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**The Experiences and Transition of Black Former Student Athletes Through and Out of  
College**

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### **Abstract**

Using a narrative approach this researcher used a qualitative study to examine the experiences and transitions of former Black student athletes at a Division I institution. The study involved four participants who were three to four years removed from completing college and athletic retirement. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, Astin's (1999) involvement theory, and Baxter Magolda's (2008) Self authorship theory was used as the theoretical frameworks for this study. The findings provide insight in to how their experiences as college student athletes impacted their ability to graduate and transition out of college. The participants relied on the support and strategies they learned as athletes to be successful students, and in transitioning to life after college.

**Key Words:** Student Athlete, Black Students, Involvement, Self-Authorship, Transition

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, who has always believed in me.

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to give a special shoutout to my father who set a great example for me and has always taught me to create my own path in life. I also want to give a special thanks to my grandma, Shirley, who instilled faith in me at a young age. Through my faith I have been able to persevere through times where I felt doubt and uncertainty. My mother and father who encouraged me throughout my journey and reminded me how proud they are of me.

There were so many times when I questioned myself, but I am thankful for my support and my mentors who helped guide me along the journey and did not let me quit on myself. I am so thankful for God and my support system. I am happy to have a community that believes in me because it really does take a village. Not only to raise a child but also to have people in your corner during times where you doubt yourself. I am thankful to have completed my thesis. This is a major accomplishment not only for me, but I did this for my family. Being the oldest sibling on both sides and cousin (on my father's side), I hope that I can continue to lead by example and continue to be a good role model. Thank you to my committee as well for the time and feedback.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Being a student-athlete can be a double-edged sword. All student-athletes face multiple hurdles when navigating through their college experience such as balancing their lifestyle socially, academically, and personally (Gayles, 2009). Student-athletes are given multiple priorities and it is common for their role as an athlete to overshadow other priorities such as academics (Heird & Steinfeldt, 2013). Although there is a limited amount of time an athlete is supposed to dedicate to their sport student-athletes often spend over the recommended hours in athletic-related events (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001).

Although student-athletes face similar challenges as the general student population, Black student-athletes have extra challenges they must face. These are related to their academic performance because there is a difference in grade point average, classroom experiences, course enrollment and major selection patterns, and participation in enriching educational experiences beyond athletics (Harper, 2016). Some of these challenges include balancing athletic and academic endeavors, coping with social isolation, not participating in student activities, managing health and injuries, prioritizing healthy support system relationships, and adjusting to the transition of what life looks like after college (Carter-Francique et. al, 2015).

Understanding the experiences that Black student-athletes have and how it impacts their future is important. Gayles & Hu (2009) identified that Black student-athletes have lower levels of academic performance, experience academic clustering in particular majors, and may be socially segregated with a lack of student involvement. Research has suggested that Black student-athletes have a higher rate of identity foreclosure after college than the non-athletic student population (Watt & Moore, 2001). Marcia (1966) defined *identity foreclosure* as a commitment to an identity formed by society with the lack of exploration of other hobbies or



interests. The narrative of former Black student athletes will contribute to further understanding the Black student athletic experience and how that impacts their transition out of college. This study aims to learn how Black former student-athletes experienced college and how they perceive that impacting their post-graduation experience.

### **Researcher Positionality**

When choosing the topic, I thought about my own experience and the impact being an athlete had on my transition post-graduation. As an incoming first-year student I looked forward to the four years I had ahead of me with a scholarship to pay for my education while being on the track and field team. As a first-year student I was taught that competition is just the person who is willing to outwork you. I was committed to being the best and keeping my scholarship. The athletic community became a second family with my environment, schedule, and peers surrounding me being 90% represented by the sport I committed to.

I wanted more from my experience; thus, I became an RA and joined a sorority to explore the opportunities on campus. I knew that I was shifting my priorities to activities and organizations on campus and not devoting everything to athletics, because I understood how important it was to network. After graduation, I applied to jobs that I did not hear back from because I lacked practical work experience. I did not have the same structured schedule as I did in college, and it made navigating life after graduation difficult. I had to figure out who I was and what my purpose was. In going through this transition, I found other former athletes who were or had faced the same obstacles as myself. It is important to bring light to the culture of athletics and the impact it has on former student-athletes. Understanding the student-athlete experience and the transition out of college will help in forming pathways for student-athletes through and out of their time at the institution.

## **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to share the experiences of former Black student athletes while they attended a midsize 4-year Division I institution in the Midwest. Their experiences while in college, their transition out of athletics and college, as well as their experiences post their undergraduate time will provide great insight.

The following research questions will guide this qualitative study of former student-athletes regarding their social and professional experiences in and the transition out of college.

RQ1. How do Black former student-athletes describe their experiences as a student and athlete while enrolled at university?

RQ2. How do Black former student athletes describe how their experiences in college impacted their life post college?

