college, it will entail inclusivity, receptiveness to create retention programs, and our acknowledgment of this population's inequities in our colleges. These same retention issues also impact Black student-athletes due to their challenges to balance both academics and athletics.

College Graduation Rates

The quality of a higher education institution is often measured by its graduation rates, and most importantly, the portion of the admitted students who complete their degree. Graduation rates are important because they show that colleges and universities have support initiatives and resources to help students succeed in graduating. There are several factors that can hinder graduation trajectories. For example, a student can have trouble with work-school balance. In other words, students spend numerous hours during employment working for income, which takes focus off completing the recommended classes during every semester. Also, some students are unable to graduate on time because they must stop school to care for their parents or family members. Regardless of

the circumstances, when students enroll in school as freshman, their number one goal is graduating.

Students of color have struggled with graduating on time. Overall, Black college students' graduation rates are 27% (NCES, 2019). Differences in graduation rates between racial groups has been a popular research topic (Toldson, 2021). According to Toldson (2021), Black students suffer from lower graduation rates due to family structure. For example, even though Black college students are young adults, graduation rates can be affected by that individual having not had a father in the household growing up. The author also emphasized that Black student's graduation is hindered by "society's dysfunctional", which includes poverty (p. 3). Poor graduation rates are a serious topic for minority students attending postsecondary institutions.

Over the years, this issue has also been true for Black students at community colleges. According to a NCES (2019) study, Black students at two-year postsecondary institutions have the lowest graduation rates at 23%. Nelson and Baltes (2019) contended that the community college population consists of "nontraditional students, underserved populations, and students who need extra academic support" (p. 90). For example, a student who came from a low socioeconomic area in a low performing K-12 school will at times need tutoring to pass their college classes. More support programs are needed for African American students who aspire to graduate from college.

Although the data do not specifically show statistics about Black student-athletes, Black student-athletes continue to struggle with graduation rates as well. In fact, several researchers have found disparities in graduation rates between Black and White student-athletes who participate in collegiate sports (Harper & Gasman, 2008). Financial issues

also continue to be barriers to secure effective graduation rates (Hagedorn et al., 2001).

Future college preparation is vital for African American student-athletes to be successful in higher education.

African American Student-Athlete Experiences

Research on African American student-athletes revealed they endure several challenges while competing in college sports. For example, they get behind in assignments because of sport responsibilities (Reynolds et al., 2012). Reynolds et al., (2012) contended that student-athletes are unready for post-secondary education and not prepared for the task of good performance in their classes. They asserted that this lack of focus can lead to academic failures.

African American student-athletes' experiences in higher education gives educators an opportunity to help these students. From the beginning, athletic programs make them feel welcomed, but this inclusive component must be extended to the campus environment so they can feel a part of the college culture and be successful. A study by Braxton (2003) solidified the challenges that African American male and female student-athletes face while playing sports and balancing academics. According to Braxton, post-secondary institutions and college officials define success as the ability to attain projected objectives. Postsecondary institutions must continue to develop support initiatives to prepare these student-athletes of color for a college education in addition to a successful academic experience (Horton, 2009). Horton defined success as satisfying scholastic obligations to partake in sports at the community college in addition to having great athletic and academic performance to excel to a university's sports program post junior college.

Theoretical Framework: Socio-Ecological Outcome Theory

The main theory informing this research study is the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model. This model began as a broad examination of the experiences and outcomes of men of color at community colleges (Harris & Wood, 2016). The model focused on Latino, Black, Native American, and Asian men of color. In our country, postsecondary educators have struggled to develop support plans to enhance the success of men of color (Harris & Wood, 2016). Harris and Wood (2016) noted that higher education officials are concerned about this population's success because their academic performance is lower than their female and White peers. According to the *Digest of Education Statistics* (2021), under 20% of men of color complete their degrees at junior colleges within three years. Another study found that 26.5% of men of color who enrolled in junior college with the objective of transferring did not accomplish this goal until six years (Shapiro et al., 2017). Harris and Woods contended that these data are disturbing in that junior colleges are a gateway for men of color to transition to an undergraduate degree institution post-graduation. In my experience working with African American retention as a mentor of men of color, I have witnessed community colleges prepare them for a successful journey at a four-year institution.

A Community College Survey of Men (CCSM) was conducted to study the factors for academic prosperity at junior colleges. Harris and Wood (2016) wrote about their findings stating, "In response to the aforementioned outcome disparities, community colleges have increasingly relied on retention programs, conferences, and workshops aimed at enhancing outcomes for men of color" (p. 40). They acknowledged past research that has lacked data and research instruments to evaluate the challenges of men

of color at junior colleges. According to Harris and Wood (2016), “extrinsic mediators (e.g., familial responsibilities, employment, transportation) impact academic immersion (e.g., faculty interactions, active learning) through extrinsic outcomes (p. 41). The CCSM was highlighted as a valid research tool to examine the noncognitive elements as it relates to men of color experiences at junior colleges. As a result of this work, the authors developed the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model.

Theoretical Basis of Socio-Ecological Outcome Model

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes model transitioned from the examination of men of color to focus on Black men. According to Harris and Wood (2016), the model's five domains are centered on enhancing good student achievement for Black men in community colleges. Specifically, the authors expressed the significance of this comprehensive study to examine the experiences of Black men. The authors asserted that the:

...five domains model focuses exclusively on Black male student success in community colleges and was based on an interdisciplinary synthesis of relevant literature and research on the experiences of Black men in postsecondary education, community college student success, Black masculinity, and Black identity development. (Harris & Wood, 2016, p. 39)

These domains positions Black men for college success at higher education institutions, especially community colleges.

Although the five domains and the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model share a close correlation, they are different in a couple ways. The authors explained that the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model has a comprehensive range because it studies the lived

experiences and academic outcomes of all men of color, but the five domains are centered on Black men. The authors further asserted that the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model has undergone an extensive experiment that was analyzed by the CCSM. Because over four thousand men of color participated in the CCSM at several junior colleges:

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes model is more parsimonious than its predecessor in that it is composed of the most salient factors that are known to influence student success outcomes for men of color in community colleges and is a more accurate portrayal of the relationships and interactions between these factors.

(Harris & Wood, 2016, p. 37)

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes model and domains create an inclusive environment for Black men on college campuses.

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes model has the following key constructs: 1) inputs, 2) socio-ecological domains, and 3) outcomes. Harris and Wood (2016) began by featuring two constructs, background and societal factors, as inputs of the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model. They asserted that background factors such as a student's demographics, a student's registration status at the college, and their preparation for transition to college can affect their academic achievement. The authors noted that these background factors have been validated by scholarly research and can have an impact on student success. Harris and Wood argued that societal factors involving financial status, stereotypes, or prejudice can also lead to academic challenges in community colleges.

The authors also identified four domains that are relevant to the overall model. The first area was the noncognitive domain. Noncognitive skills is an important component of student success, including men of color. Harris and Wood argued that

extrinsic results and intrinsic mediators are two variables that intertwine and produce factors that enhance junior college student's advertency, which in turn leads to good scholastic achievements. An example of student advertency that helps academic achievement are student participation in study tables, focusing on upcoming exams, and perseverance to raise grades during semester challenges. The CCSM focused on the following noncognitive factors:

- sense of belonging
- degree utility
- self-efficacy
- intrinsic interest
- racial/gender climate (Harris & Wood, 2016).

Regarding sense of belonging, students who feel connected and included within the campus community experience this outcome. Degree utility prepares junior college students to be productive during their higher education journey. Next, students with self-efficacy possess self-assurance and the aptitude to be academically successful in their college environment. Intrinsic interest helps students to develop personal goals in addition to them having academic gratification. Finally, an inclusive racial/gender climate lets students, specifically men of color, feel serene with staff, instructors, and most importantly, peers in their college environment.

The academic domain encompasses relationships with college instructors, utilization of support and academic resources, and dedication to completing their major. Harris and Wood (2016) explained that "although these interactions are integral to the success of men of color, they are reluctant to pursue faculty interaction because they have the

perception that faculty are unsupportive and uncaring” (p. 39). The authors further contended that connection with academic advisors and frequent interaction with tutors can also lead to success under the academic domain. For example, I have personally recognized African American students-athlete’s struggles during a semester and secured them tutors, which resulted in them passing the classes.

The environmental domain involves students’ engagement with their external responsibilities, which results in a negative impact on their academic achievement (Harris & Wood, 2016). Examples of these external responsibilities are jobs that require extensive hours and family obligations as well. Other external responsibilities emphasized by the authors that affect students of color academic journey are “stressful life events, such as a divorce, death in the family, eviction/homelessness, or job loss” (Harris & Wood, 2016, p. 41). External responsibilities that include jobs or family commitments also affect Black student-athletes (Simiyu, 2012). It is important to acknowledge that these responsibilities can become overwhelming, involving time constraints that lead to poor academic performance for this population.

The Campus Ethos domain accentuated a couple components, sense of belonging and connectedness, that can help students prosper in college, specifically men of color. The internal validating component is effective if postsecondary educators are engaged in creating strategies, resources, and support initiatives to enhance the academic achievement of this population of students. Harris and Woods (2016) argued that internal validating “can be especially important for men of color who may have had invalidating educational experiences and relationships throughout their schooling” (p. 42). From my experience in higher education, a sense of belonging and connectedness intertwine and

are the most important variables under this domain. A sense of belonging promotes a hospitable college environment and the similar variable, connectedness, grasps the relationships that develop supportive settings at that institution.

Inputs combined with domains equal good outcomes under the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model. The unique interconnections between these components can lead to a successful academic journey for students of color, including men of color. According to Harris and Woods (2016), persistence, degree and certificate attainment, achievement as measured by grade point average, transfer, and other student goals are the result of the constructs and interactions that are depicted in the model (p.44). The authors recommended the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model for colleges working on students of color initiatives, especially postsecondary institutions who focus on programs for men of color.

Applying Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model to Black Female Student-Athletes

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes model acknowledges the experiences of men of color at community colleges. Black females endure those same challenges involving gender stereotypes, discrimination, and underrepresentation, especially Black female students-athletes (Smith, 2000; Ferguson, 2023). According to Ferguson (2023), our history highlights the marginalization of Black females both in higher education in general and in college sports in particular. Despite Black females thriving in higher education, the author expressed that exclusion remains present in the athletic arenas. It is important to expand the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model to explore the experiences of Black female student-athletes because the Black male and female student-athletes' challenges at the community college level share a close relationship.

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes model highlighted noncognitive, academic, environmental, and campus ethos as domains. These components can be applied to the experiences Black female student-athletes in the community college environment. Under noncognitive skills, gender and racial disparities can impact Black female student-athletes successful achieves. The academic domain can support this population during academic challenges and promote the resources that create a plan to balance both athletics and academics. The environmental can be extends to Black female student-athletes because the ensure some of the same, if not more, external challenges as Black male student-athletes. The campus ethos domain argues for promoting a sense of belonging. Athletic programs in higher education have been a male dominated sport (Cooper and Newton 2021). Sense of belonging may help Black female student-athletes feel valued and included not only in athletic spaces but the campus environment as well. A sense of belonging could help Black female student-athletes combat negative stereotypes, which can enhance their perseverance to be successful while participating in sports.

It is imperative to explore the expansion of the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model, to see if it may validate that Black female student-athletes experience similar challenges as the Black male student-athletes. As emphasized in this section, this model's domains display a mutual relation with female student-athletes' participation in junior college athletics. That is, the aspects of this theory can be modified to include this specific female group. Moreover, incorporating Black female student-athletes and testing this theory in a community college setting will enhance rich data during this study.

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes model aligns with my dissertation research. I will focus on the constructs in this model because I believe that they are effective strategies to support African American student-athletes. All the aspects of the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model will be beneficial beginning with evaluating the background of the African American student-athletes. Under societal factors, it is important that athletic departments in collaboration with the community colleges create a comfortable college environment free from microaggressions or any prejudice at that institution. Next, all the socio-ecological domains have postsecondary support elements that can support African American student-athletes. The noncognitive domain is the most effective component because it has inducements that promote student success. This model can produce motivation and good outcomes with the most important being persistence. I look forward to applying this theory to my intended research.

Research Questions

My experience working with African American student-athletes while they have endured academic obstacles- including probation and suspension from their sport-has led to the overarching research questions concerning how these student-athletes experience this type of challenge. This question leads to the following sub-questions:

- What factors have adversely impacted African American student-athletes' perseverance?
- How do African American male and female student-athletes feel community colleges can improve retention practices?
- What kind of supports do African American student-athletes feel they need to succeed after learning about their experiences?

- How did African American student-athletes feel about their academic challenges and suspension from their athletic team for unsatisfactory grades?

Significance

This topic is needed in our research community because it helps two-year colleges develop strategies to retain African American student-athletes. Low retention rates are a key indicator that African American student-athletes are struggling academically. When students are on academic probation and not eligible to participate in sports, it becomes the goal to help these population return to good academic standing, which in turn will reinstate their sports eligibility. There is only a small amount of research on African American student-athletes at the community college level. Therefore, the purpose of this study will be to examine how community colleges can improve onboarding and retention practices for Black student-athlete's academic outcomes.

African American males and females have historically been seriously disadvantaged in retention efforts. Learning more about student-athletes' experiences in community college contexts can help expand the understanding of these issues. This topic is needed in our research community. At the organizational level, it will help two-year colleges develop improved strategies to retain African American student-athletes. When students are on academic probation and not eligible to participate in sports, it becomes the goal to help these population return to good academic standing, which in turn will reinstate their sports eligibility. At the individual level, it will help expand knowledge about the experiences of African American student athletes in this context, as there is

very little research on African American student-athletes at the community college level.

This study will add important perspectives to that work.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Graduation rates are low at junior colleges in addition to college students-athletes becoming ineligible to participate in their sport because of poor academic grades, especially African American male, and female student-athletes at the community college level (NCES, 2020). It is essential for student-athletes to be able to balance both school and sport responsibilities if they expect to be successful. A significant number of African American student-athletes at the community college level continue to experience ineligibility because they were unable to perform at an academic level necessary to maintain their eligibility.

As highlighted in Chapter One, African American student-athletes experience academic challenges and eligibility issues for several reasons. According to Kissinger and Miller (2009), student-athletes often endure these six challenges: keeping a balance between sports and academics, bracing for athletic success versus failure from an emotional stability perspective, building good relationship with stakeholders, participating in social activities that neglect athletic duties, accepting the end of a college athletic career, and focusing on physical health while contemplating the possibility of injuries (p.18). Despite these challenges, student-athletes struggle with time management. Several notable scholars have expanded the research on college athlete's experiences (Hoffman, 2020; Staurowsky, 2011; Rakin et al., 2016). Godfrey (2010) emphasized that the biggest challenge that affects student-athletes' academics is "time constraints" that lead to class challenges and a loss of focus on academic goals in addition to being

overwhelmed (p.19). Although there is research at the university level, there is limited research at the community college level.

In this research review, I explore research involving the experiences of African American student-athletes in higher education. This research includes their encounters in predominantly White college environments, in historical Black college spaces, and African American experiences at community colleges. Next, I highlight research findings on African American student-athlete's persistence in higher education. Then, I examine literature involving the experiences of Black male student-athletes. After examination of this literature, I will discuss the implications of these findings as it relates to my dissertation research.

Experiences of African American Student-Athletes at Postsecondary Institutions

The literature on African American student-athletes in higher education is well established. The majority of the literature on the experiences of African American student-athletes was examined at the NCAA level. A plethora of existing literature compares student-athletes to non-athletes at the postsecondary level. There is a small amount of community college research as it relates to African American student-athletes.

African American student-athletes' experiences in higher education gives educators an opportunity to help these students. From the beginning, athletic programs make them feel welcomed, but this inclusive component must be extended to the campus environment so they can feel a part of the college culture. Because student-athletes research is broad and wide ranging in higher education, a small sample of such findings focusing on African American student-athletes will be presented in this review, including African American female student-athletes. Additional topics found during this research

review were African American student-athletes' experiences at (1) predominantly White institutions (PWIs), (2) at historical Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and (3) at community colleges.

African American Male Student-Athletes

African American male student-athletes is a popular research topic when compared to female student-athletes. Several authors have validated the importance of studying and understanding the experience of Black male student-athletes in higher education (Harrison et al., 2015; Cooper, 2016; Hawkins et al., 2017). According to Harrison et al. (2015), examining the scholastic motivation of African American male student-athletes is needed to enhance their academic experiences. Additionally, Shaun Harper (2018) explored the experience of Black male student-athletes, which included Latino student-athletes as well. Harper affirmed the overrepresentation of Black male student-athletes at the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) level.

The academic challenges of Black male student-athletes are not new to this research. According to Harper, one of the reasons for this underachievement of Black student-athletes is because they were recruited from less prestigious high schools with insufficient resources, which likely underprepared them for the rigors of college level academic work” (p. 4). Racial barriers were present in the past for African American male student-athletes, and they continue to exist in higher education's athletic programs. Although issues facing African American male student-athletes are a broad topic, several authors have narrowed the topic to a specific number of areas. African American and Black interrelates in this paper and are used interchangeably based on the author's

research. Feelings of exploitation, self-perceptions, and racism are a few themes that have been experienced by African American male student-athletes.

Experience with Exploitation

Exploitation happens when an individual or organization takes advantage of a person or group of people with the goal of gain something, for example, a monetary profit. Several authors have explored postsecondary institution's exploitation of Black student-athletes for profit (c.f., Sellers, 2000; Singer, 2005; Smith, 2009). In his book *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions*, Hawkins (2010) acknowledged the history and continued exploitation of Black student-athletes in higher education. The author found that Black student-athletes continue to be used as prized assets to generate monetary gains at these institutions of capitalism. Hawkins highlighted his own experience with being exploited as a Black athlete at a small private school. The author contended that student-athletes come and go in these intercollegiate sports programs but exploitation and objectives to collect increased profits through capitalist initiatives remain the same.

Scholars have also compared exploitation to economic deprivation due to student-athletes' success and economic benefits being ignored because of the athletic program's revenue goal. Cooper (2012) examined the sociological imagination of Black Student-athletes' experiences at PWIs. Although the author highlighted several themes about the experiences of Black student-athletes at PWIs, economic deprivation correlated with the exploitation of Black student-athletes at these institutions. Cooper argued that the economic exploitation of Black student-athletes at NCAA colleges is similar to the historical exploitation of Blacks in our country.

The history of exploitation of African American student-athletes in higher education is startling. A review of the studies in these exploitation themes shows that colleges care more about athletic revenue instead of investing in these African American student-athletes' academic prosperity and professional career growth. Although the revenue is less at junior colleges, the presence of exploitation is still racialized at these two-year institutions among African American student-athletes.

Self-Perceptions

Self-perception is how people view themselves. Self-perceptions can lead to positive outcomes for African American student-athletes. Bimper et al. (2013) studied the self-perceptions and behaviors that led to seven Black male student-athletes' success in balancing their roles as students and athletes during their college experience. Poor scholastics performances of Black male student-athletes have been at the forefront of creating support programs and initiatives by the NCAA. Bimper et al. expressed that despite the academic challenges at colleges that produce significant amounts of monies, Black male student-athletes showcase their athletic talents while participating in their sport. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as a theoretical framework for this research study. Bimper et al. contended that Black male student-athletes acknowledged that race is embedded in their experiences as Black male student-athletes. They explained:

Their experiences at this particular institution and evaluation of others' social perceptions had a significant impact on their identity development with regard to meanings about their Blackness, role as an athlete, system of beliefs about education, and the way in which advantageous learning environments may be constructed to better serve their needs as Black student-athletes (p. 110).

The authors emphasized the significance of fostering meaningful opportunities to develop healthy Black male student-athlete's identities and academic achievement.

Some college environments can affect self-perceptions. Howe (2023) explored how historical White institutions (HWIs) and Division I athletic environments impact self-presentation of Black male student-athletes from a critical theory perspective. The author's study revealed that Black male student-athletes felt excluded in HWI spaces because of the presence of whiteness. Howe found that intercollegiate sports programs and college settings at HWI's can impact self-presentation. Both Howe (2023) and Bimper et al.'s (2013) research confirms that an athlete's self-perception leads to them believing in themselves and, in turn, allows them to successfully balance academic and sports responsibilities. Positive self-perceptions can enhance student-athletes' scholastic achievement, drive, and self-confidence (Gruman et al., 2016). Self-perceptions can help student-athletes evaluate themselves. This assessment gives student-athletes an opportunity to boost self-confidence. A self-assessment can increase confidence together with improving academic and athletic performance.

Experiences with Racism

The experience with racism is not new among African American student-athletes. Martin et al. (2010) explored African American male student-athletes' academic experiences and confidence about their academic achievement. Stereotype threat and stereotype reactance were investigated in relation to findings. Martin et al. found that African American male student-athletes deal with stereotypes and stigmas on traditionally White campuses. The author acknowledged that these African American male student-athletes had to continuously prove that they were valuable to attend these

PWIs. The exclusivity of the predominantly White campus environment can cause a negative stereotype or make this population of students feel unwelcomed.

Racism has continued to persist at PWIs. Singer (2016) studied African American male student-athletes' narratives on education and racism. The author utilized CRT to gain an understanding of the impact of racism at PWIs. Singer found that the African American student-athletes felt the presence of racism in this campus environment. In a similar study, Bimper (2015) employed CRT to explore the influence of post-racial narratives and colorblind racism as it relates to Black student athlete experiences. The author found that colorblind racism had an impact on Black athlete's experiences with racism.

Studies about African American student-athletes in community college settings are imperative. In relation to my research of African American student-athletes at junior colleges, Horton (2015) stressed the importance of examining the academic experience and progress of Black male student-athletes at the community college level. Horton acknowledged that this study was a good pathway to expand the research of Black male athlete's academic achievement at these two-year colleges. Despite the effort to eradicate racism in higher education, racism still exist in the college spaces of two-year and four-year colleges. The research under this theme on racism in higher education posits that it will be a very difficult task to eliminate not only racism but systemic racism practices within these institutions. African American male athlete's feelings of exploitation, racism, and their self-perceptions can be barriers in an academic environment, and most importantly, their academic success. These experiences are even more of a strenuous hindrance for African American community college student-athletes.

African American Female Student-Athletes

Research of African American female student-athletes is equally important in higher education. As emphasized in the previous section, there is a small amount of research of female student-athletes versus African American male student-athletes. African American female student-athletes deserve representation at all levels of collegiate sports. In fact, they continue to experience inequities while participating in sports programs in higher education.

Black female college athlete's experiences are impacted as it relates to their intersectionality. Francique (2018) studied the need for intercollegiate athletic departments and their administrators to foster a sense of belonging for Black female student-athletes. The author used Strayhorn's sense of belonging theory. Francique contended that Black female college athlete's experiences can be "enhanced through inclusive excellence rooted in the sense of belonging elements" (p. 61). She expressed the need for intercollegiate athletic departments to create inclusive spaces for Black female student-athletes with diversity and inclusion policies that encourage their identity development and invest in their academic engagement and career aspirations.

Athletic opportunities are at times nonexistent because of players' Black and female identity. Francique (2013) studied the experiences of Black female student-athletes who partook in a culturally relevant co-curricular leadership program. The author highlighted how the participants' experiences of being Black and a female involved encountering racial and gender discrimination. To defeat this "double bind", Francique expressed the need for Black females who are involved in culturally relevant programs to be given the opportunity to reflect on their marginalized status within a PWI (p. 90).

Scholars have also examined the college environments that Black female Student-athletes reside in to understand their experiences. Ofoeegbu (2023) analyzed Black female student-athletes' narratives within athletic PWI environments and found that race plays a part of Black female student-athletes' relationships with coaches, co-players, and the support of athletic advisors compared to academic advisors. In a similar study, Ferguson (2023) explored how Black female student-athletes' experiences included having to combat racial injustice at PWIs. Ferguson found that PWIs continue to be a campus environment of exclusivity for Black female student-athletes. The author also found that Black female student-athletes who protested these college institutions' marginalized spaces were able effect change within that campus community.

Black female student-athletes' voices are just as important in college athletics. Bruening (2005) found that because of the underrepresentation of African American female student-athletes, especially in the NCAA, they have been inadequately represented in higher education sports contributed to their silencing and marginalization.

African American female student-athletes have secured and continue to secure astounding accolades on our athletic college platform; however, disparities continue to exist in these college spaces. These disparities share a close relationship with the intersectionality of these student-athletes' race and gender. In addition to intersectionality, African American student-athletes continue to lack opportunities, and most importantly, representation on this athletic platform. With that said, it is important to expand the research on African American female student-athletes in the future to work toward defeating their continued challenges in college spaces.

African American Student-Athletes Experiences at Community Colleges

Community colleges are a good pathway for student-athletes and students of color, specifically for Black students. Several studies have focused on Black men in the community college environment. As described in Chapter One, Harris and Wood's (2016), Socio-Ecological Outcome model is centered on enhancing good student achievement for Black men in community colleges. This research was expanded by David Horton. According to Horton (2015), community colleges continue to serve a diverse population of students, which include African American student-athletes. Decades of literature have focused on the experiences of student-athletes of color at 4-year institutions instead of two-year institutions. Mendoza et al. (2012) stated that "athletic programs often serve as the primary motivation for many individuals to pursue higher education, especially prospective students from low income and ethnic minority backgrounds" (p. 202). Junior colleges continue to play a significant role in advancing education and encouraging perseverance among minority students.

Persistence factors can be expanded to several different populations to motivate academic success. One important researcher in this area is J. Luke Wood (2012), whose research has focused on Black men in higher education, including community colleges. Similar to my research, Wood's research has been dedicated to advancing the outcomes of Black men at junior colleges. Wood and Williams (2013) studied persistence variables as it relates to Black male students at community colleges. The authors examined persistence variables in the following four domains: 1) background variables, 2) academic variables, 3) social variables, and 4) environmental variables. The authors found that participation in intramural sports, extracurricular activities, conversations and

interactions with faculty, study habits, the number of hours worked weekly, support for others, and life stress were predictive of persistence. Wood and Williams also found that environmental variables were significantly more predictive of persistence than variables in the other domains. Persistence sparks student's drive and motivates their determination to complete their goals.

Support at the community college level is even more vital for student-athletes. Horton (2009) examined the impact of athletic participation on community college students. Horton found that it was important for coaches and executive leaders at these junior colleges to focus on advancing the success of student-athletes, creating prosperous athletic programs, and assuring that the students and athletic program's initiatives are accomplished. The author also found that student-athletes can be successful at balancing both academics and sports with (1) the assistance of academic and athletic staff, (2) allocating funds not only for students but for student athlete support, and (3) promoting diligent faculty engagement with the student-athletes as advocates, for tutoring support, and most importantly, mentorship. A strong support system at junior colleges can lead to athletic and academic aspirations.

African American student-athletes academic achievement is a significant goal at the community college level. Another study by Horton (2015) examined differences between pre-college traits and academic performance between Black male student-athletes and their student-athlete peers. Horton found that Black males secured 72% of the credits per their enrollment. The author also found differences between socio-economic groups among Black males. According to Horton "individuals identified as high socio-economic status (SES) earned approximately 82% of credit hours enrolled,

compared with those identified as low SES, which earned 67% of credit hours attempted” (p. 300). In addition to SES factors, Horton also found differences between preparation for college and degrees completed. Research on this population will pave the way for future African American males’ experiences at junior colleges. In correlation to community college research, several prominent scholars have examined the retention of Black college students at two-year institutions (Strayhorn, 2012; Wood & Harris, 2016).

After review of the above studies, the available literature on African American student-athletes at community colleges is lacking. These studies findings include retaining and improving African American athlete’s academic achievement, but the research does not go in depth about this population’s experiences in these junior college settings.

Predominantly White Institutions

Research on PWIs is well established as it relates to minority college student-athletes. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2009), Blacks as a racial and ethnic minority group are underrepresented within institutions of higher education, specifically within PWIs. Ofoegbu (2022) examined the academic experiences of Black female student-athletes at PWIs. The author expressed the need for higher education institutions, especially PWIs, to understand how race and gender converge in addition to learning about Black female student-athletes encounters in these academic campus spaces. Ofoegbu found that Black student-athletes at PWI’s struggled with balancing academic and athletic roles, responsibilities, and priorities. The author’s study also revealed experiences of being the only Black girl in the classroom; and aspects

of preparing for life after sports. PWI's development of support initiatives will create an inclusive environment for Black student-athletes.

Underrepresentation of Black college student-athletes has been a prevalent topic at PWIs. Theune (2022) evaluated the overrepresentations and underrepresentation of Black male student-athletes at PWIs. In a comparison of Black and White male students, he found that Black males were more likely to be underrepresented and non-athletic White students overrepresented as students who play on lucrative collegiate sports teams, for example, football and basketball. Theune emphasized that these findings correlate with the interest convergence element under CRT because conscription of Black male student-athletes is viewed as advancing athletic integration over academic integration.

Social capital can enhance the scholastic success of student-athletes (Carter-Francique et al., 2015). In this context, social capital means the resources and opportunities available to Black student-athletes from faculty, staff, and athletic departments at higher education institutions.

Carter-Francique et al. (2015) studied how social capital, and social support can enhance the academic achievement of Black student-athletes at PWIs. The authors found that Black student-athletes' scholastic achievement was dependent on their relationship with faculty due to their positive and negative connection in the camps environment. Carter-Francique et al. also established the need for a call to action to athletic departments to develop initiatives involving parent involvement with the goal of supporting student-athlete's acclimation and enrollment at that postsecondary institution.

The presence of exclusion in college spaces at PWIs has been experienced by Black student-athletes. Melendez (2008) explored the social experiences of a small group

of Black football players at PWIs in the U.S. The author noted that little attention has focused on Black student-athletes' psychosocial experiences at these PWIs. Melendez found Black football players felt isolated, excluded, and felt wary of their White peers and teammates. The author also found that the football players felt the presence of negative judgments in that campus environment, including their coaches. In addition to their exclusive stance at this PWI, Melendez emphasized that the Black football players also experienced team, campus, and city issues that affected their emotional and academic achievements. Several other authors have highlighted the mistreatment and negative impact of Black student-athletes (c.f., Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Comeaux, 2010, 208; Walsh et al., 2024). Inclusion at PWI's creates a welcoming and equitable campus environment for all student, including Black student-athletes.

Acclimation to classes and sports has also been a barrier in PWI environments. Chaplin and Lim (2020) studied the experiences of Black student-athletes at a PWI as it relates to their academic preparation and expectations in higher education. According to Chaplin and Lim, balancing both academic and sport responsibilities often is a challenge, especially at PWIs (p. 17). They found that 1) Black student-athletes struggle to balance academic and sports unless they make the education component their number one goal, 2) faculty and college administrators must continue to create inclusive spaces and support mechanisms for this population so that they can thrive through their educational attainments, and 3) Black student-athletes were empowered when they paved their own academic journey, which consisted of self-empowerment, extra studying, and most importantly, the determination to succeed.

Collectively, the above research solidifies the unwelcoming environment at PWIs and expresses the need for these institutions to develop strategic initiatives to promote inclusivity. Although colleges and universities promote educational achievement before sports, research highlighted the gap between the support for Black student-athletes versus White student-athletes at PWIs (Chaplin & Lim, 2020). At times, student-athletes focus more on playing their sport compared to their academic grades.

Historical Black Colleges and Universities

HBCUs have also been included in the research of Black student-athletes. Cooper and Hawkins (2012) examined factors relating to the academic accomplishments and positive college experiences among Black male student-athletes at a Historically Black University (HBU) in the Southeastern U.S. Cooper and Hawkins found that the participants in this study enrolled at this HBU because it gave them the chance to participate in their sport at the college level. The authors contended that the Black male student-athletes perceived their experience at MU as a good opportunity for them to enhance their academics, athletics, and social life. Cooper and Hawkins contended that Black male participants at this HBU possessed a good chance at advancing constructive and encouraging relationships with instructors, academic peers, staff, and other individuals associated with this higher education institution. The authors also found that good relationships with instructors, small class size, and productive academic support resources impacted the academic achievement of these Black male student-athletes.