## **Significance of Study**

The importance of this research was to understand the experiences Black former athletes had while in college, while transitioning out, and post-college. It was important that Black athletes were not overlooked in their individual and career development. The guidance and support system athletes have help shape their future and the bonds made impact the transition into athletic retirement (Bailey & Fuller, 2019). Understanding not only Black student athletes but college student athletes in general. Firsthand experiences can provide great insight and helpful information to those working at any college. Faculty and staff on campus and in the athletic department can work together to create an environment that allows for a balanced development of both athlete and student.

## **Limitations**

The limitations that might have impacted the trustworthiness of the study was the access to former-student athletes. However, by utilizing the staff in the athletic department provided a list of those who were several years post-graduate. This allowed for a pool of participants that were unknown to the researcher as well as provided a balanced perspective from athletes in various sports. Identifying former Black athletes that come from various sports will be attempted in the selection process.

Another potential limitation was the length of time since retirement. The longer the time that the student had left the institution, the more difficult it could have been for them to accurately recall experiences of their time as a student athlete. To minimize this issue, I limited my target population to athletes who graduated at least three years ago and no more than five years. Those that graduated three years ago did so before the COVID-19 pandemic and thus their experiences was more of a traditional nature.

A third limitation is from me as the researcher and my own student-athlete perspective. As a former student-athlete I am part of the population that I have investigated. Because of my own experiences, I am interested in understanding the development of Black student-athletes as they transitioned throughout college as well as after retirement. My experience or the participants who were chosen will not speak for every Black former athlete, however, similar stories shed awareness on the transitions and development of former student athletes. I worked with an advisor and committee to keep my perspective in check. Additionally, I have kept a journal and talked with an advisor as I did my research to separate my own perspectives from those of my participants.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are common terms found within this research. These terms are centered around the college experience of s Black student athletes and their development. There are some definitions that are not as common and will be defined to better understand this research.

*Student Involvement.* The amount of energy a student gives psychologically and physically to academic and non-academic activities (Astin, 1999).

*National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA),* established to help regulate intercollegiate athletics in the United States (Smith, 2000).

*Athlete Identity,* the degree in which the athlete identifies with the role of an athlete (Heird, & Steinfeldt, 2013).

*Division 1 Athlete.* A collegiate athlete receiving a scholarship to participate in sport at the college level.

*Transition.* Any event or non-event that causes change to occur (Schlossberg, 1981).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduces the topic on the experiences of Black former student athletes while in college, their transition after graduation, as well as their experiences post their graduation. This study emphasizes how Black student-athletes experienced college. Transitions are explored to also understand the coping process of athletic retirement. The participants will include Black former student athletes who are 3 to 5 years removed from graduation

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

This literature review seeks to provide insights into the college experiences of former Black student-athletes while they were moving through and transitioning into life after college. It is important to understand how student involvement, both in and out of athletics, may have played a role during their time in college, as well as the transition out of college and sport. This chapter provides information about the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), college student involvement, transition, and self-authorship from a theoretical perspective.

### NCAA

The National Collegiate Athletic Association was established to help regulate intercollegiate athletics in the United States (Smith, 2000). Harvard and Yale have been long standing rivals in athletics, specifically in highbrow regatta; Smith (2000) explained that in the early 1900's Elkin's Railroad line commercially sponsored an intercollegiate athletic event in rowing between the notorious Harvard and Yale. Harvard took an undue advantage by recruiting a member on their team who was not a student, the increased commercialization of athletics and cheating became a matter of concern (Smith, 2000). Rising concerns about collegiate athletics began in 1905 when the nation brought attention to the 18 deaths and 100 major injuries concerning football (Smith, 2000).

Chancellor Henry MacCracken of New York University requested a national meeting and ultimately formed a rules committee to regulate football (Smith, 2000). President Roosevelt sought to have members of the White House and Rules committee come together to reform rules, resulting in the Intercollegiate Athletic Association later renamed The National Collegiate Athletic Association or NCAA (Smith, 2000). The NCAA has been commonly known as a safety

net for universities, intercollegiate activities, and individual student athletes because it has helped with reducing injuries to athletes, marketing in athletic events, and necessary rule changes to keep the sport fun (Stieber,1991). The governance structure of legislation bodies of the NCAA is made up of volunteer members at institutions such as the president, athletic director, and students (Knoch 1973).

The NCAA's Commitment to the student-athletes wellbeing specifically states

It is the responsibility of each member institution to establish and maintain an environment in which student- athlete's activities, in all sports, are conducted to encourage academic success and individual development as an integral part of the educational experience. Each member institution should also provide an environment that fosters fairness, sportsmanship, safety, honesty and positive relationships between student athletes and presentative of the institution. [Epstein & Anderson, 2016, p.298]

### ***NCAA and the college***

When the NCAA was initially created it did not play a major governing role for intercollegiate athletics, however by the 1920's collegiate athletics were booming and becoming an integral part of higher education (Smith, 2000). By 1976 the NCAA was given additional authority to enforce rules and regulations that schools were penalized if they did not follow (Smith, 2000). As a result, college presidents started to become more aware of what collegiate athletics had to offer as a potential lucrative revenue and noticed it was a great public relations source (Smith, 2000). Smith (2000) identified that the college presidents realized that their reputation began to tie with how well their athletic program was and became more fearful of the NCAA's enforcement authority. Determined, the presidents sought to seek active and collective roles that overtime changed the governance structure of the NCAA (Smith, 2000).