A strong support system is needed for the success of Black student-athletes. Similar to the previous study, Cooper et al. (2016) conducted a mixed methods study about student-athletes' experiences at Black colleges. In particular, the authors were

interested in learning about Black student-athletes' experiences at HBCUs in the Southeastern U.S. Cooper et al. pointed out academic struggles of Black student-athletes in higher education. A restructure of higher education institutions is needed to support Black student-athletes. The rigorous schedules of this student population often became overwhelming. Cooper's et al. meta inferences found a strong relationship between individuals associated with the HBCU, a nurturing family campus environment, and a higher education institution dedicated to holistic development. The first meta inference highlighted relationships with mentors, coaches, and family to encourage their HBCU journey. Next, the author showed how relationships with HBCU faculty created a family environment. The last meta inference focused on student-athlete's inspiration to be a high achieving student first and an athlete second in addition to the college's promotion of their holistic development toward a college degree (Cooper et al., 2016).

A strong foundation can also motivate Black female student-athletes in a HBCU setting. Cooper and Newton (2021) examined the college experiences involving the academic, athletic, and social status of two groups of Black female student-athletes at HBCUs. The sense of belonging theory was used in this study to explore how Black female student-athletes guide their college experiences and cope with their multiple identities, which include race, gender, and athletic status at a HBCU. Copper and Newton found that Black female student-athletes felt a sense of belonging in HBCU environments, especially with the presence of a large population of people they could relate to from an ethnic perspective. That is, the environment of Black students, coaches, and faculty made me feel a part of the campus community. Under their academic experience, the authors found that the Black female had great relationships as it relates to

Black female athlete's athletic experiences. In addition to Cooper examinations of HBCUs, several prominent scholars have found that HBCUs produced positive experiences for Black students (Black & Jones, 2021; Foster, 2022).

Notwithstanding the differences among HBCUs and PWIs research in advancing Black student-athletes, there is a connection within these findings as it relates to these postsecondary institutions. That is, PWIs can learn from HBCUs. This will entail PWIs adopting HBCUs practices as a mentor component and to enhance the academic success of students of all backgrounds (Shueler et al., 2022). This will include African American student-athletes in these sport programs.

Persistence of African American Student-Athletes in Higher Education

Persistence is an important component while competing in sports, especially for African American student-athletes. Unfortunately, obstacles to persistence exist among African American student-athletes. Leaders and faculty have continued to work on improving the persistence of this population at postsecondary institutions (Hyatt, 2003).

Mentorship is a good strategy to enhance student persistence at PWIs. Sato et al. (2018) explored the mentorship experiences of Black student-athletes attending undergraduate programs at PWIs. The participants consisted of six Black student-athletes. Self-determination and transformation leadership theories were utilized in this study. The authors used a case study design to collect data. Sato et al. developed the following themes upon the conclusion of a data analysis: (a) mentoring study habits and routines, (b) mentoring academic schedule and time management, (c) personal development within an isolated environment, and (d) family members' support and encouragement. As a support component for Black student-athletes at PWIs, Sato et al. (2018) recommended

that “athletic department administrators, coaches, faculty, and all students should be encouraged to respect, value, and embrace the racial identities, origins, languages, and cultures of the student-athletes that are being mentored (p. 562).

Motivating student-athletes is key to educational attainment as it relates to persistence. Gaston-Gales (2004) conducted a study on athletics and academic motivation and how it enhances academic performance. According to Gaston-Gayles (2004), the performance of student-athletes is an ongoing challenge for collegiate institutions. In this quantitative study, the author used the regression model to test the relationship of several variables that could lead to academic success. The following variables were measured:

- college GPA
- ACT score
- highest level of mother’s education
- highest level of father’s education
- career athletic motivation
- academic motivation
- student-athlete motivation (Gaston-Gayles, 2004).

Gaston-Gayles found that American College Test (ACT) scores, ethnicity, and academic motivation was essential in projecting academic performance. The author was not astonished by the results of the ethnicity data. Gaston-Gayles emphasized that Black student-athletes’ poor graduation rates will continue to be an obstacle in higher education. The author further noted that their academic preparedness is not supported during their transition from high school to college.

Skill development is needed to strengthen perseverance among African American student-athletes. Hyatt (2003) highlighted the non-cognitive variables that impact persistence among African American student-athletes. Hyatt (2003) noted a plethora of “criticism and discussion both on and off college campuses regarding the low graduation rates of student-athletes, particularly African American males competing in the sports of football and basketball” (p. 265). Because of these challenges, Hyatt informed us of policies developed by the NCAA with the goal of enhancing academic achievement and improving graduation rates of student-athletes. The author also noted the athletic program’s lack of understanding of student-athletes of color served at their postsecondary institution. Hyatt highlighted discrimination, integration, commitment, and isolation as non-cognitive variables that were recognized as barriers to persistence in the African American and student-athlete populations. Hyatt pointed out that the racism and discrimination that still exist at these higher education institutions, which affects African American athlete’s persistence. The author also expressed that African American student-athletes do not feel a part of the campus community and lack that integration with peers and faculty, which in turn, decreases their persistence. Hyatt also emphasized that African American student-athletes are not committed to their college goals. Lastly, the author affirmed that these barriers act as a domino effect in that they lead to isolation among African American student-athletes, which affect their social and academic integration in a college environment.

Student-athletes racial minority status can impact their academic success as well. Another study by Francique et al. (2013) explored Black student-athletes’ perceptions of academic success and how social support leads to their academic success. Just like some

of the previous studies, Francique et al. utilized CRT to gauge the social realities and academic experiences of racial minorities within the college's academic environment. Narrative interviews were used to collect data as it relates to the experiences of Black college student-athletes. Francique et al. found that Black players' social support stemmed from their status as a student-athlete and as a racial minority. In fact, the author solidified that social support for these Black student-athletes involved social isolation and alienation at this PWI. Francique et al. acknowledged the NCAA's definition of academic success, which included grade point averages and graduation. Francique expressed the importance of PWI's recognizing how student-athletes grasp academic success and value social support so that institutions can promote achieving academic success for Black student-athletes and a diverse population of students.

A plethora of student support services for college students can lead to successful accomplishments. Johnson et al. (2022) examined the help-seeking behavior of a Foundation Program and undergraduate students at Qatar University (QU) to grasp the student's utilization of campus support services. Although this article did not involve African American student-athletes, this framework of support service is needed to enhance the persistence of this population of students. Our country's higher education institutions have student support services that enhance student performance, improve students' success, and boost students' chances at achieving third degree (Johnson et al., 2022). Student support services programs' success depends on students' help-seeking behavior. The exploration of the campus services was needed to better understand students' use of these support services. During this study Johnson et al. analyzed the correlation between help-seeking behavior as it relates to support service, student

success, and persistence in two consecutive semesters. At-risk students were also examined in this study. Johnson et al. found a significant correlation between students' services and student success and persistence. The author also found a significant difference between at-risk students' majors and at-risk students in STEM. In addition to these findings, Johnson et al. found a variance in the help-seeking behavior among males and females, nationals and non-nationals, and student classifications.

College support services are even more imperative for African American student-athletes. DeFrancesco and Gropper (1996) conducted a quantitative study exploring the differences that exist between the needs of African American student-athletes and the perceptions of those needs held by university educators and non-athlete students in relation to the effectiveness of student-support services. During my experience working with African American student-athletes in higher education, I have witnessed resources and student support service lead to persistence for this population of students. Comparing African American student-athletes to non-student athletes, the authors found that 52% of Black student-athletes contended that it was hard for professors to view them as academically serious students. They also found differences between groups in relation to the academic and career choices of African American student-athletes.

There is diverse research on improving persistence in higher education, including a small amount of literature at the community level. For example, Wood and Harris (2016) found data items that were foreseen to improve persistence for Black male students at junior college. However, because community college research is dearth, the above research and findings on persistence support the needs to understand persistence from a student-athlete perspective at the community college level.

Onboarding Practices

Onboarding is a term usually used as an employment technique. Onboarding supports individuals as they become familiar with an institution's values, policies, and organizational development (Richardson et al., 2021). In this study, onboarding is explored from a student-athlete perspective. From a higher education perspective, onboarding can help students become familiar with the college environment, the culture, and student development resources. Coaches and athletic department staff can check-in with their student-athletes every two weeks during the semester to get feedback on challenges, academic support, and to determine if they are meeting their goals. These onboarding check-ins will give student-athletes confidence in completing long-term goals. Onboarding in collaboration with orientation can provide a solid foundation for these struggling student-athletes to become motivated.

Onboarding techniques can consist of additional support at the college preparation level, during the transition to college, and during their academic journey. Onboarding practices should begin when student-athletes are high school students and express interest to play sports at your college. This process consists of making sure their scholarship is applied, including assisting them to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) if the scholarship does not pay for the full tuition. During their transition to college, a good onboarding method is developing a good relationship with the advising department and connecting with an advisor to register for classes. During a student-athlete's first semester, another onboarding tip is to reiterate resources, including tutoring for classes that are challenges. Effective onboarding can produce a successful college transformation for freshman student-athletes.

Student-athletes, especially African American players, need more than orientation. They need onboarding strategies that promote academic success. These onboarding methods include study tables for the student-athletes. Because student-athletes have busy sports schedules, study tables are key to focusing on academic assignments, which will enhance academic achievement. Another onboarding strategy is introducing the student-athletes to the college learning lab coordinators so they can have another academic support resource. Coaches can also utilize onboarding tips by showing student-athletes how to connect with their college professors during office hours when they do not understand a class assignment, concepts, or terms for an upcoming test. All of these onboarding practices can help student-athletes progress towards academic accomplishments.

Implications for The Current Study

A plethora of existing literature has examined African American student-athletes at the NCAA Division I level, specifically 4-year institutions including PWIs and HBCUs. Popular research topics have focused on retention rates, graduation rates, transfer rates, racism in college environments, student support services, and small amounts of persistence. In fact, research on the experiences of African American students who participate in sports at community colleges has not been given much attention. With that said, a gap exists in the research of African American student-athletes in 4-year institutions compared to two-year institutions.

Research also lacks studies about African American female athlete's academic challenges at the community college level. This literature review highlights studies on African American female student-athletes but again these explorations were at 4-year

institutions in the NCAA program. A reason for this limited research could be that females outperform male student-athletes academically; however, that has not been my experience. During my experience working at a community college with African American players, female student-athletes have struggled academically, been placed on probation, which in turn, led to them not being eligible to play on their sports teams. An exploration of how to support and develop initiatives to improve African American student-athlete's academic outcomes would add to this research and offer recommendations for new programming and practices at two-year postsecondary institutions. In my research, I will conduct a qualitative study that will allow me to gain a deeper understanding of these student-athletes' struggles and establish data that helps understand their lived experiences in a community college setting. Specifically, I plan to gather in-depth insights into the arduous issues of Black student-athletes retention, persistence, and scholastic challenges, which can help athletic departments at junior colleges develop support initiatives to improve academic success rates.

The studies examined in this literature review used a diverse number of methods to combat the barriers and improve the experiences for African American student-athletes in higher education. To summarize the research in this review, all of the literature express the dire need to support African American student-athletes as it relates to inclusivity in college environments, retention or graduation rates, improving academic achievements and resources to elude probation, defeating racism in these campus communities, enhancing persistence, combating policies, practices and barriers involving systematic racism, and most importantly, creating a better experience for this population of students in community college environments. Despite this research, there remains a void in

understanding the experiences of African American male and female student-athletes at community colleges. Extensive evaluations on the issues of African American student athlete's retention and academic challenges in community college setting are needed. It is imperative that future research focuses on plans to enhance academic achievements and retention rates for these populations of students. Although strategic initiatives are essential for future athletic programs, support is the key to improving African American student-athletes experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American student-athletes at Midwest community colleges, specifically exploring the academic challenges and how their athletic eligibility is impacted by academic probation. For this study, interviews served as the primary data source. A review of social media posts served as a secondary source. This information offered richness as it relates to the academic challenges of the participants as well as deeper insight of lived experiences of African American community college student-athletes. This chapter provides an overview of key research questions, research design, population and sample, instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Questions

My background working with African American student-athletes while they have endured academic obstacles- including probation and suspension from their sport-has led to the following overarching research question concerning how these student-athletes experience this type of challenge.

The research sub-questions for this study were:

- 1) What factors have adversely impacted African American student-athletes' perseverance?
- 2) How do African American male and female student-athletes feel community colleges can improve retention practices?

- 3) What types of supports do African American student-athletes feel they need to succeed after learning about their experiences?
- 4) How do African American student-athletes feel about their academic challenges and suspension from their athletic team for unsatisfactory grades?

Researcher's Positionality

I have worked with a community college athletic department for over five years. This community college has over 13,000 students. It is a public two-year institution located in an urban area of a midwestern state. The athletic department has the following seven sports teams: softball, baseball, men's basketball, women's basketball, wrestling, golf, and volleyball. The men's and women's basketball teams are predominantly African American players. During my time at this postsecondary institution, I have watched a myriad of African American student-athletes placed on academic probation. I became passionate about supporting this population of students to help them return to good standing. We developed a program and several resources to assist student-athletes academically during their season. Unfortunately, our program and athletic initiatives did not decrease the academic hardships of African American student-athletes.

My dedication to help these students stemmed from these repeated experiences with students experiencing academic challenges at community colleges. Every semester, many African American student-athlete's GPAs fall below a 2.0, which results in academic ineligibility to play sports. Some of these student-athletes were disadvantaged students, which highlighted the demand for more support components. Research at the community college level will establish a better understanding of these disadvantaged students' experiences and future resources to achieve academic success. During my

study, I examined the experiences of African American student-athletes as it relates to their college readiness, academic motivation, lack of assistance, athletic eligibility, and balancing academics and sports

Research Design

This study's qualitative research design was exploratory in nature. A qualitative approach is useful to understanding human experiences and enabling researchers to collect and analyze rich data through open ended questions, which quantitative measures cannot provide (Tenny et al., 2018). Moreover, qualitative research is implemented when the "why" and "how" factors are examined under the phenomenon. For this study, interviews served as the primary data source. A review of social media posts was used as a secondary source. This data offered richness as it relates to the academic challenges of the participants as well as deeper insight of lived experiences of African American community college student-athletes.

I used a phenomenological approach to learn about the lived experiences of this population of students. Phenomenology prioritizes participants' first-hand accounts of their life experiences over specific periods of time (Lester, 1999). Phenomenological studies have several strengths in comparison to other qualitative approaches. While all qualitative approaches are methods that allow the researcher to explore in-depth issues, there are differences among these approaches. Phenomenology research entails understanding the lived experience of a participant. Moreover, a phenomenology method can acquire a deep understanding of that experience. This in-depth examination can lead to rich and descriptive data. In contrast, a case study, for example, is a research method that explores a single event or case, including specific people or situations. Narrative

research, another example, explores human experiences just as phenomenology studies. However, narrative methods strategically analyze individual's stories. My phenomenological study provided a safe and inclusive space so African American student-athletes can share their experiences.

Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that investigates what one has encountered during life. There are multiple definitions of phenomenology, but in lay terms, phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that plans to delineate a phenomenon by studying it from the perspective of individuals who have experienced it (Neubauer et al., 2019). According to Neubauer et al. (2019) "The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of this experience—both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced" (p. 93). The school of philosophy interrelates with phenomenology. The authors noted that it is imperative for researchers to celebrate on a philosophy they acknowledge when selecting a phenomenological research method. This reflection can establish a solid foundation during their research.

There is a diverse number of perspectives as it relates to phenomenology. Several phenomenological authors established that human beings extract meaning from the world through personal experience pick a few authors (Husserl, 1931; Hourigan and Edgar, 2020). According to Jarvis (1987), "Investigating the experience of individuals is a highly complex phenomenon because the phenomenon is psychologically oriented, culturally driven, and socially structured (p. 166). In my study, I used a phenomenological approach to learn about the lived experienced of African American student-athlete's academic challenges at community colleges. A phenomenological inquiry gave me the opportunity to utilize multiple data sources to understand my phenomenon. Exploring the experiences

of African Americans student-athletes under phenomenology also let me grasp how the athlete's academic challenges affected their athletic eligibility. I am passionate about supporting African American student-athletes to return to good standing, and most importantly, overcome academic barriers so they can have a successful balance between sports and coursework. I was inspired to have the chance to interview, conduct an analysis, and highlight the experiences of African American student-athletes, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Yin (2009) expressed the importance of criteria in research because it affords the researcher to choose "information -rich" studies that align with the topic and research questions. The author also emphasized that criteria allow that the collected data produces in-depth perspectives as it pertains to the phenomenon being examined. Yin further explained that criteria-based sampling would enhance the validity and reliability of the findings by choosing participants that can bring out the most relevant experiences under the study.

Research Site and Participant Selection Process

Interview Participant Site and Selection Process

My research study took place in a Midwestern state. I chose this research site because a substantial number of African American students participate in athletics at Midwestern community colleges compared to other geographical location. There are 40,000 African American students enrolled in this state's junior colleges every year (CEPI, 2023). According to Carmardelle et al. (2022), community colleges are a significant gateway to higher education for Black students, and more than 36 % of all Black undergraduate students are enrolled in our country's community colleges. The

authors also noted that community colleges offer cheaper colleges fees than four-year college tuition in addition to offering more flexibility for students as well.

Purposive sampling was used for this research study, which entailed interviews with three African American-student-athletes. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) “purposive sampling involves researchers “using their judgment to select a sample that they believe, based on prior information, will provide the data they need” (p. 114).

Purposive sampling aligned with obtaining data responses to my research questions.

The guidelines for qualitative research are diverse as it pertains to sample size. Typically, the sample size under qualitative research is kept relatively small. According to Sim et al., (2018), sample size approximation in qualitative research is appropriate and an imperative element as it pertains to the reliability of qualitative research. The authors posited that establishing a sample size early in your project satisfies stipulations of the institution’s review board (IRB), allows researchers to map out a time and monetary plan, and gives one leverage with funding agencies. Although the number of participants is vague in the qualitative research community, the authors pointed out that sample size is dependent on the following elements: a) theoretical, b) ideological, c) methodological, d) epistemological, and e) practical issue.

My research study focused on African American student-athletes attending community colleges. The study was open to both male and female student-athletes. Community colleges in the Midwest and student-athletes at these two-year colleges are managed by National Junior College NJCAA has 24 separate regions across 24 states in the U.S. and is divided into 3 divisions, Division I, II, and III. The NJCAA is very strict about student-athletes on academic probation. Student-athletes must pass a minimum of

12 credit hours with a 2.0 GPA or higher during the academic semester to remain eligible to play on the team. The student-athletes picked for this study were chosen because they could give the best insight on their experience with obstacles that affect good academic accomplishments and eligibility issues.

I collaborated with an athletic director at a community college to select African American male and female student-athletes. The initial point of contact entailed an email and text to the participants. The athletic director proclaimed the opportunity to volunteer for my qualitative study to African American student-athletes. Although all races of student-athletes academically struggle at two-year colleges, several years of data has shown that African American student-athletes endure academic challenges more frequently. African American student-athletes who are on academic probation and not eligible to play sports will be the focus of this exploration. The athletic director forwarded me the contact information of the African American student-athletes who were interested in partaking in this research. The selection process consisted of choosing eight to ten participants.

The athletic director reached out to the participants and requested permission for me to have their contact information. She forwarded me the contact information of five African American student-athletes. Four student-athletes attended her college, and one player was her mentee who attended another community college in her district. I sent emails and texts to these student-athletes explaining my research and asked them if they would like to volunteer to participate in my study. Two participants volunteered to participate, and the other three students declined via email. Via sampling, the participants who volunteered for my study provided referrals for two of their friends who

were competing in community college sports during that time. After getting their permission, I emailed them my research, and both students agreed to participate in my study. After a couple weeks, one of the participants changed their mind and declined.

I reached out to multiple community college athletic directors and coaches to recruit additional African American student-athletes for my study, but they were not receptive to me having access or interviewing their academic probation student-athletes. One of the athletic directors set up a meeting with me. He told me that conducting research on African American student-athletes involving academic probation is a touchy subject and this is the reason I received resistant with recruiting participants at their colleges. After over 50 emails to athletic directors and coaches at community colleges, only one athletic director helped me with recruitment. This left me with three participants. A phone conversation was conducted with each athlete to confirm participation and their eligibility for the study by meeting the following criteria: 1) enrolled full-time in a junior college as a student-athlete, 2) not eligible to participate in their sport because of academic probation, 3) GPA is a 1.7 or below, 4) student-athletes identify as African American and 5) participates in a varsity sport at a Midwestern community college.

Social Media Post Selection Process

As a secondary data source, social media posts of African American student-athletes were examined. Several research studies have examined social media posts as a secondary data source (Schober et al. 2016; Karimi et al. 2019). All social media posts were retrieved online. The criteria I used to select posts to include were the following: (1) were African American student-athletes, (2) participated in sports at a community

college, (3) endured academic challenges while competing in sports, and (4) were placed on academic probation.

These social media posts were retrieved online through Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit. The social media post involved community college student-athletes who experienced challenges resulting in academic probation. I reviewed over 200 social media post about the experiences of African American student-athletes attending community colleges, but I was only able to find four posts. The majority of the social media post searched involved NCAA student-athletes. With that said, because most posts involved student-athletes from 4-year colleges, the selection was very limited. These student-athletes at the NCAA level are praised and normalized in our country. However, community college student-athletes, especially research on African American student-athletes is pushed up under the rug instead of addressing the underlying challenges of this population.

My initial goal was to identify African American student-athletes at community colleges. As the search persisted, adding academic probation yielded several results. I consulted several social media sites about the experience of junior college student-athletes, including YouTube, Tik Tok, Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit. I could not find these topics on the YouTube or Tik Tok platform. I continued to search popular hashtags about these topics. I also used social media platform's search bars.

As I continued to search, I found several posts that involved male student-athletes who played basketball. I also tried to expand the results by searching for African American student- athletes who quit community college due to academic challenges or probation, but no results were yielded with these terms. Despite validating the dearth of

community college research on social media platforms, this search criteria and four posts found interrelated with my research questions.

After reviewing hundreds of posts, mostly involving posts about the experience of student-athletes at the four-year colleges, I was able to find four posts about experiences of student-athletes at the community college level. As highlighted in the previous paragraph, I utilized community college keywords to find these four posts. While consulting social media posts, I discovered gaps between community college student-athletes' posts compared to university student-athletes' posts. The four posts were found on Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit. Two videos and two written posts were analyzed for this research study.

Participants

Interview Participants' Characteristics

My study included interviews with both male and female student-athletes who GPA was below 1.8. These African American student-athletes in this study were selected because they could express their experience with academic challenges, support of the athletic department, resources to help get them back to eligible status, and their feelings about not being able to play sports. Despite my goal to interview three to five participants, I ended up with three participants. To protect the participant's identity, I used the pseudonyms Jimmy "JB" Butler, Ben "BW" Wallace, and Sherl "SS" Swoopes who were all African American professional basketball players who were once community college student-athletes. For the social post, I used the terms Baller, Hooper, Dunker, and Shooter as colloquialisms to describe the individuals who posted their lived

experiences on the social media platform. These terms are frequently used and tied to basketball culture.

All participants identified as African American. They ranged from the age 18-19 years-old, and this was their first semester attending community college. Two participants were male student-athletes, and the third participant was female. The male student-athletes played basketball, and the female athlete played volleyball. Only one of the participants was a first-generation student, which was the female athlete. All participants were on academic probation and not eligible to compete in sports. Table 3.1 illustrates the distribution of the sample I interviewed.

Table 3.1

Summary of Background Characteristics for Interview Participants

Background Characteristics	Participant by Pseudonym		
	JB	BW	SS
Ethnicity	African American	African American	African American
Gender	Male	Male	Female
Primary Sport	Basketball	Basketball	Volleyball
Age	18	19	18
Year in College	2025	2025	2025
Term Placed on Probation	Fall Term	Fall term	Fall Term
College Status When Interviewed	Academic Probation	Academic probation	Academic probation
First Generation	No	No	Yes

Social Media Participants' Characteristics

The social media participants' characteristics were similar to the interview participants. Participants in the social media posts were African American. All student-athletes in the posts were on academic probation. They competed in sports at community

colleges. Also, the participants in the posts were male student-athletes. Basketball was the participants' primary sport. Although key words and video post were used to identify the social media participants as African American, social media post can be fabricated. At best, the information in a social media post is what that person wants the public to know.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Interview Protocol and Data Collection

According to DeMarris 2024, interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to engage with research participants to acquire in-depth knowledge. My dissertation used this approach to provide key information on any connections between academic challenges and the African American athlete's experience with being excluded from their sport because of their academic probation. DeMarris also emphasized that the purpose of interviewing is to establish a bigger image of an experience or an event. The objective of conducting interviews is to create an understanding of the participants' experience.

In my study, I facilitated semi structured interviews. Bernard (2000) suggested semi structured interviews for researchers who like to arrange their study early in the project. Bernard emphasized that semi structured interviews equip researchers with dependable, analogous, and rich data when an interview protocol is utilized. Therefore, the author recommended semi structured interviews to researchers who practice early preparation in addition to showcasing their expertise of their topic. Because my interviews were lengthy, it took me a substantial amount of time to reach the completion of my interview process.

My interview protocol consisted of 15 questions. I framed the interview protocol with an opening and closing format via my interviews with participants. The opening statement included ice breaker to establish comfortability in our interview space before presenting the interview questions. The closing statement gave the participants the opportunity to express their closing thoughts before the conclusion of the interview. This interview protocol allowed me to examine the experiences of the African American student-athletes. Specifically, their experience with academic probation, suspension from their sport, and the lack of persistence during their encounter with academic challenges. The interview protocol questions are in Appendix 2.

After my identification of my participants, I reached out to them to confirm consent. Upon the approval of the IRB, my confirmation of consent consisted of an email to participants and a follow-up phone call. After the completion of the consent form, I requested that the research participants reply to the semi structured interview questions with the goal of exploring the experiences of the African American student-athletes. At the conclusion of my consent process, I set up interview dates with the participants. My interview time block consisted of two hours with each participant.

Interviews were conducted at a location convenient for the participants. In-person and Zoom interviews were offered to the participants. I took notes, and the interviews were recorded with the permission of the student-athletes. After the final questions, participants were afforded the chance to add or share any additional information regarding their experiences as a junior college African American student-athlete. The objective of this question was to elicit replies that may have been missed in the previous interview questions. The interview protocol concluded with a question designed to

address the participant's overall perseverance. Member checking was conducted after reviewing the interview transcripts. Validity, trustworthiness, and obtaining accurate information are essential factors under member checking. This process afforded me the opportunity to follow up with participants to let them elaborate on non-concise information, to provide feedback, and to recollect information that was missed during the interviews. After checking in with the participants, they had no additional information to add to this interview process and no edits were made.

Social Media Post Data Collection Approach

A review of social media posts was conducted to gain an understanding of the academic challenges and experiences impacting athletic eligibility and retention of African American student-athletes at community colleges.

I used the social media networks Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit for my secondary data source. Social media posts are content, and data obtained from online platforms. This information often displays videos, public posts, and shared stories. I selected two social media posts with video content and two with written post about lived experiences as African American student-athletes at community colleges. One Instagram video post had 1087 likes and 10 comments and the other Instagram video post had 3707 likes and 138 comments. The Facebook written post had 14 likes. The fourth written post on the Reddit platform consisted of 17 likes and 24 comments. These social media posts were thoroughly reviewed under my research study.

Data Analysis Approach

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that researchers use to thoroughly organize and analyze data sets. This type of analysis involves the

identification of themes through strategic reading and re-reading of the data transcripts (King, 2004). Several authors have established that a thorough thematic analysis approach can deliver insightful and trustworthy findings (Joffe, 2011; Nowell et al., 2017). This analysis not only lets researchers grasp a contextual understanding, but it produces findings that are in-depth. Moreover, this analysis lets you evaluate the themes methodically. That is, it converts raw data into significant insights by linking underlying patterns and perspectives within the narrative elicited by participants. I used thematic analysis to examine the responses of my participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Thematic analysis is an adaptable evaluation. Braun and Clarke (2007) emphasized that thematic analysis is flexible in that it identifies, outlines, and interprets themes after a data collection. They further contended that this analysis is a good collaboration component for researchers conducting qualitative studies, especially research that has a difficult topic. Chamberlin (2015) endorsed thematic analysis because of its ability to apply or utilize this evaluation in epistemological research. Although the thematic approach has limitations in information not being clearly reported in research, Barke and Clark highlighted the importance and validity of this analysis because of its transparency, attainability, and pliability.

Open, axial, and selective coding was used to analyze interview data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). My open coding phase consisted of breaking down the interview transcripts line by line, which allowed me to categorize concepts. While breaking down the interview data, I created themes from data that were repetitive in the transcripts. Also, during the break down process, I noted words that were repeated by the African American student-athletes.

During the axial coding phase, I reassembled the data and themes broken down during the open coding process. I organized the previous categories into common themes based on the student-athletes' experience and challenges at the community college. I evaluated recurring patterns and organized ideas, which allowed me to recognize the relationships between the themes. In addition to identifying the relationships associated with the interview data, I determined how several of my concepts shared a close connection with one another.

At the conclusion of the coding process, I used selective coding. I strategically examined coding notes, my personal data drawing and my solidified categories. I recorded the interviews with a voice recording and via the zoom platform, which was saved to the cloud. I retrieved the transcripts from the cloud, downloaded the transcripts to a word document, underlined the sentence in bold, and circled the themes. I also listened to the voice recording to see if I missed any information that correlates with my themes. This process let me synthesize the data into my main themes shown in Table 3.2 that will be discussed in the following chapter. In vivo coding was also utilized in my study to make sure the main themes involving African American student-athletes were grounded in data (Martin et al., 2010; Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

After coding the interviews, I used a similar process for the social media posts. I reviewed the written social media posts several times and watched the video posts multiple times. I was able to add a social media post sketch, which organized a summary of the similarities and differences associated with the recurring themes. It let me systematically select categories from the social media posts that matched the main themes in my study.

Table 3.2*Data Codes for African American Student-Athletes at Community Colleges*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Academic Probation	A warning status sparked when a student-athlete's cumulative GPA falls below 2.0	Academic probation just felt like somebody snatched something out of you. It felt like your heart was snatched out of you, for real. It's something that I don't really care for nobody to go through.
Lack of College Readiness	Does not pose the skills needed to be successful in entry-level college courses.	I'm not going lie; In Northern high school in Detroit, the teachers weren't teaching you, and if they did teach a lot of students weren't paying attention.
Class Struggles	Academic difficulties experienced by students while enrolled in classes.	When I was behind in classes, I was panicking because me and a few of my teammates had so many assignments stacked on top of each other that was impossible to turn in on time.
Poor Student-Athlete Balance	Challenges maintaining a demanding athletic schedule while managing a rigorous course load.	Being an athlete and student was a challenge because you practice all day, study time, and travel to games an hour away most days. After that, you eat, take a shower, and then get up early in the morning to go practice again.
Limited Academic Backing	Academic support gaps and lack of programs in the athletic departments that are focused on helping student-athletes.	Playing basketball for college and not having no tutor was difficult when we struggled in classes. Instead of getting tutors for athletes or other academic support services, coaches just made us go to study hall for 45 minutes and study on our own.
Athletic ineligibility	Student-athletes who cannot compete in NCJAA sports because they fail to meet academic requirements.	I did feel a little bit embarrassed about being eligible to play sports, especially knowing that my coaches would chastise me about my poor grades.
Suspended from Team	Student-athletes are prohibited for participating in sports for academic violations.	You know, we had a player meeting one day while I was playing on the basketball team and the coach pulled me to the side and told me that I couldn't play for the rest of the season because I was not eligible.
Low GPA	Student-athletes cumulative GPA falls below a 2.0, which results in ineligibility.	The credit and GPA eligibility requirements should be decreased to 6 or 8 credits. 12 credits is overdoing it and at times can lead to athletes being overwhelmed.
Athletic Issues Ignored	Educational needs, performance, and progress of student-athletes are overlooked.	In JUCO colleges, a lot of the schools not getting no money off these players. The athletic programs and administration don't care about the players' issues; you better keep up or get lost.
Stressed	A physical and emotional reaction to challenges.	I was shook because I wasn't used to failing classes. I was a good student before I attended college.
Feelings of Not Being Heard	Student-athletes' perceptions that their coaches and support staff are dismissing their needs.	The JUCO college administration and leaders should get to know the players and see what they need help in and what they can do better to provide athletes with better resources to be successful. They need to communicate with us. Sometimes it's better to see what players need because they don't know what we need. They don't hear us, but they need to hear us and look into our concerns.
Athletic Alienation	Feelings of isolation involving separation from your teammates due to academic probation.	It should be some type of mandatory program automatically set up that prevents JUCO athletes from becoming ineligible. When you become ineligible, many student-athletes feel like an outcast.