Today there are over 660 colleges and universities that are members of the NCAA divided into Division I, II, and III (Knoch, 1973). The NCAA rules are specified by its Constitution, Bylaws, Official Interpretation of the Bylaws, Executive Regulations, Recommended Policies and Practices, and Procedures Concerning Enforcement (Knoch, 1973). The NCAA policies are in place to make sure that the experience student athletes have are similar from institution to institution and that they are supported in both their student and athlete roles.

Policies and procedures are in place to help set a system of checks and balances and when institutions have issues the NCAA steps in. An example of this is when the NCAA in 1973 charged University of Southwestern Louisiana (USL) with more than 120 violations, including direct payments to student athletes, and USL countered with a lawsuit against the NCAA (Koch, 1973). The NCAA sought to take action for the violations; however, USL filed a restraining order to participate in the post season tournaments as well as more time to reply to the multiple charges (Knoch, 1973). Knoch (1973) stated that during that time USL was considered a “powerhouse” and claimed that the NCAA’s charges were politically motivated and targeted due to their rise from mediocrity to a prominence team (Knoch, 1973). Unfounded rumors suggested that the increase in Black student athletes had caused the school to be a target by the outraged segregationist sentiment in Louisiana (Knoch, 1973), USL suggested that the other parties were spreading rumors to punish the institution (Knoch, 1973). USL carried the case to the Louisiana Supreme court but their application for a review was denied (Knoch, 1973). The NCAA imposed hard sanctions that banned the school from participating in intercollegiate basketball for 2 years, barred other USL athletic teams from participating in post season championships and national televised broadcast, and mandated that the school return all trophies

and receipts of participation in the basketball tournament for the previous three seasons (Knoch, 1973).

### ***Institution responsibility***

The institution has two responsibilities when it comes to student athletes, the first is to educate them and the second is provide them an opportunity to engage in the sport they are there to participate in (Epstein & Anderson, 2016). The NCAA's Fundamental Policy stated, "intercollegiate athletics is an integral part of the educational programs, and the athlete is an integral part of the student body and, by doing so, retain a clear line of demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports" (Epstein & Anderson, 2016, p. 288). There was a concern that if student athletes were paid, they would come to college to be an athlete instead of a student (Steiber, 1991). Athletes live in two worlds on the college campus, the athletic arena that is very straight-forward and in most cases provides a great deal of structure and support (Epstein & Anderson, 2016). The other is the academic side that requires students to take the initiative to do well in their academics; however, this is not always the case (Epstein & Anderson, 2016). Kevin Ross who was a star basketball player sued Creighton University for failing to provide him a meaningful education that included tutoring (Epstein & Anderson, 2016). The court, however, held that his claim was an illegitimate "educational malpractice claim" and instead was a contract claim that was a "basic legal relationship between a student and private institution or university is contractual in nature" (Epstein & Anderson, 2016, p.289). The responsibility falls on the student to use student support services and written in the National Letter of Intent is the fine print of the student versus the institution's responsibility. Another case was when RJ Hendricks transferred to Clemson University and claimed he was given bad advice from his academic advisor that ultimately left him ineligible to compete (Epstein & Anderson,



2016). He claimed that there was a breach of contract due to the advisor's error; however, the courts ruled that there was nothing in the contract that guaranteed he would maintain his eligibility (Epstein & Anderson, 2016). The institution's responsibility is to educate the student and it is important for all student athletes to hold themselves accountable in their efforts of taking advantage of resources that are available through the athletic department and campus.

### ***Support in the Athletic Community***

The most important part of being an athlete is learning to balance all parts of their lives. Bell (2009) conducted qualitative research on the experiences of 41 Division I-Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) student-athletes which revealed the complexities of student-athletes with their academic experience and their relationships with coaches, athletic academic advisors, fellow athletes, nonathlete peers, faculty and parents as the key factors. The theoretical framework used was role-identity in understanding how the key factors have helped in the academic role (Bell, 2009). A participant in this study said:

I was in general studies, and I was just taking classes that my advisor gave me and when it came time to pick a major, because you have to have a certain percentage completed, I wanted to do like marketing or something like that, but if I would have chosen that, I would have lost like 16 or 18 hours, and so that would have made me below the percentage, so I just been put in that [Agricultural major] with everybody else [Bell, 2009, p. 28].

Entering college and adapting to the atmosphere that supports and embraces the idea of teamwork, competing and exploration, is a healthy environment to develop as a student (Jayakumar, 2016). Faculty, staff and coaches who promote student-engagement and exploration beyond the athletics will help student-athletes develop as a professional. It is a coach's

responsibility to make sure their athletes are eligible to compete, so study tables, tutoring, and separate academic advising are offered through the athletic department. Support developed within the athletic department is instrumental for a student-athlete to meet their graduation requirements.

Relationships developed with the faculty and staff outside of athletics, allows the athlete engagement in other departments and adapting to the demanding and structured lifestyle as an athlete and student (Navarro, 2015). Some student-athletes who disregard receiving an education and use collegiate athletics as a means to go to the professional league will have a harder transition into athletic retirement. Student affairs professionals sometimes use “academic clustering” which is when athletes are advised to majors related to degrees that benefit their schedule as an athlete as just a means to compete (Fountain & Finely, 2009).

A qualitative study of 29 senior college student-athletes were interviewed regarding the life experiences that contributed to their career selection and their future career aspirations (Navarro, 2015). Many of the athletes suggested that the major they selected was due to outside influence. A male participant said;

I knew I was interested in teaching, but I didn't really have time to focus on an education degree. My athletics advisor and I would talk after study tables, and I started to realize maybe I could teach but go at it a different way. I did not have a ton of time to go check out majors on campus, so [I] kind of decided that I liked sociology [Navarro, 2015, p.327].

Although his statement does not speak for every athlete, it is an example of the sacrifice athletes make to compete in college. Being an athlete can be like wearing a blindfold and holding on to a rope while someone else guides it and that is why support is so important. A

different participant in the same study expressed the pressure of selecting a major and the different factors contributing such as her advisor

It was more convenient to rely on my athletics advisor since I was so busy with practice and lifting and games...I relied on her when I picked a major because I knew she would help me get all my credits done and still consider eligibility [Navarro, 2015, p.373].

A common theme amongst research is the role academic advisors have in the influence of major selection (Navarro 2015, Fountain & Finley 2009). Although she does not speak for every student-athlete, many share similar experiences. Graduating is a huge deal for college students, and can feel like an accomplishment that many do not have the opportunity to do. Student athletes can have a good and bad experience, but what is important is that something kept them going. Family, faith, and resilience are some contributing factors that keep athletes intact with their student identity (Bailey & Fuller, 2019).

### **The Intersection of Black Male Student-Athletes and Graduation Rates**

Scholars have done extensive research on how black men are socialized and valued for their athletic ability, the financial benefits the institution receive outweighing the success of the black male student-athletes, and the long-term effects of psychological wellness and post-career transitions (Beamon,2008; Harper, 2016; Bailey & Fuller, 2019). Harper (2016) conducted a study that analyzed the institution's federal graduation rate and compared Black male student-athletes in football and basketball into three groups that included the graduation rate for students overall, undergraduate black men overall, and undergraduate students overall. The study was limited to the NCAA's federal graduate database that was inclusive to only student-athletes on scholarship (Harper, 2016). He separated the institutions into "winner" and "loser" institutions based on the graduation rate for Black male student-athletes. Harper (2016) found that during the

2014-2015 academic year Black men made up 2.5% of the general population, but made up 56.3% of football teams and 60% of the basketball teams; Across four cohorts 53.6% of Black male student-athletes graduated within 6 years compared to 68.5% of student-athletes overall; Two-thirds of the universities in the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten Conference, PAC 12 Conference, and the Southeastern Conference graduated Black male athletes at rates lower than Black undergraduate men who were not part of collegiate athletics (Harper, 2016).

Harper's (2016) study suggested that administrators pay more attention to the narrowing racial gaps in graduation rates, academic success indicators, and assorted student outcomes as well as creating internal task forces that focus on racial equity. Findings have indicated that surrounding student-athletes with athletic professionals and counselors can help them cope with the transition, gains and strengths, and a loss of identity for a smooth athletic retirement (Menke & Germany, 2018).

### ***Student Involvement Theory***

Student involvement refers to the amount of energy a student gives psychologically and physically to academic activities. These activities vary in the amount of time a student spends studying, interacting with faculty and staff, campus activities and more (Astin, 1999). Astin (1999) identified that student involvement relies on what students bring in as they enter, referred to as *inputs*. These could include their athletic ability their academic preparation prior to college. It could also include other things they spent time doing while in high school such as additional sports, participating in school or community organizations, and social interactions. Next, Astin identified the *environments* they are a part of and for athletes this is more than one. The students' environment includes the athletic environment (locker room, athletic arena, coaching

spaces, etc.) and the academic environment (classrooms, study tables, etc.). Astin then identified what they have at the end of their experiences which are the *outputs*.