After this stage, I dove deeper into development of the themes. Similar codes coexisted, and I combined the codes into one theme. I maintained codes that were directly relevant to the African American student-athletes academic challenges in the community college environment. An examination of a vast array of words, sentences, paragraphs and pages were reduced to highlight important themes (McCracken ,1988). The development of the categories and themes progressed naturally. Once I had the emerging categories, I studied the question responses for shared patterns within the category. During the evaluation, four themes, lack of support, imbalance of academic and sports, loss of status, and unconscious bias, were confirmed as shown in Table 3.3. These themes displayed in the table frequently recurred from the interview participants and social media posts. In vivo codes were further identified that included “My Support Was Abandoned”, “Sports Came Before Classes”, “Mesed Me Up Mentally”, and “My Voice Was Silenced.”

Table 3.3

Themes for African American Student-Athelets at Community Colleges

In Vivo Code	Theme	Meaning	Codes Affiliated with Theme
“My Support Was Abandoned”	Lack of Support	African American student-athletes lacked academic support during their class difficulties.	Lack of college readiness, Low GPA, Stressed, Athletic issues ignored
“Sports Came Before Classes”	Imbalance of Academics and Sports	African American student-athletes struggled to balance course work and demanding sports schedule.	Poor student-athlete balance, Low GPA, Athletic ineligibility, Stressed
“Mesed Me Up Mentally”	Loss of Status	African American student-athletes loss their status as a player on their sports team.	Athletic Alienation, Athletic issues ignored, Suspended from team, Stressed
“My Voice Was Silenced”	Unconscious Bias	Unconscious bias led to exclusion of African American student-athletes who are ineligible to participate in sports.	Feelings of not being heard, Athletic Alienation, Athletic issues ignored

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study examined the experiences of African American student-athletes at community colleges as it relates to their academic challenges and athletic eligibility. This chapter presents an overview of the findings. As described in Chapter Three, the participants in this study consisted of three African American student-athletes at community colleges. There was one female and two male participants. A secondary data source was also reviewed consisting of four social media post of African American student-athletes' experiences at a community college. Four themes were developed after reviewing the interviews: lack of support, imbalance of academic and sports, loss of status, and unconscious bias. The following research questions guided this research study: 1) What factors have adversely impacted African American student-athletes' perseverance? 2) How do African American student-athletes feel community colleges can improve retention practices? 3) What types of supports do African American student-athletes feel they need to succeed after learning about their experiences? 4) How do African American student-athletes feel about their academic challenges and suspension from their athletic team for unsatisfactory grades? The findings revealed that the participants were unsupported in these community college spaces, endured challenges balancing both academics and sports, their athletic status was demoted, and they experienced implicit bias. Per the interviews, these themes were transformed to in-vivo codes, which consisted of "My Support Was Abandoned", "Sports Came Before Classes", "Messed Me Up Mentally", and "My Voice Was Silenced." These findings also highlight the correlation with the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model's domains:

academic domain, environmental domain, noncognitive domain, and campus ethos domain.

Participants' Stories

Interview Participants' Stories

The interviews with these participants gathered information about their lived experiences as an athlete in a community college setting. The interviews highlighted that the participants were unprepared for college, and they endured difficulties with balancing academics and sports. In fact, the participants failed to pass the required community college courses during their first semester. This contributed to a negative college experience and academic probation. The interview questions help the participants tell their stories. All participants spoke passionately about playing sports at their community college. Excitement was present in their eyes and body language during our discussion about sports. The interview questions also let the participants describe struggles and experiences with academic probation. These interviews prompted the participants to transform their thoughts into their personal narratives, which included emotion and sadness. The following sections summarize what each interview participant had to say about their story.

JB's Story

JB was a high school basketball star at a high school in Detroit, Michigan before he transitioned to community college. JB was passionate about basketball since his sister bought him a basketball at the age of five. In high school, he averaged 21 points per game and received the most valuable player award. In fact, JB accomplished several accolades

as an athlete. JB received several scholarships offers to community colleges because of his good athletic performance.

JB's mother, sister, and older brother were very supportive during his preparation to attend college. His family helped him narrow down his choice of two-year colleges to attend. His counselor and high school coaches were very helpful as well. He explained that they provided him with information to make a transition to community college. The coaches took the senior student-athletes to visit these colleges. During these visits, JB learned about the importance of financial aid, scholarship options, grants, and other funding opportunities intended to help student-athletes and their families afford college. After reflecting on all the information and reviewing the scholarships, JB chose a community college that aligned with his future goals.

Upon arriving at the community college, the coach put him in the starting rotation at the guard position. There were a couple stars on JB's team, but he was able to showcase his athletic skills averaging 13 points per game. He explained that his former coach at his high school had instilled a hustle mentality in JB. He was able to exhibit those same basketball fundamentals on his new college team. During practice, JB was aggressive with rebounding, made smart passes to teammates, took high percentage shots, and played exceptional defense. In addition to his good basketball skills, JB was a coachable student-athlete. His community college coaches were impressed with JB's ability to learn the plays quickly. He felt included at this community college as an athlete and as a student.

Although his performance was good as an athlete, JB began to struggle as a student. The long practices and game schedule began to affect his academic coursework.

For example, he was given several zeros by the instructors for not submitting his assignments and his exam scores were low. When he picked his classes, he explained that a one-on-one follow up or meeting with community college officials to discuss strategies to balance his classes and sport duties did not occur. JB assumed that his coach would refer him to academic support services when they noticed he was struggling. JB's attempt to balance both responsibilities led to significant challenges.

Academic probation was a tough experience for JB. His athletic environment felt different when he could no longer contribute to the team as a player. JB's academic probation and ineligibility induced feelings of exclusion. During the interview, you could hear the excitement in JB's voice for basketball. JB wanted to improve his coursework but was not aware of the support services to help him do so.

During JB's academic probation, the coaches or the athletic department did not refer him to academic tutoring to improve his coursework. The coaches did not even talk with him about his feelings of being temporarily suspended from competing in sports. After several months of being suspended from the team, a community college instructor assisted him with a small amount of tutoring. This tutoring helped with a few of his courses, but JB could not return to good academic standing.

JB was devastated because of his academic difficulties and ineligibility. Academic probation and ineligibility can cause all students-athletes grief, but JB described it as even more of a negative experience for African American student-athletes. In addition to the lack of support by the athletic department, he expressed that the overall institutional support was inefficient at that community college. Feelings of hopelessness

had sunk in, which also incited feelings of not being a part of that college's campus environment. JB responded to this situation by leaving the community college.

BW's Story

BW was also a high school star at his high school because of his height and his excellent basketball skills. He was excited to tell his story about how his uncle taught him his basketball skills, how to be tough on the court, and how to use his height as an advantage on the Detroit playgrounds. BW was 6'4 and was able to dominate on the court. In fact, his high school coach rotated his position between power forward and the center position. He averaged 25 points and 13 rebounds a game.

College coaches and scouts were impressed with his basketball skills. This attention resulted in multiple scholarship offers from community colleges. BW picked the community college that his fellow high school teammate picked the year before. He was happy to have the opportunity to play basketball at the college level with his teammate. BW was eager to attend college because his dad played basketball and graduated from college. His goal was to make his dad and mom proud of his accomplishments.

Like JB, when BW got to his community college the coach put BW in the rotation at the power forward position. As a freshman, he averaged ten points a game. However, after learning the fundamentals of college basketball, he improved his points to 21 points and five rebounds a game. The staff instructors and other students embraced BW at this community college. This welcoming environment made him embrace this college as his home. It touched BW's heart that his coach believed in him, and he wanted to show him that he was dedicated to this team as an athlete.

BW admitted focusing more on his athletic responsibilities, which resulted in him neglecting his classes. He explained that he needed tutoring assistance, but he was embarrassed to ask for help. The academic experiences he had in high school did not prepare him for the rigors of academic work in college. BW eventually informed his coach that he was struggling in classes. He admitted that being a student-athlete was difficult. BW was placed on academic probation during his first semester. A few of BW's teammates were having challenges in their classes as well. The coach implemented study tables for the student-athletes.

BW's academic probation was a stressful experience. The study table resource was not effective to help with his academic struggles. BW explained that the coaches and the athletic department did not have support strategies in place to help with his academic deficiencies. Despite his effort in his classes, he was still failing. BW started to feel like a failure. Because of his academic probation, he was afraid of losing his athletic scholarship.

Being suspended from participating in competition added to BW's stress. BW acknowledged his feelings of guilt because he let his teammates down. The coach let him practice but he expressed that it was not the same as playing in the games with his teammates. BW apologized multiple times to his teammates and promised to improve his grades so he could be reinstated to the team. Sitting on the bench watching his teammates play produced feelings of exclusion. BW was also afraid to be redshirted because he was a freshman. Red-shirted student-athletes are suspended from playing on the team for a full season.

BW responded to his situation by continuing to attend study tables. A few

teammates on his team were exceptional students. These teammates came to the study sessions to help BW improve his coursework. The teammates helped him understand his homework, explained how to prepare for quizzes and exams, and showed him a few writing techniques to help improve his academic papers. BW eventually was able to meet with an academic advisor who was able to help him with an academic improvement plan. With his teammates support, BW was able to regain eligibility to play on the team.

SS's Story

SS has been passionate about volleyball since her mom bought her a volleyball net and volleyball at the age of 7. She remembers going to see her cousin play volleyball for a Detroit league. SS was so excited when she got the opportunity to play on a high school volleyball team. With practice and training from her cousin, she became a dominant player on her high school team. This dominance led to her receiving several athletic scholarships from community colleges.

One of SS's teammates from her high school received a scholarship offer from the same school, so they decided to attend the same community college together. Her mom took her and her teammate to tour the community college. SS and her mom liked the coaching staff and the environment at the college. She felt that this college was a good fit for her as a student and as an athlete. SS and her teammate were able to visualize life as a student in that campus space as they walked around and interacted with people. She was happy to embark on this new journey at this community college.

Upon arriving at the community college, SS received mentorship and extra one-on-one volleyball training from her coach. She was able to accomplish good player statistics during the games. She was excited about being an athlete, but she admitted

being nervous about taking college classes for the first time. SS was a first-generation student, so she also was a little uneasy because she did not have family guidance or mentorship until she arrived at the community college. Despite being nervous, her coach's caring presence and support put her in a calm state. SS explained that her coach recognized her potential from day one.

During the semester, she began to fall behind in her classes and assignments. She kept her academic struggles hidden because she was ashamed of her poor grades. SS explained that she was overwhelmed and afraid of disappointing her mom and family members. As a child in grade school, SS had dreamed of attending college one day. SS explained that now her dream was on the verge of being shattered. Her embarrassment about her struggling grades deepened her stress and began to affect her athletic responsibilities.

Her academic struggles led to academic probation. SS explained that she did not receive college readiness preparation in high school. Several of her friends in her residential neighborhood were prepared for college. SS noted that her high school skills were not strong, and she was unable to handle college-level work. Her time management was poor. While she attempted to balance both courses and athletics, her time management was poor. In addition to poor time management, she lacked experience setting academic goals.

She was sad when her academic performance started to decline. Feelings of self-doubt started to sink in, which impacted her grades as well. SS also started to feel like she did not belong and was not ready for the rigor of college. Having a boyfriend added to her challenges. When she tried to develop a study routine, she would get sidetracked

spending time with her boyfriend. SS repeatedly lost focus during her academic difficulties. She again reflected on her academic preparedness and acknowledgement that she was not ready to attend community college.

She tried to talk to one of her mentor coaches, but he was exhausted with multiple duties. SS felt that there were not enough support initiatives in her athletic program. SS volleyball coach was busy attending school, with employment, and the coach had three kids. Despite her busy life, she set some time aside to help SS with her classes. The coaches also acquired more tutoring resources for SS. Her coach's authenticity inspired SS to improve her grades. This support from her coach and academic support services allowed her to return to good academic standing and return to competition.

From the perceptions of the participants, they performed well academically in high school. However, all the participants contended that they were not ready for college. Chapter Three's demographics highlighted that SS was a first-generation student. The previous chapter further displayed that JB and BW were continuing-generation students. Despite their college status as first-generation and continuing generation students, they still endured academic challenges during their first semester. These challenges led to academic probation and the participants not being eligible to participate in sports.

Social Media Participants' Stories

Examination of social media post information displayed the participants' love for basketball. The posts also highlighted information that related to their education hurdles while competing in sports at the community college and frustration with their inability to overcome the academic challenges. Information from the posts also described the participants' sadness when they were suspended from the team for failure to meet the

minimum GPA requirements. The social media post also generated some unique perspectives about the experiences associated with community college sports and probation. The posts' stories were able to produce a visualization of their devotion to playing basketball at the community college. Moreover, an examination of all social media posts highlighted poor educational performance. Each social media participant described their experience with academic probation, and their demotivation post their suspension from the team. The following sections summarize what each social media post participant had to say about their story.

Baller's Story

Baller's post expressed how scholarship offers from universities disappeared after they looked at his academic transcript. Because Baller now had limited options, he enrolled at a nearby community college. Community college did not align with his original goal to go to a division one college, but he told himself that this was just a temporary setback. Baller's new plan consisted of showcasing his basketball skills on the court and obtaining good grades so he could transfer to a Division One program. At basketball practice, Baller played with something to prove. He attacked the rim, dove for loose balls, and knocked down shots with confidence. By the end of the week, his name was on the team roster.

Baller social media post also discussed his struggles with community colleges classes. Classes moved faster and professors expected the student-athletes to stay on track. There were no reminders and no second chances for missed work. Baller was confident that he would be able to balance academics and sports. However, old habits followed him, which entailed skipping morning classes after late-night practices and

putting off assignments until deadlines passed. He was convinced that he could pass his classes. A few months into the semester, Baller received an email from the academic office informing him that he was on academic probation. He was devastated. In the post, Baller acknowledged that it was hard watching his teammates suit up for games while he sat on the bench in street clothes. The sound of the buzzer, the rhythm of the game, and watching his teammates run plays on the court all felt distant now. He applauded and supported his teammates on the bench, but he was frustrated, embarrassed, and angry at himself. He also felt excluded.

Hooper's Story

Hooper's social media post discussed his community college story. He explained that community college was different than high school. He was overwhelmed with information about the syllabus, instructor office hours, academic integrity, and class schedules. Basketball was also different and more competitive at his community college. A lot of his teammates had also been high school stars at their high school. Hooper's basketball skills dominated in high school, but he struggled to find his rhythm as a community college athlete. He was not making his shots during the games, and he lost his confidence.

Hooper's post also highlighted his academic difficulties at his community college. At the end of the semester his grades were three Es and a D. Hooper was startled by these grades. He did not want to show these grades to his mom. Hooper felt like it was all over for him after receiving these grades. With these grades came academic probation and not being eligible to compete in basketball games during the season.

Shooter's Story

Shooter's Facebook post recounted his story as an athlete. His plan was to go to a big university, dominate at the next level, and eventually play in the NBA. He had dreamed of playing professional basketball since he was a kid. Shooter's mom worked multiple jobs to keep a roof over their heads, and she glowed with pride at her son's accomplishments. Unfortunately, Shooter suffered a bad injury. He was diagnosed with a torn ACL a few days later and his season was over. With the injury came the loss of everything, including the loss of the Division One scholarship offers. Schools told him they could not offer a spot to someone with such an uncertain future. Shooter's world, once bright with possibilities, turned grey.

Shooter's post described how his mom wanted him to go back to school. So, he registered at a local community college. The day he walked into the community college gym, one of his past coaches recognized him and asked him to join the team. Shooter was happy to be playing basketball again. He averaged 19 points per game, still able to knock down shots from what felt like the NBA three-point range. However, balancing school and basketball became a struggle. Shooter found it hard to focus on classes, often staying up late finishing assignments after hours of practice. His grades slipped and he did not take it seriously because he felt that basketball was his way out. When grades came out, his coach called him into his office and informed him that he was placed on academic probation. If his grades did not improve, he would be ineligible to play on the team.

Dunker's Story

Dunker's social media video post was a heartfelt story. He was a high school basketball star and basketball gave him purpose. Dunker had offers from some of the biggest schools in the country, but the colleges were in Texas, which was far from his

family. It was a tough decision. His heart was torn between chasing the dream of playing for a top-tier D1 program and staying close to home, where his mom needed him, and where his friends all believed in him.

Dunker's video post described his decision to stay close to home. He enrolled in a local community college and chose to play for his previous mentor coach from his youth basketball days. The coach had seen Dunker's talent early on and had always pushed him to be more than just a dunker. His goal was to stay home, get some playing time, and eventually transfer to a bigger school. It was not the Division One dream he had in mind, but he could work with it.

His video post further highlighted his basketball success at the community college level. Dunker led the team to victory after victory, averaging 23 points a game with ease. He could still soar above defenders, breaking ankles with a quick crossover and a drive to the basket. His three-point shot was smooth, and his highlight reels made their way onto social media, earning him a growing fanbase. However, Dunker did not care about classes, and he was not receptive to homework or studying. He was there to play basketball, and that was all that mattered. Toward the end of the semester, Dunker's academic advisor informed him that he was on academic probation. Later that day, his coach told him that he cared about him, but he could not let him play. It broke Dunker's heart.

Thematic Findings

“My Support Was Abandoned”

The theme “My Support Was Abandoned” was identified regarding the participants' responses about their college experiences. Additionally, research question

three, “Supports Needed for African American Student-Athletes’ Success,” correlates with this theme. This theme captured the participants’ perceptions of their lack of support at these postsecondary institutions. During the interviews, the student-athletes were asked about their college support system while they encountered academic challenges. At these community colleges support entails academic advising, learning labs with computers, calculators, and technology, food pantries, mental health resources, study tables, and, most importantly, tutoring and learning assistance. These support services are important for all students attending community college but even more significant for student-athletes of color because of their stringent schedule. Many athletic departments at community colleges implement study tables for student-athletes. Study tables are a study time allotted for student-athletes to do their homework or study for exams. Tutors are not present at these study tables but instead the student-athletes studied independently during their allotted schoolwork time.

The theme of lack of support entails how the participants were unassisted when they endured academic obstacles. Although support services are offered at the community colleges, student-athletes are not aware or referred to the services by the athletic department and coaches. All the participants were freshman, and they were placed on academic probation during the Fall semester, which was their first semester. Also, the athletic staff focused on practices, games, and their athletic responsibilities. In other words, the student-athletes felt disconnected from academics and lacked awareness that these resources existed, which led to them missing out on academic help.

JB was without support when he became ineligible and endured academic difficulties. JB expressed his academic challenges by stating “it's not no support to look

out for you, you know, you gotta just figure it out yourself.” JB felt alone when he faced academic obstacles while participating in sports at his community college. JB further expressed “if you don't have your time all lined up and everything lined up, it's gonna be hard, man, especially when you don't got that support. So yeah, I don't think too much of tutoring or anything like that was really available.” During these academic struggles, coaches or the athletic department did not acquire tutoring resources for him. JB’s experience demonstrates several challenges in addition to being unsupported while dealing with this adversity.

SS discussed similar experiences with a lack of support. One of the mentor coaches in her program was overwhelmed with responsibilities and could not effectively support all the student-athletes struggling academically. SS voiced similar issues contending “I feel that athletes should have their own advisors.” SS needed an academic advisor to give her personalized guidance during her class struggles. She also stated that “Coach Brad works with every athlete, he coaches a team, he's a busy man, so it's hard for him to keep everyone in check.” SS felt that having a designated athletic academic advisor could have helped her succeed academically. Her experience, despite the challenges, demonstrates that additional academic resources involving academic advising could have made her feel somewhat supported.

BW’s responses also reflected the same problems by voicing “dealing with basketball and not having no tutor at the time, because we didn't have no tutor, they'd just make us go to study hall for, like, 45 minutes.” BW needed a tutor and additional academic support to help with his challenges in his classes. Study hall was not an effective resource because it did not advance his learning or help him academically. He

also added “there wasn't no discipline as far as, like, somebody to help you out with certain, assignments or certain, classes to, to develop you more.” BW did not have help from coaches, faculty, or peer mentors with assignments, preparation for exams, and the development of academic skills and ability to succeed. His response shows that the athletic study hall was not an effective academic support service, and a tutor should have been obtained to help at the study hall sessions. BW experience with overwhelming academic struggles shows that a tutor at study hall could have provided personalized attention to each student-athlete to enhance understanding of their coursework. When student-athletes struggle academically, community colleges often refer them to academic resources. The interviews with the three African American student-athletes showed that pointing them in the direction of resources was not enough support. The Socio-Ecological Outcomes model emphasized the importance of connections with faculty, advisors, and tutors. However, the interviews highlighted the participants lack of connections with academic advisors and regular interaction with tutors under the academic domain (Harris and Wood, 2016), which led to an unsuccessful semester.

Shooter’s Facebook post shared a close relationship with the “My Support Was Abandoned” theme. Shooter expressed his unsuccessful experiences as an African American community college athlete. His social media post expressed: “I almost quit school when I was placed on academic probation with a 1.79 GPA.” Shooter’s academic difficulties were overwhelming and incited feelings of dropping out of college. Shooter Facebook posted further stated: “I wasn’t focused as a student and cared more about sports.” Shooter social media post highlighted a disconnect between his education and athletics. Harris and Wood (2016) underscored the necessity of academic services under

the academic domain to produce good academic outcomes. Shooter's social media post did not acknowledge that he utilized academic services while struggling with classes.

“Sports Came Before Classes”

The theme “Sports Came Before Classes” reflects the participants’ descriptions of their struggles and imbalance of academic and sports. This theme is also related to research question one, “Negative Impact on African American Student-Athletes Perseverance.” Balancing sports and coursework at community colleges can be challenging. These challenges stem from rigorous practice schedules, games, travel, and poor sleeping habits. Student-athletes’ rigorous schedules produce intense time demands. For example, student-athletes consume 20-30 hours a week with athletic responsibilities, which neglect their academics. Student-athletes also can become stressed with expectation to have good athletic performance. This can lead to becoming overwhelmed or burnout. These athletic responsibilities can ultimately lead to academic struggles.

The theme of an imbalance of academics and sports involves the participants inability to balance their demanding athletic schedule (Dawkins et al.,2008; Cooper, 2016). The student-athletes also struggled with prioritizing class tasks. Other key struggles involved poor time management skills and the participant being physically and mentally fatigued. SS’s ability to manage coursework and athletics was difficult and having a boyfriend added to these challenges. I also asked the student-athletes to share their experience with balancing their course work and their athletic responsibilities. SS contended “focusing on volleyball, classes and a boyfriend was distracting.” Trying to balance athletics, school, and a relationship with her boyfriend caused SS to stray away from her academic responsibilities. She also stated, “I wasn’t setting my priorities straight

in what I needed to do.” In addition to her challenges managing both academics and sports, she admitted not focusing on her academic tasks.

JB also did not have a good experience with balancing academics and sports. JB contented “that balancing courses and sports aint easy because as a student-athlete your days start off at 6 am and end at 10 pm, sometimes later than that.” JB rigorous schedule often made it hard to focus on classes and homework (Cooper & Cooper, 2015). He also added “I learned that time management go along way with, like, prioritizing the stuff you gotta do, getting rest and going to sleep on time at night helps a lot.” Reflecting back on his inability to balance both academics and sports, JB realized the importance of time management.

BW also had a demanding schedule that hindered his academic performance. During BW’s interview, he described his daily athletic schedule “We had workouts early, then you got breakfast, then you go to classes and after that you go to practice.” BW had an intense daily schedule, and his strenuous athletic responsibilities did not afford him time to work on additional academic tasks. He also asserted “by the time you get out of practice, you eat dinner, then you go to study hall at 6 pm and after study hall your day is over with.” “It ain’t no time to even do nothing,” he also added. BW experience demonstrated burnout, which also affected his performance in both arenas. These interviews highlighted difficulties with time management, neglect of academics due to strenuous practices and game schedules, and physical and mental exhaustion. The African American student-athletes in this study all struggled with managing their time effectively. The intense demand of practices and games neglected these three student-athletes’ coursework. This stringent schedule and their inability to balance athletics and

classes led to physical and mental enervation. Imbalance of academic and sports correlates with the environmental domain in that it involves students' engagement with their external responsibilities, which affects their scholastic achievements (Harris & Wood, 2016). JB and BW did not have external responsibilities, but SS described her boyfriend as an external responsibility. In fact, she contended that trying to maintain a relationship with her boyfriend neglected her coursework.

There was an interrelation of Dunker's Instagram post and the theme "Sports Came Before Classes." Similar to the other posts, Dunker's social media post also spoke about his academic difficulties while participating in community college sports:

I was not focused during my first year as an athlete at community college and Nobody in my family went to college to show me the way. I was a high school basketball star, so I felt like I was untouchable.

Dunker's mindset was not ready for the academic rigors of community college and his first-generation status enhanced his challenges as an African American athlete. Dunker's social media post further spoke about his invincible demeanor:

Because of my basketball skills I said the hell with school I'm just going to play sports even after coaches told me I couldn't succeed in college without them grades" In community college, I often skipped class, didn't complete my homework and didn't listen to my coaches.

Dunker's post showed that he was arrogant about succeeding as a community college student-athlete until reality set in. Harris and Wood (2016) reinforced the importance of external validating agents under the environmental domain that included friends and family members' ability to motivate student-athletes success. Although Dunker's mom

supported and encouraged him, her confidence was not enough for him to overcome his academic challenges.

“Messed Me Up Mentally”

The theme “Messed Me Up Mentally” reflects the participants’ experience with losing their status as an athlete, specifically ineligibility. This theme shares a close connection with research question four, “Experiences with Academic Challenges and Suspension.” Community college student-athletes lose their status as a player when they are suspended and become ineligible to play sports because of poor academic performance or violation of other athletic rules. There are a couple reasons why student-athletes become ineligible. Under academics, student-athletes become ineligible because they fail courses, do not meet GPA point requirements, or they drop below full-time registration credits. Students can also be ineligible for behavior issues, which can lead to violation of that community college’s code of conduct. For example, fighting, threatening or ignoring teacher instructions or destroying the college’s property. This study will focus on students who became ineligible for academic violations.

The theme loss of status in this study encompasses when a student-athlete was forced to discontinue their sports due to their challenges and poor performance academically. The loss of status can be described as sidelined or placed on the bench temporarily. Sidelined student-athletes experience profound sadness, feelings of exclusion, and even mental health concerns, for example, depression. The student-athletes in this study were disappointed and affected mentally with their ineligible status and not being able to play with their teammates.

JB was disappointed with being suspended from the team. JB shared “I feel like, even with the best player on down to the weakest player, when you accept student-athlete into your program, the athletic staff should be dedicated to helping athletes maintain their eligibility instead of being banned from playing sports.” JB felt excluded from his teammates during his ineligibility. JB also asserted “it should be some type of program automatically set up that should be mandatory for Black students who become ineligible.” His community college lacked support and programs for African American students who were on a pathway to becoming ineligible.

SS echoed this experience with ineligibility, stating, “When I became ineligible to play, I was shook because I wasn't used to failing.” SS was deeply affected by her temporary suspension from the team. She further contended “I was stressed out when I had to sit out and watch my team play volleyball.” SS was devastated because she was not competing in her sport alongside her teammates.

BW also discussed the impact on his life as an athlete when he lost his status as a player. BW explained “Not being able to play with my team and my class struggles messed me up mentally.” The student-athlete’s ineligibility led to emotional distress. In addition to the mental impact, BW added “It hurt me because the athletic department and coaches punished you for failing a few classes instead of helping us.” He felt that he was penalized instead of receiving encouragement and guidance during his academic difficulties. These African American student-athletes value diminished when they became ineligible. Their loss of status shared a close relationship with the noncognitive domain in that it incited feelings of not belonging (Harris & Wood, 2016). It also impacted on the participants’ mental state. The student-athletes understood that they violated the NCJAA

eligibility requirements, but their loss of status made them feel worthless and excluded from their athletic space.

The “Messses up Mentally” theme shared an interconnection with Hooper’s Reddit post. Hopper’s lived experience as an athlete at the community college echoed Ballers post due to his poor performance during the first semester. Hooper’s Reddit post contented “My life was over because I failed first my semester.” Hoopers post expressed feelings of being discouraged and feeling like a failure. Hooper was also nervous because his first semester was a fiasco: “I was scared that a failed semester was going to destroy my future chances as a college student.” Hooper was distraught about the neglect of his academic responsibilities. The Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model’s noncognitive domain highlights how the self-efficacy element can instill confidence in a student to be successful in college (Harris & Wood, 2016). Hooper’s social media post showed that he did not possess self-efficacy or the mental drive to thrive academically.

“My Voice Was Silenced”

The theme “My Voice Was Silenced” mirrors the participants’ experience with unconscious bias. Research question two, “Improving Retention Practices at Community Colleges,” is associated with this theme. Implicit bias can impact community college student-athletes in several ways. Unconscious bias refers to attitudes and perceptions that influence our actions and behavior while interacting with individuals. Moskowitz and Carter (2018) defined unconscious bias as a stereotype and prejudice that impacts individuals outside of awareness and without conscious intent. It is labeled as “unconscious” because people are not aware that it is happening or that it exists. In this study, we will examine how unconscious bias manifests in excluding African American

student-athletes who are ineligible to participate in sports.

The theme of unconscious bias refers to how the administration and athletic staff are not receptive to student-athlete's issues when they become ineligible (Oseguera, 2010). That is, they praise and direct their attention to the student-athletes that are eligible to play. Student-athlete academic challenges and suspension from the team issues are put aside. Spaces are not created in their athletic environment for their voice to be heard.

JB academic difficulties and ineligibility was unheeded by the administration and athletic staff. JB explained "The administration puts the organization of sports events and the games at the forefront." Community college officials favored sports accolades over academic coursework. JB also added "Athlete's academic complications and ineligibility issues should be prioritized the same way." He believed that student-athletes' academics should have been the spotlight before athletic accomplishments. BW discussed a similar perspective stating, "The higher administration needs to talk to the players, get to know the players, provide us better resources and see what they need help in." He expressed the importance of the community college leadership being engaged with the student-athletes to be aware of their struggles. "It's better for the administration to see what we need because they don't know what we need and a lot of players don't say nothing about their challenges. They need to communicate with us", said BW. He perceived that effective communication from community college leadership could improve academic outcomes.

SS expressed her frustration with her academic challenges and ineligibility being disregarded. SS reflected, "The administration and coaches can see that athletes are struggling in courses before we become disqualified to play on the team, but we don't receive extra help." She felt that the administration sits back and watch student-athletes

fail courses instead of rectifying their issues. She also asserted, “My female coach has three kids, and she is in school so it’s hard for her to support us when we fall behind in classes.” Coaches are overwhelmed with multiple duties, so student-athletes’ struggles are overlooked. The participants’ academic performance and eligibility violations were unconsciously ignored. This implicit bias led to self-doubt. Another feeling associated with this bias is the participants being confused about a support system that was supposed to be in place for them. The unconscious bias theme and the campus ethos domain concept shared an interrelation because the participants endured invalidating educational experiences when their academic struggles were dismissed (Harris and Woods, 2016).

The “My Voice Was Silenced” theme was also a clear point in Ballers Instagram post. Baller’s post expressed frustration with academic probation stating, “When I was placed on academic probation, I was treated like I had leprosy.” Baller was not only separated from the team, but he was excused from all athletic activities due to academic probation. Baller post also expressed “I was treated like I was subhuman.” Baller post also displayed sadness because he was treated like an object that can be set aside rather than being treated like person. Baller’s facial expressions and body language during the post showed disbelief that he was in an inclusive athletic space one day and treated like an outsider the next day. Harris and Wood (2016) stressed the significance of a sense of belonging under the campus ethos domain. Baller’s social media post validated that he did not feel this sense of belonging in his community college space.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

African American student-athletes at community colleges continue to endure academic challenges that impact their eligibility to participate in sports, yet their experiences are understudied. The literature does not directly speak to the topic of African American student-athletes' challenges at two-year colleges. There is a lack of data regarding this specific subject. Therefore, it was important to conduct this study to understand the lived experiences of this population. My research, in totality, can start to contribute to a gap that is present in the dearth of community college literature. These findings will bring a new perspective to the literature as it relates, specifically, to African American students-athletes, academic probation, improving retention, and athletic ineligibility.