Outputs are the expected outcomes from the involvement. For students this is a degree, perhaps a job, and a certain knowledge criterion based on the area of study. With athletes this is enhanced skill development, greater knowledge about the sport and what it means to be an athlete, along with a lifelong appreciation for the sport. Looking at a microlevel approach research has shown positive benefits of involvement and developmental gains. Dugan (2013) found when students are too involved, they are unable to keep a healthy balance of their responsibilities. Student athletes balancing two environments can become over involved in one or both areas which could lead to potential frustration, injury, failure, and burn-out if not addressed. Student involvement theory is based on behavioral aspects which is critical because it defines what the individual does and explains how they are on a continuum of progression with their involvement (Astin, 1999). Astin identified five postulates that describe involvement with college students, and these are broken down below.

The first postulate explains how involvement is an investment in physiological as well as psychological energy into various objects (Astin, 1999). An example could be a student athlete who invests a lot of time into practices, games or meetings but does not make time for academics. The athletic community including coaches, tutors, and trainers, spend a lot of time together and it can range from more general (practice, team meetings, social gatherings) to more specific (rehabilitation, private tutoring, skill enhancement one-on-one) requiring individuals to develop a schedule to set aside time for themselves.

The second postulate identifies that involvement occurs on a continuum (Astin, 1999). This means that their involvement ranges over time and is related to our level of commitment in

the activity. As student athletes are balancing their two major roles on campus, they have to decide what they give their time and energy to and it will differ based on the sport, season, year in school, as well as their level of interest and commitment to the activity. The third postulate identifies that involvement has both quantitative and qualitative aspects (Astin,1999). An example of this can be the amount of time involved in academics, campus activities, athletic commitments, and most importantly self-care time.

Different commitments lead to different results. If a student wants to do well in a class, they need to attend class, complete the homework, seek support if they are struggling, and study as needed. Athletes need to attend practice, training, and so forth to do well and all of this requires time and intentional work. Heird & Steinfeldt (2013) conducted research on the amount of time that student-athletes spend in athletic related activities and the results showed that the athletes spent over 30 hours weekly. The benefit is that the athlete should show progress in their athletic ability and contribute to their team for wins.

The fourth postulate talks about how the more an individual puts into something the more they will get out of it (Astin,1996). As identified in the third postulate, students who put time and energy into something will see different outputs. However, if they are not putting energy into something they will likely struggle. For example, the student athlete who shows up at required team events but does not listen to the coach, does not do the training, and does not study the plays or mentally prepare for activity may find themselves sitting on the bench or not participating at the high level of their teammates. The same would happen if they were neglecting their academic work.

The final postulate by Astin (1999) stated that the effectiveness of an educational practice is related to the capacity of the practice increasing student involvement. This identifies the need

for support, direction, and information that comes out formally from those in leadership at the institution. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has specific policies for student athletes and for institutions that need to be enforced and these have been developed to ensure that student athletes get the most out of their collegiate experience. One of the major outputs that the NCAA looks at is grades and graduation rates of college athletes. The NCAA provides the graduation rates of student-athletes annually; however, when Gayles (2009) looked into these rates more thoroughly by sport, gender and race it showed flaws. Such as, male athletes entering college performing at lower levels in high school compared to their peers who enter college with higher academic achievement reported lower first year grades. Due to the eligibility requirements to compete student-athletes are more likely to be motivated to completing their degree (Gayles, 2009).

Using the student involvement theory for this research will help define and structure how student athletes managed the various commitments. Understanding the participants' inputs, environments, and outputs will provide insight into their transition to college and then post-graduation. Most do not look at athletics as a form of involvement, but in this study, it will be viewed that way along with their academic experience. Both require investment by the individual and this theory helps in understanding that perspective.

### ***Self-Authorship***

Self- authorship is the internal capacity to define one's internal beliefs, identity and social relationship and includes *trusting in one's internal voice, establishing an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments* (Baxter Magolda, 2008). According to Baxter Magolda (2008) the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development are the three internal foundations of a person's cohesive entity. Trusting in one's internal voice allows for an

individual to take ownership of how they make meaning of external events allowing an individual to create their own meaning (Baxter Magolda, 2008). But before they can do this the individual must go through a series of developmental tasks as they move through the four phases toward internal foundation. An example of this could be a student- athlete embracing athletic retirement and moving forward with the next chapter of their lives.

In moving toward identifying their internal foundation an individual goes through four phases: following formulas, crossroads, becoming the author of one's life, and finally internal foundation (Baxter Magolda, 2008). In entering college as a student athlete, the individual is listening to their coaches, and advisers, as well as upperclassman. Their families may also play an influence in telling them what to do and not do. At this time, they are listening and allowing themselves to be guided by those around them which falls under the *following formulas phase*, and they move out when they are unsatisfied with what others are telling them and shift to a time of *crossroads*.

In this second phase they begin to see that the plan they are following may not be the plan they have chosen, becoming dissatisfied with their current status and looking for a more authentic experience. This may be the student athlete who realizes they do not enjoy their courses and may be in the wrong major, or the athlete that is no longer happy in the sport they once loved. As the feelings continue to change and shift with the individual looking at what others want for them and what they want they shift in to the third stage, *becoming the author of one's life* (Baxter Magolda, 2008). In this phase student athletes will begin to stand up for their own beliefs and ideas and develop self confidence in their decisions and actions. They may seek out others' opinions but are ultimately confident in making their own decision, and this is what propels them into the final stage.