This study sought to examine the lived experiences of African American student-athletes at community colleges. This study is important to the research community due to the multiple barriers that African American student-athletes face. I aspired to highlight the various difficulties of these participants through a phenomenological approach. It is important to study their experiences and add to the literature from the voices and stories of African American student-athletes at two-year colleges. This conclusion summarizes key findings and their implications for community colleges.

Summary and Implications of Findings

The findings in this study underscore the dire need of programs and additional support resources to address the specific needs of African American student-athletes in these community college spaces. Supporting these student-athletes can foster future

academic success and promote inclusivity for all as it relates to these athletes' experiences. The questions I used to guide the study are as follows:

- 1) What factors have adversely impacted African American student-athletes' perseverance?
- 2) How do African American male and female student-athletes feel community colleges can improve retention practices?
- 3) What types of supports do African American student-athletes feel they need to succeed after learning about their experiences?
- 4) How do African American student-athletes feel about their academic challenges and suspension from their athletic team for unsatisfactory grades?

The findings of this research study of the experiences of African American student-athletes at community college produced four themes: lack support, imbalance of academic and sports, loss of status, and unconscious bias, which were transformed to in-vivo codes. These findings highlight a close correlation between the research questions and the themes.

Research Question One: Negative Impact on African American Student-Athletes Perseverance

An examination of the participants' experience found how the African American athlete's struggles with balancing academics and sports adversely impacted their perseverance. The male student-athletes described their rigorous schedule as a barrier to focusing on their coursework and the demotivation of their perseverance. Several decades of collegiate sports research has substantiated the challenges with balancing both sports and coursework (Cooper, 2016; Comeaux, 2016; Haper, 2018; Strayhorn, 2014). The

findings in this study reinforced the past and existing issues about the imbalance of academic and sports, particularly for African American student-athletes at community colleges. According to Woods and Williams (2013), students of color are more likely than their peers to underachieve and drop out of community college before meeting their intended aspirations. The participants in this study experienced the same underperformance because of their overwhelming responsibilities.

The findings were consistent with the theoretical concepts of the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model. Through the environmental domain my participants were able to express challenges and their experience as an African American student-athlete at community colleges. Harris and Wood (2016) emphasized that the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model is unique because it studies lived experiences and academic outcomes. My female participant spoke about being unable to cope with multiple responsibilities as a student-athlete and her external relationship with her significant other, which impacted her academic performance. The female student-athlete admitted that having a relationship with her boyfriend added to the challenges of athletics and school balance. This added issue ultimately led to burnout. The female student-athlete's multiple domains could not be managed successfully. Kaufman (2015) found that 47% of student-athletes acknowledged feeling burnout during their participation in collegiate sport. This highlights the importance of community college athletic departments promoting rest, and most importantly, self-care while competing in sports. One goal of my research was that my participants' voices will spark higher education institutions to create future initiatives to support this population.

The male student-athletes also expressed their experience with mental fatigue

associated with their demanding athletic schedule. The participants described their lack of rest as a neglect to their well-being. The NCAA's 2021 Student-Athlete Well-Being report found that mental health issues, including mental fatigue and anxiety, were common among collegiate student-athletes (NCAA, 2022). Good mental well-being can help these student-athletes thrive.

Hoopers' social post expressed his lack of preparation and not having parents who attended college as a barrier. As a first-generation student, Hooper's parents could not teach him strategies to manage a school and athletic balance. Although they were not first-generation students, Dunker and Baller's social media posts highlighted complications while juggling scholastic and athletic responsibilities. Balancing academics and athletics are crucial because it builds lifelong time management and perseverance.

In general, the findings from my study revealed that balancing academics and sports was a significant barrier for the interview and social media participants. All participants lacked perseverance while facing adversity and athletic and coursework obstacles. Athletic times demands were overwhelming and left little time for classes and studying. Additionally, managing multiple external responsibilities outside of academics and sports impacted grades. Balancing sports and academics not only led to frustration for a few of the participants, but they were also mentally exhausted.

Research Question Two: Improving Retention Practices at Community Colleges

The African American student-athletes empathized how community colleges were not prioritizing their academic difficulties or retention practices. The experiences endured by these African American student-athletes at these community colleges could lead to the

withdrawal from college. The participants described their experience with unconscious bias in their athletic spaces. All participants' personal reflections emphasized that their academic struggles and eligibility issues were unconsciously ignored by the community college administration. Because research is scant at the community college level, the academic probation and ineligible athlete's voices continued be silenced, especially the African American student-athletes. Community college student-athletes of color have become a marginalized group whose issues are silently hidden. This stresses the importance of creating retention initiatives to retain this population. According to Strayhorn (2013), "two thirds of all Black men who enter higher education leave before completing their degree—the highest attrition rate among all races and both sexes" (p. 1). The participant interviews support Strayhorn's (2008) emphasis on how perception of African Americans student-athletes has significance in terms of retention and completion. It is vital that we as college educators unmute the voices of these struggling student-athletes.

The findings of my study also align with the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model's campos ethos domain and the importance of African American student-athletes' ability to succeed in a community college environment. To be successful, institutional policies, programs, campus resources, and day-to-day practices are imperative (Harris & Woods, 2016). As found in my study, there were several commonalities among the African American student-athletes that were reveled in the interviews and highlighted in the social media posts. These experiences and similarities came together to highlight the narratives that described their lived experiences with the lack of programs to improve retention.

From a retention perspective, it was difficult for the interview and social media participants to endure academic challenges at community college institutions that are not receptive to establishing plans to help them prosper. Quitting school was discussed with one of the interview participants and highlighted in one of the social media posts. Shooter's social media post described feelings of wanting to drop out of community college after experience with academic probation and suspension for the team. Similarly, JB, one of the interview participants, quit his community college due to his scholastic hardships and ineligibility. Harris and Wood (2016) expressed that lower retention rates among African American student-athletes are intertwined with inadequate academic preparation compared to their peers. An examination of these experiences may help to develop future retention strategies to motivate this population's good academic attainment.

Overall, the findings from this research indicated the lack of the African American student-athlete's voices was a persistent issue in this study. A couple of these community colleges created a pervasive culture that prioritized sports over these student-athletes' humanity and academic responsibilities. Silenced voices in addition to academic difficulties can lead to student-athletes quitting college. When student-athletes leave community colleges, this negatively impacts the retention rates at that institution, which was highlighted in this study by JB's decision to drop out of college.

Research Question Three: Supports Needed for African American Student-Athletes' Success

This research question assessed the support services needed for African American student-athletes to be successful in a community college environment. An examination of

the participants' experience found that the student-athletes faced significant challenges acquiring support services. The participants reported several obstacles to acquiring adequate academic resources. Prior research has pointed out the significance of academic support services, including at community colleges. In a community college study, Horton (2015) emphasized that "a further discussion is needed concerning the academic support needs of special populations, specifically African American student-athletes (p. 289). Academic well-being is extremely important for this population.

Despite support services being available at the community colleges, all the participants lacked help receiving those academic services. The athletic staff and college instructors watched these African American student-athletes fail their coursework without getting them extra help. Pondering back on the literature review and Socio-ecological Outcome Theory, Harris and Wood (2016) emphasized that "Black athletes are reluctant to pursue faculty interaction because they have the perception that faculty are unsupportive and uncaring" (p. 39). This stresses the need to continue to build support programs that include faculty mentors so these African American student-athletes can be successful.

All participants from social media posts also described faced challenges utilizing support services to improve their academic grades. In fact, Shooter's social media post correlated with all the participants struggles when he said, "*I wasn't focused as a student.*" Despite the participants courses being their responsibilities, they felt abandoned when the athletic department and administration watched their challenges and did not create a support plan for these African American student-athletes.

Under the academic domain, the Socio-Ecological Outcomes model emphasized the use of academic services, tutoring, academic advising, and men of color dedication to their classes at the community college (Harris & Wood, 2016). Although the research study involved only men of color at the commute college, these same academic domain variables could have helped SS, the African America female student-athlete, avoid academic probation. The Socio-Ecological Outcomes model is also advantageous because it intersects with the other domains under this theory, which helps to motivate success for this population of students.

Across all of the participants, the findings from this research indicated that the academic support services were not utilized by the participants. Although the community colleges had academic support services, the African American student-athletes were not aware of these support services, and the coaches and athletic departments did not acquire extra help for these participants. Utilizing academic support services is a norm for White student-athletes, but African American student-athletes often second guess their scholastic abilities despite available supports (Harris & Wood, 2016). In addition, this study highlighted poor time management. Time management workshops and personalized tutors for the participants is needed for a successful journey as African American student-athletes.

Research Question Four: Experiences with Academic Challenges and Suspension

This research question examined the experiences with academic challenges and suspension for unsatisfactory grades. An analyzation of the participants' experiences with their loss of eligibility status found mixed feelings of disappointment. All participants described feeling sad and frustrated when they were suspended from the team. They were

sad because their ineligibility separated them from their teammates. Moreover, the student-athletes were frustrated because the athletic staff and coaches were aware of their academic struggles but did not offer a helping hand to combat these barriers. At times this complex blend of disappointments can lead to mental health issues. Hutchinson et al. (2022) asserted that 33% of all college students will experience serious psychological struggles, such as despair, anxiety, or food consumption disorders. The mental health of these student-athletes cannot be ignored.

In addition to being disappointed, the participants also reported feelings of exclusion post their temporary suspension for academic violations. That is, they felt that their perceived worth as a player diminished. One of the male participants further described his exclusion from the team as a harsh punishment by the athletic staff. In other words, the athletic department and coaches only cared about his athletic achievements and did not care but him as a student. This underscores the athletic department and coaches to display authentic care and dedicated mentorship for these student-athletes. Under the campus ethos domain, Harris and Wood (2016) highlighted systemic barriers at community colleges which produce feelings of not belonging for African American student-athletes compared to their White peers.

Several of the participants described feelings of defeat when they were not eligible to participate in sports. Hooper's social post also highlighted feelings of being heartbroken post suspension from his team. Hooper's social post expressed that his life was over. Authenticity and caring about these participants post loss of athletic status can reencourage these student-athletes to succeed at their community colleges.

Generally, my study's findings entailed that the interview and social media participants felt a mix of shame, embarrassment, and a diminished self-worth due to losing their athletic status and suspension from the team. In addition to these findings of mixed feelings, my study also found that participants felt excluded from their community college spaces when they became not eligible to play sports. Feelings of exclusion, especially involving African Americans student-athletes, can make this population feel significantly less welcomed at their community college. This impacted a couple of the participants' psychological well-being. Lastly, during the study, the participants reiterated the fact that community college's athletic departments prioritized their athletic responsibilities over their academic grades.

Limitations

There were a couple limitations in this study. This study consisted of a small interview sample size, three African American student-athletes, at community colleges. With that said, the transferability of findings should be viewed with caution, because (by design) the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population because of the size. Moreover, a small sample may not capture the variety of experiences present in a larger group of African American student-athletes.

Another limitation came from the fact that only one community college's athletic department was willing to provide contact information of African American student-athletes. This effort led to the recruitment of two participants for interviews. Through snowball sampling I was able to recruit another participant for a total of three African American student-athletes. A potential for bias could therefore have existed in my study.

The recruitment process could have limited that bias if I had been permitted access by more than one athletic department to participants from additional community colleges.

The athletic departments and athletic director's refusal to grant me access to the African American student-athletes on academic probation also generated another limitation – that the topic itself carried a fair amount of stigma. I met with one athletic director who is a committee member of the Michigan Community College Athletic Association. He was truthful and informed me that African American student-athletes on academic probation was a bad subject, and several community colleges would not be open to me interviewing their student-athletes. After several hundred emails to the athletic directors and coaches, I was ignored, these African American student-athletes were hidden, and their voices silenced.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research might consider a mixed method study consisting of quantitative and qualitative studies to examine the academic challenges, academic probation, and eligibility issues among African American student-athletes at community colleges. A mixed method study has the ability to assess the specific academic challenges and academic support needed for African American student-athletes at community colleges according to their perspectives. Conducting a mixed method approach could potentially also allow the researcher to collect a larger sample of data from a more diverse group of participants. The mixed method would provide the researcher with richer and more trustworthy data for analysis.

Future research might find it useful to involve focus groups. Focus groups could produce interactive discussions and generate deeper insights than what is typically

uncovered through one-on-one interviews. Drawing upon a larger sample of participants in a qualitative approach would similarly increase the variety of perspectives concerning African American student-athlete's academic success at community colleges.

Because of the resistance I experienced accessing this population, my last recommendation consists of future researchers in this area forming strategic partnerships with state-level Community College Associations, state-level Community College Athletic Associations, and the National Junior College Athletic Association to retrieve the data of African American student-athletes on academic probation.

Conclusions for the Field

Based upon the results of this study, African American student-athletes at community colleges face multiple challenges to academic success while trying to balance sports and academics. These academic difficulties lead to barriers, academic probation, suspension from their teams, and can result in withdrawal from community college, which can impact retention rates at these institutions. New initiatives are needed to support these struggling student-athletes. One of the initiatives should focus on community college athletic departments promoting rest and, most importantly, self-care while competing in sports and balancing academics and athletics. As I learned in this study, this marginalized group's issues are silenced and hidden. The community college president and his leadership team should make sure these African American student-athletes voices are heard. For example, vice presidents can check-in with student-athletes to gauge what is needed to support these individuals during their struggles. Acknowledgment of the existing academic challenges at community colleges will help establish strategic plans to support African American student-athletes.

Retention should be another initiative at the forefront of community colleges' agenda. I was saddened by JB's experience with quitting college. African American student-athletes who drop out of community college should raise a red flag for community college presidents and administration. This red flag should prompt community college educators to develop retention programs to retain African American student-athletes.

In addition to retention programs, peer mentorship programs should be developed to include alumni student-athletes who were successful in their athletic program. At times student-athletes are embarrassed to address their academic challenges to faculty or administration; however, they can feel comfortable talking to their peers that shared their same student-athlete experience. Athletic directors should also embed academic support services in their athletic departments so access to these resources is close and available to this population. For example, hiring athletic tutors and a couple academic advisor than can support these African American student-athletes during challenges. These African American student-athletes are humans. With that said, respecting this population's humanity will let community colleges enhance their support, and most importantly, motivate these student-athletes' prosperity in athletic spaces.

APPENDIX A
IRB EXEMPTION



Institutional Review Board

Date: July 2, 2025

Study #: IRB-FY2025-405

Study Title: A Phenomenological Study on Improving the Athletic Eligibility and Retention of African American Student-Athletes at Community Colleges

Submission Type: Initial

IRB Decision: Exempt

Research Team:

Aijalon McLittle

Julia Smith

Based on applicable federal regulations, the above referenced study has been determined to be Exempt, with the following categories:

Category 2.(ii). 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:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Notes for Researcher(s):

Submission includes the following approved documents:

Date-Stamped Information Sheet V 7-2-2025

Athletic Director Recruitment Email

Student Recruitment Email

Data collection tool: Demographic data and interview questions

Letter and Consent Document:

This letter along with the IRB approved (date-stamped) consent document can be found in Cayuse in the Submission Details page under Letters and Attachments, respectively. Please make sure to use the most recent IRB approved version of the consent form in consenting participants.

Permission from Research Site(s):
Please note the following:

This IRB exemption determination letter means that this research has met one or more of the federal criteria for exemption per 45 CFR 46.104- Exempt Research.

Before the research is initiated, permission to conduct research at a given site must be obtained from all research locations listed in the IRB submission. You must keep copies of all such permission letters for your files.

It is the responsibility of each researcher to follow all applicable policies and procedures of any outside institution where the research will be conducted.

Modifications:

Any changes to this exempt project must be reviewed by the IRB prior to initiation by submitting a MODIFICATION request. Do not collect data while the changes are being reviewed. Data collected during this time cannot be used in research.

Record Retention:

Exempt projects will be retained by the IRB office for three years after the last action on the project.

You are approved to start the research. Please retain a copy of this notification for your records.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office.

Thank you.