*Setting an internal foundation* helps guide reaction to reality, often accepting personal aspects of oneself and incorporating them into their identity (Baxter Magolda, 2008). After spending time getting to know oneself and exploring hobbies and interests is important for student athletes in particular who spend a lot of time dedicated to their sport. They become strongly grounded in their sense of who they are and will cross over from understanding their internal commitments into living them and it being a part of their internal being (Baxter, 2008). The shift of self-authorship occurs when students encounter challenges that question assumptions, have opportunities to reflect on their assumptions and are supported into reframing their assumptions into more complex frames of references (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008). Jane Pizzolata stated “if students were self-authored, they would be more likely to choose major’s appropriate and interesting to them, engage in critical thinking about their choices, and develop healthy relationship with diverse others” (as cited by Baxter Magolda & King, 2008, p 8) In higher education it should be important for all faculty and staff to create an environment that promotes self-authorship. Creating the conditions to promote self-authorship through three key assumptions: the capacity to choose between wisely between multiple different alternatives, the internal sense of self, and the ability to function interdependently with others (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

### ***Schlossberg’s (1981) Transition Theory***

Student athletes go through several transitions during their time in and out of college. From high school to college athletes, to perhaps red shirts or injuries, and then out of college and these are just the experiences related to the transitions of an athletic career. A transition is any event or non-event that causes change to occur (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg’s (1981) theory has been used to understand adult development over a period of time and events (Wheeler et. al.,

1996). Student-athletes each have their own experiences based on their own transitions, entering and leaving college. Some student athletes, athletic retirement is anticipated due to events like graduation, however other student athletes have an unanticipated transition such as injuries that could make coping with athletic retirement more difficult. According to Schlossberg (1981) there are three factors that affect an individual to adapt to change; first is the characteristics of the individual, next is an individual's pre-transition and post transition environment; and last how the individual perceives their transition.

Most student athletes are excited about the transition into being a collegiate athlete and the commitment that is required in athletics however, few fully prepare for the transition out of college and in most cases away from active involvement in their sport. Wheeler et. al, (1996) examined 18 male and female student athletes who had disabilities (such as permanent physical disability) and their transition experiences into athletic retirement. His study used a grounded theory approach with Schlossberg's transition theory as the format for the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were analyzed in three iterations through carefully categorizing and comparing similar data patterns (Wheeler, et. al, 1996).

The participants answered questions about their experiences as an athlete, their transition into retirement, and their life post retirement (Wheeler, et. al, 1996). More specifically, they were asked questions about their career, hobbies, and health (Wheeler, et. al, 1996). The results showed three emerging categories from the analyses: meaning and value of sport, commitment, and lack of institutional support (Wheeler, et. al, 1996). The retired athletes spoke highly of their connection to competing and saw the meaning and value as an intricate part of their identity (Wheeler, et. al, 1996). Athletes make their sport so much a part of their experience that when it is no longer there it can feel like losing a major part of who they are. The participants identified

their commitment to their sport being “there whole life. Reconstructing their whole life to training and competing. The retired participants in the study felt as though they had a lack of institutional support in counseling and preparation for retirement (Wheeler, et. al, 1996).

As participants spoke about their retirement a common characteristic found amongst the emotional response was sadness, grief, anger or feeling “ripped off” for the lack of preparedness. Almost all the athletes in Wheeler’s study agreed that their athletic retirement was voluntary and started to look more into other aspects of their life such as a career, having a family and travelling. The participants who did not retire voluntarily spoke about how they had feelings of unfinished business (Wheeler, et. al., 1996). All of the participants described that they felt they lost their identity and felt a strong desire to return back. Each participant identified how they found a way to cope that often involved channeling their energy into their career, family, or significant other (Wheeler, et. al., 1996).\_ Wheeler et al. (1996) found that using Schlossberg’s transition theory to guide their study was very important in understanding the transition of athletes.

Schlossberg (1981) identified using potential resources which included situation, support, strategies and self could be an asset or liability in the coping process. The views of a *situation* of the transition whether negative or positive is a direct influence of the experience of it being expected or unexpected or voluntary compared to involuntary (Schlossberg, 1981).\_ Student athletes find themselves in different situations throughout their college experience and beyond. Some of the situations they find themselves in are sitting in a classroom for a test, being on the field for play, sitting in a doctor’s office with an injury, working with a tutor in a class they are struggling with, just to name a few. Each of these situations can have a different type of impact

on the student's ability to transition through this experience. What the individual learns from one situation could have a greater impact on how they experience the next similar or new situation.

*Self* includes both personal/demographic characteristics and psychological resources. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory factored in gender, socioeconomic status, stage of life, state of health, ethnicity, and age along with tools used to cope—ego development, outlook, and commitment and values. The athlete persona along with that of student are also part of this full view of self. Some student athletes may view their athlete status as greater than all other characteristics which may play a large role in the transition they are experiencing. Losing that identity may also impact their sense of self through the transition.

*Support* includes intimate relationships with family, friends, coaches, faculty, staff and communities and is one of the central ways of handling stress in transitioning periods. The function, type and level availability are important when factoring in support during a transitional period (Schlossberg, 1981). The professionals within the intercollegiate community are a support system to help with student-athlete demands. Students in general are provided with a wide variety of support networks while in college, and athletes receive the same support along with those in the area of athletics. Most of this support is getting the students through college, and in some cases beyond; however, if students fail to seek out this support or utilize what is provided, they may have a different experience.

*Strategies* in which Schlossberg's (1981) theory is how the individual handles their transition approach to coping. (Schlossberg, 1981). Perception of the situation is a key factor in creating strategies to cope. For example, with Wheeler's, et. al, (1996) study that examined 18 former student athletes and how they coped with retirement, many chose to direct their energy into other aspects of their life. According to Schlossberg (1981) adaptation depends on the

resources and deficits as well as the transition of perception of self, environment, and support. The four “S’s” *situation, self, support, and strategies* in Schlossberg’s transition theory provide insight to help understand how athletes are triggered during athletic retirement transition.

Understanding the process of transition and what athletes experience as they move through college is important. This theory provides an important framework for understanding their experiences. Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory will help explain how former student athletes transition into post retirement and the physical and psychological effects of sport retirement.

### **Chapter Summary**

The testimonies of athletes can make the intercollegiate community aware of the problem’s Black student athletes face. It is important that professionals provide the right assistance so that athletes are able to make wiser decisions in selecting career paths in their best interest. Athletes need the experience of engaging in community, exploring what they like and don’t like so they choose the best major for them and not choosing a major less rigorous provide the (Foster & Huml, 2017). Athletes must be interwoven into the community instead of being isolated. Research has shown that athletic identity, identity foreclosure, and career development could leave their career identity underdeveloped (Shurts & Shoffner, 2004). College is the bridge into adulthood; it is a time to grow and develop as a young adult that will eventually contribute to society.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of Black former Division I student-athletes and its impact on their life after college. It is important to know what impacted their life in college and how that played a role in where they are today. Not only does it positively impact a student-athlete academically and athletically, but support in networking also plays a pivotal role in aiding the success of a student before and after college (Carter-Francique, et. al., 2014). Opportunities such as student involvement, which can include being a student athlete, allow for the expansion of the student's community and their career development.

#### **Design of the Study**

A narrative research approach was used to understand the experiences that impacted Black former Division I student-athletes while in college as well as transitioning out of college (Creswell, 2014). Narrative research aims to analyze and understand the lived and told experiences that are connected in a series of chronological events (Creswell, 2014). The narrative mode of thinking strives to use the series of life events that an individual faces through explanatory knowledge and human experiences (Kim, J., 2015). Although the narrative design is still developing, this method allowed five different former athletes to talk about how their life was impacted by being a Black student-athlete at a Division I institution in the analysis process. To accurately gauge the life experiences of Black Division I student-athletes this qualitative research looked to gain insight into four former Division I student-athletes and their experiences as well as their transition into a professional role.

#### **Research Site**

This study was conducted with Black alumni from a four-year Division I public university in a Midwestern rural town. In 2018 the Midwestern institution had over 7,500 full time students, with just under 15% identifying as Black or African American. The university had 197 recognized clubs and organizations. The University is a mid-sized Division I university with approximately 525 athletes. The athletic department has 10 men's and 11 women's sports teams, the most popular being football, basketball, baseball/softball, and track and field. At this Division I school the resources for student-athletes are similar to those of a large institution yet is small enough to receive individual attention from faculty and staff. This is important when considering how the role of community support impacts experience and development.

### **Participants**

This study was designed to look at the experiences of former Black college student-athletes, which meant they needed to fit this criteria. They needed to have graduated from college, participated in their sport for at least four years, and be at least three years out of college. Five participants were interviewed and at the conclusion of the interview it was determined that one participant did not meet the criteria and their interview was removed from the study. Half of the participants went to high school out of the Midwest, while the other half were recruited in-state. Each participant graduated with their Bachelor's between 2017 and 2018 and were a couple years into their career field.

The participants were gathered with assistance from the institution's athletic department who maintains a list of alumni. An email was provided to the athletic department and sent out to those who would qualify for this study. An initial email (Appendix A) was sent to the potential participants along with a demographic survey (Appendix B). This was done to solicit participants and make sure that they met the minimum requirements before scheduling the

interview. Once that was received an interview was scheduled. This was done until the participant number was achieved.