The Oakland University IRB

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Format Protocol

Focus	Questions
Ice-Breaker	1. Talk to me about the first time you became passionate about playing sports.
What are the academic struggles, if any, of African American student-athletes?	2. Please share with me any academic struggles you experienced in college. 3. How did you react when you were struggling in class? 3a) Did anyone motivate you during your academic struggles, for example, coaches, athletic director, professor, mentor, parents, or teammates? 4. When you were struggling academically, did you seek support from campus services? If yes, why? If no, why not and what did you do to get help with classes? 5. Reflecting back on your academic struggles, what do you feel you could you have done better to avoid any consequences?
How did they experience being suspended from the team?	6. Describe how you felt when you were excluded from the team because of academic probation. 7. Do you feel your race ic identity made your academic probation experience different from your teammates or other student athletes that have different racial and ethnic identities from your own? 8. How did you decide to deal with your academic probation situation?
In general, what kinds of support did these students feel they needed to help with their academic outcomes?	9. Did you ever contemplate leaving or discontinuing in college? 10. What do you feel the college can do to better support you academically? 11. Tell me how you might have been more successful in class beyond what you have already shared?
What do African American student-athletes feel they need from the athletic department to be more academically successful?	12. What kinds of things could the athletic department do to help you succeed academically? 13. Please describe how you balance your academic and athletic responsibilities. 14. When you're reinstated to play on your team, what are the things you plan to do to balance both academics and sports? Any final thoughts that you would like to share about your experience as an African American student-athlete?
Demographic Information	
Name	Place Born
Age	Year in School
Gender	School Location
Ethnicity/Race	Division:

REFERENCES

- Bimper, A. Y., Harrison, L., & Clark, L. (2013). Diamonds in the rough: Examining a case of successful Black male student-athletes in college sport. *Journal of Black Psychology, 39*(2), 107-130–130.
- Bimper, A. Y. (2015). Lifting the veil: Exploring colorblind racism in Black student athlete experiences. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 39*(3), 225-243.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States (5th ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braxton, J. M. (2003). Student success. In S. R. Komives & D. B. Woodward, Jr (Eds). *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession* (4th ed.), 317–338. Jossey Bass.
- Bruening, J. E., Armstrong, K. L., & Pastore, D. L. (2005). Listening to the voices: The experiences of African American female student athletes. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 76*(1), 82–100.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2005.10599264>
- Camardelle, A., Contractor, H., Elam, P., Jr., Graber, C., & Overton, S. (2022). Improving training evaluation data to brighten the future of Black workers. *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies*.

- Carter-Francique, A., Hart, A., & Cheeks, G. (2015). Examining the value of social capital and social support for Black student-athletes' academic success. *Journal of African American Studies*, 19(2), 157–177.
- Center for Educational Performance and Information. (2023). *College Data*. State of Michigan.
- Chamberlain, K. (2015). Reflexivity: Fostering research quality, ethicality, criticality and creativity. In M. Murray (Eds.), *Critical health psychology*. (2nd ed.) 165-181. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan. 10.1007/978-1-137-28267-5_10
- Chaplin, N., & Lim, J. H. (2020). Becoming the “Ultimate competitor”: African American male student-athletes' resolution for academic success in the face of adversity at NCAA division I predominantly White institutions. *Journal of Business Diversity*, 20(4), 10-19.
- Colin, E., López D., and Spaulding, S. 2023. Present day experiences of students of color at community colleges. Structural Racism Explainer Series. Urban Institute.
- Cooper, J. N. (2012). “Personal troubles and public Issues: A sociological imagination of Black athletes' experiences at predominantly White institutions in the United States.” *Sociology Mind* 2:261–271.
- Cooper, J. N., & Cooper, J. E. (2015). “I’m Running So You Can Be Happy and I Can Keep My Scholarship”: A comparative study of Black male college athletes' experiences with role conflict. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 8(2), 131-152. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jis.2014-0120>

- Cooper, J. N., & Hawkins, B. (2012). A place of opportunity: Black male student-athletes' experiences at a historically Black university. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 5(2), 170–188.
- Cooper, J. N., & Newton, A. (2021). Black female college athletes' sense of belonging at a historically Black college and university (HBCU). *Journal of Negro Education*, 90(1), 71–83.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). Basics of qualitative research (3rd ed.): Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. SAGE Publications, Inc.,
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230153>
- Dancy, T. E., II, Edwards, K. T., & Davis, J. E. (2018). Historically White universities and plantation politics: Anti-blackness and higher education in the Black Lives Matter era. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 176–195.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918754328>
- Dawkins, M. P., Braddock, J. H., II, & Celaya, A. (2008). Academic engagement among African American males who hold aspirations for athletic careers in professional sports. *Challenge (Atlanta): A Journal of Research on African American Men*, 14(2), 51.
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A241629547/AONE?u=anon~efd9bdda&sid=googleScholar&xid=49476966>
- DeFrancesco, C., & Gropper, R. (1996). Support services for African American student-athletes: A case study analysis. *College Student Journal*, 30, 2–8.
- DeMarrais, K., Roulston, K., & Copple, J. (2024). Qualitative research design and methods: An introduction. Myers Education Press, LLC.

- Digest of Education Statistics. (2021). Current trend in American education. U.S. Department of Education.
- Ferguson, T. (2023). Safe space as resistance for Black women student-athletes. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 16(2), 7.
- Fraenkel, R. J., & Wallen, E. N. (2000). How to design and evaluate research in education. McGraw-Hill.
- Francique, A. (2018). Is excellence inclusive? The benefits of fostering Black female college athlete's sense of belonging. *Journal of Higher Education Athletics & Innovation*, 1(3), 48–73.
- Francique, A. (2013). Black female collegiate athlete experiences in a culturally relevant leadership program. *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice*, 7, 87-106.
- Francique, A. & Hart, A. & Steward, A. (2013). Black college athletes' perceptions of academic sand the role of social support. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 6, 231-246.
- Foster, S. JL. (2022). You gotta be there: A thematic content analysis of the historically Black college and university sporting experience. *Communication & Sport*, 0(0).
- Gaston-Gayles, J. L. (2004). Examining academic and athletic motivation among student-athletes at a division I university. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(1), 75.
- Godfrey, M. G. (2010). College football players: The new nontraditional student. TigerPrints.

https://open.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1520&context=all_dissertation

- Grier-Reed, T. L., Madyun, N. H., & Buckley, C. G. (2008). Low Black student retention on a predominantly White campus: Two faculty respond with the African American Student Network. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(5), 476–485. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0031>
- Gruman, J. A., Schneider, F. W., & Coutts, L. M. (2016). Applied social psychology: Understanding and addressing social and practical problems. *SAGE Publications, Incorporated*.
- Hagedorn, L. S., Maxwell, W., & Hampton, P. (2007). Correlates of retention for African-American males in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 31(2), 151-175.
- Harper, S. R. (2018). Black male student-athletes and racial inequities in NCAA Division I edition. Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Race and Equity Center.
- Harper, S. R., & Gasman, M. B. (2008). Consequences of conservation: Black male undergraduates and the politics of historically Black Colleges and universities. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 77(4), 336-351. [doi.org /https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2009-04341-00](https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2009-04341-00)
- Harris, F., & Luke Wood, J. (2016). Applying the Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model to the ` Student Experiences of Men of Color. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, (174), 35–46.

- Harrison, C.K, Martin, B.E., & Rhema Fuller, R. (2015). “Eagles Don’t Fly with Sparrows”: Self-determination theory, African American male scholar-athletes, and peer group influences on motivation. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 84(1), 80-93.
- Harrison, L., Harrison, C. K., & Moore, L. N. (2002). African American racial identity and sport. *Sport, Education and Society*, 7(2), 121–133.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332022000018823>
- Hawkins, B. (2010). *The new plantation: Black athletes, college sports, and predominantly White institutions*. New York: Palgrave-MacMillan.
- Hawkins, B., Francique, A. & Cooper, J. N. (2017). *Critical Race Theory: Black athletic sporting in the United States*. New York: Palgrave-MacMillan.
- Hoffman, J.L. (2020). College sports and institutional values in competition: Leadership challenges. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/978042939957>
- Horton, D. (2015). Between a ball and a harsh place: A study of Black male community college student-athletes and academic progress. *Community College Review*, 43(3), 287–305.
- Horton Jr., D. (2009). Class and cleats: Community college student-athletes and academic success. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2009, 15–27.
- Howe, J. (2023). Self-presentation and Black male college athletes at historically White institutions. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 40, 1-10.
- Hourigan, R.M., & Edgar, S. N. (2020). The foundations of phenomenology, epistemology, methodology, and analysis. *Approaches to qualitative research. An oxford handbook of qualitative research in American music education*, 1, 110.

- Husserl, E. (1931). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology. (Trans by W.R.B. Gibson). Macmillan.*
- Hutchinson, M., Steven, H., Johnson, B.J., Hagans, M., Schaefgen, C. (2022). The unseen struggles of being a student athlete. *Black In Blue.*
- Hyatt, R. (2003). Barriers to persistence among African American intercollegiate athletes: A literature review of non-cognitive variables. *College Student Journal*, 37(2), 260–275.
- Jarvis, P. (1987). *Adult learning in the social context. London: Croom Helm.*
- Joffe, H. (2011). Thematic Analysis. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Mental Health and Psychotherapy* (eds D. Harper and A.R. Thompson). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119973249.ch15>
- Johnson, C., Gitay, R., Abdel-Salam, A.-S. G., BenSaid, A., Ismail, R., Naji Al-Tameemi, R. A., Romanowski, M. H., Kazem Al Fakih, B. M., & Al Hazaa, K. (2022). Student support in higher education: campus service utilization, impact, and challenges. *Heliyon*, 8(12).
- Jones, W. & Black, W. (2021). Basketball’s Black tax? An examination of historically Black college and university men’s basketball guarantee game compensation. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36, 1-12.
- Karimi, R., Bakhtiyari, M., & Masjedi Arani, A. (2019). Protective factors of marital stability in long-term marriage globally: a systematic review. *Epidemiology and health*, 41, e2019023. <https://doi.org/10.4178/epih.e2019023>
- Kaufman, K. A. (2015, January 16). Understanding student-athlete burnout. Association for Applied Sport Psychology.

<https://appliedsportpsych.org/blog/2015/01/understanding-student-athlete-burnout/>

King, R. 2024. Exploring patients' experiences of non-conveyance after receiving an emergency ambulance service response. University of the Sunshine Coast. 10.25907/00808

Kissinger, D. B., & Miller, M. T. (2009). College student-athletes: Challenges, opportunities, and policy implications. Information Age Publishing.

Kozleski, E. B. (2017). The uses of qualitative research: Powerful methods to inform evidence-based practice in education. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 42(1), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796916683710>

Lapchick, R. E., Little, E., Mathew, R., & Zahn, J. (2009). The 2008 racial and gender report card: College sport. Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, University of Central Florida.

Lester, S. (1999). An introduction to phenomenological research. *Stan Lester Developments*. demon.co.uk.

Martin, B. E., Harrison, C. K., Stone, J., & Lawrence, S. M. (2010). Athletic voices and academic victories: African American male student-athlete experiences in the Pac-Ten. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 34(2), 131–153.

McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview*. SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986229>

Melendez, M. C. (2008). Black football players on a predominantly White college campus: Psychosocial and emotional realities of the black college athlete experience. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 34(4), 423-451.

- Mendoza, P., Horton, D., Jr., & Mendez, J. P. (2012). Retention among community college student-athletes. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 36, 201-219.
- Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2017). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 1: Introduction. *The European journal of general practice*, 23(1), 271–273.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375093>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). Graduation rates provisional data. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2022). NCAA student-athlete well-being study: Fall 2021. NCAA Research.
https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/research/other/2020/2022RES_NCAA-SA-Well-BeingSurvey.pdf
- National Junior College Athletic Association. (2024). Eligibility requirements.
<https://www.njcaa.org/compete/faqs>
- Nelson, S., & Baltes, B. (2019). For the culture: Grit, student engagement, and academic performance at a historically black community college. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, 26(1), 89–10.
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on medical education*, 8(2), 90–97.
- Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. and Moules, N.J. (2017) Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>

- Ofoegbu, E. D. (2022) “Of Course I Was the Only Black Girl”: Unpacking the academic experiences of Black women student-athletes at PWIs. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, 15(4), 396-414.
- Ofoegbu, E. D. (2023). “Aren't you here to help me?": Examining the role of identity as Black women athletes navigate relationships and create community at predominantly White institutions. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication.
- Oseguera, L. (2010). Success Despite the Image. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 4(3), 297–324. <https://doi.org/10.1179/ssa.2010.4.3.297>
- Rankin, S., Merson, D., Garvey, J. C., Sorgen, C. H., Menon, I., Loya, K., & Oseguera, L. (2016). The influence of climate on the academic and athletic success of student-athletes: Results from a multi-institutional national study. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 87(5), 701-730.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2016.11777419>
- Reynolds, M. L., Ransdell, L. B., Lucas, S. M., Petlichkoff, L. M., & Gao, Y. (2012). An examination of current practices and gender differences in strength and conditioning in a sample of varsity high school athletic programs. *Journal of strength and conditioning research*, 26(1), 174–183.
<https://doi.org/10.1519/JSC.0b013e31821852b7>
- Royal, G. L., Banks, O., Jenkins, D., Reeves, K., & Secrist, S. (2022). From theory to practice: Leveraging identity-conscious student success strategies to close opportunity gaps for Black undergraduate students. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 40(2), 100-114.

- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2000). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 769-802). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schober, M. M., Gerrish, K., & McDonnell, A. (2016). Development of a conceptual policy framework for advanced practice nursing: an ethnographic study. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 72(6), 1313–1324. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12915>
- Sato, T., Eckert, K., & Turner, S. L. (2018). Perceptions of Black student-athletes about academic mentorship at a predominantly White institution in higher education. *The Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education*, 50(4), 559–583.
- Sellers, R. M. (2000). African American student-athletes: Opportunity or exploitation? In D. A. Brooks, R. (Ed.), *Racism in college athletics: The African American athlete's experience* (2nd ed., pp. 133-154). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, Inc.
- Shapiro, D., Dunder, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P., Yuan, X., Nathan, A & Hwang, Y., A. (2017). A National View of Student Attainment Rates by Race and Ethnicity – Fall 2010 Cohort (Signature Report No. 12b). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
- Shuler, H. D., Spencer, E. C., Davis, J. S., Damo, S., Shakespeare, T. I., Murray, S. A., Lee, D. L., & Hinton, A., Jr (2022). Learning from HBCUs: How to produce Black professionals in STEM. *Cell*, 185(16), 2841–2845.
- Sim, J., Saunders, B., Waterfield, J., & Kingstone, T. (2018). Can sample size in qualitative research be determined a priori? *Qualitative Research*, 18(5), 619–634.

- Simiyu, W. (2012). Challenges of being a Black student athlete on U.S. college campuses. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 5, 40-63.
- Singer, J. N. (2005). Understanding racism through the eyes of African American male student-athletes. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 8, 365-386.
- Singer, J. N. (2016). African American male college athletes' narratives on education and racism. *Urban Education*, 51(9), 1065-1095.
- Smith, E. (2009). *Race, sport, and the American dream* (2nd ed.). Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Staurowsky, E J & Weight, E A. (2011). Title IX literacy: What coaches don't know and need to find out. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport* 4 (2), 190-209.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). What role does grit play in the academic success of Black male collegians at predominantly White institutions? *Journal of African American Studies*, 18(1), 1-10.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2013). *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203118924>
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). Satisfaction and retention among African American men at two-year community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 36(5), 358-370.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2008). Teacher expectations and urban Black males' success in school: Implications for academic leaders. *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*, 6(2), 17.
- Tenny, S., Brannan, J. M., & Brannan, G. D. (2022). *Qualitative study*. StatPearls Publishing.

- Theune, F. L., Braddock, J. H., & Dawkins, M. P. (2020). Admission of Black male student-athletes to predominantly White institutions. *Negro Educational Review*, 71(1–4), 83–105.
- Toldson, I.A. (2021). Developing a Higher Education Completion Agenda for Black Students. *Journal of Negro Education* 90(1), 1-5. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/820519>
- Walsh, J. A., Petrie, T. A., & Jackson, R. (2024). The experiences, and effects, of racial mistreatments in the lives of black male collegiate football players: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 48(5), 314–339.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/01937235241239319>
- Wood, J. L. (2012). Leaving the 2-year college: Predictors of Black male collegian departure. *Journal of Black Studies*, 43(3), 265–288.
- Wood, J. L., & Williams, R. C. (2013). Persistence factors for Black males in the community college: An examination of background, academic, social, and environmental variables. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, 1(2), 1–28.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). Case study research: Design and methods (4th Ed.). *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage*.