The four participants are described briefly below, and their narratives are shared in chapter four. The fifth participant's narrative will not be shared due to not meeting all of the qualifications for the study. The participant eliminated graduated in 2020 with her bachelor's in psychology. She transferred to a Midwestern Division I institution from a junior college in the west. Being a transfer student her experiences in and out of college as well as her transition out of college was a lot more different compared to the other participants. Thus, this participant was removed from this study.

Jordan is a male who was recruited from Mississippi to play football at a Division I institution in the Midwest. Jordan redshirted his freshman year and was able to carry over an extra year of eligibility after he graduated with his Bachelors. He received his bachelor's in Business Management and his Masters in Sports Administration in 2019. Jordan is currently working as a Freight Broker who serves as a liaison between shippers and carriers for securing and transporting goods.

Jackie is a female who was recruited in state for Track and Field. She ran at a Division Institution but due to injuries redshirted her freshman year and was not able to use the extra year of eligibility due to a season ending injury her last year. Jackie received her bachelor's in Business Accounting and her Master's in Business Administration. She is currently an Accountant for a hospital network in Baltimore.

Tristan is a male who was recruited from Georgia to play football at a Division I institution in the Midwest. He redshirted his freshman year due to a season ending injuring and did not use that extra year of eligibility due to pursuing football professionally after he graduated



with his bachelors. Tristan received his Bachelors in Kinesiology with a concentration in Exercise Science and received his Master's in Sports Management. Tristan works at a High School teaching Physical Science and Anatomy, and coach's football.

Julian is a male who participated in Track and Field at a Division I Institution. Julian was introduced to the Track and Field coach when he got to high school and became a walk on. Although Julian was not recruited on the team, he eventually earned a scholarship after his first year. He received his Bachelors in Sports Management and received his Master's in Sports Administration. Julian spent time working at the institution he received his bachelors in as an Admissions Counselor.

#### *Semi-Structured Interview*

An interview protocol (see Appendix C) was used to gain insight into Black former student-athletes' experiences as a student-athlete and as they transitioned into athletic retirement. The questions guided the researcher toward understanding what and who impacted their development during their college years. The questions were used to understand what experiences impacted or helped former student athletes get to where they are today. The questions were designed to understand the Division I student-athletes experience on a more thorough, comprehensive level.

Through the researcher's facilitative interaction, a conversational space was created, and participants were able to share stories and experiences in a space that was developed for the participants to feel comfortable sharing (Pezalla, 2012). The researcher used virtual semi-structured interviews that allowed for in-depth responses as the former athletes share their experiences. Open-ended questions was asked during the interview along with follow-up questions for any clarification.

## **Data Collection**

In order to collect data for this narrative research study, a virtual zoom interview was recorded and transcribed for the most accurate data. The zoom feature that transcribes audio in each interview was utilized to review and code the themes related to Black former student-athlete's experience at a Division I institution.

As participants agreed to an interview, they were assigned unidentifiable names that were connected to all their data. All identifiable information was removed to the best of the researcher's ability. All data collected through the recording of the virtual zoom session is protected by a password-protected computer that is the researcher's personal computer. The researcher and thesis committee have access to review the transcribed data.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is broken into four categories: codes, categories, themes and patterns (Kim, 2015) While designing a narrative inquiry to get the most information my questions took into consideration the environment and experiences surrounding their life space, living and telling as the starting point for collecting data, finding the commonalities and themes within the research were found (Kim, 2015). A narrative analysis is an analysis that displays the “big picture” of the study and preserves the integrity of the participant's story (Frank, 2008). According to Frank (2008), a narrative analysis is instrumental to using the narrative to incorporate the objectives of the study when coding. The material was organized and prepared for analysis, then read, transcribed and coded (Creswell, 2014). Codes were developed connected to each of the research questions as well as utilizing the theoretical frameworks utilized in chapter two. This assisted in developing consistent coding as the interview transcripts were analyzed.

## **Treatment of Data**

When beginning the interview, the participant was informed of confidentiality and only the researcher had access to the signed consent forms. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity. Only the researcher knew the true identity and all other materials were changed to the pseudonym to protect the identity of the participant. The researcher used a narrative analysis to code the themes in each interview.

The Transcript was stored on a OneDrive document that is password protected. Following the IRB protocol, the document will be saved three years after completing the study. During the three years, the primary researcher will have access to the transcription.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter three provided the breakdown of the study and how it was conducted. There was a total of five participants who were interviewed about their experiences as a student athlete and how their decisions in college impacted who they are today; however, only four were identified as meeting the full criteria for participation. This study utilized a narrative approach to understand each of the former Black student athletes' experiences. In the next chapter narratives from each of the participants is provided, and an analysis of the interviews will be provided in chapter five.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Narratives**

This narrative study relied on the four participants describing their experiences as college-athletes and its impact on their transition out of college. Qualitative narrative studies allow us to take a deeper look in the participants' life and experiences as a means of understanding how these developed and were influenced. To understand these participants' experiences, it was important to gain insight into their decision to be a college-athlete, their experiences in college, and their transition out. Below are the individual narratives of the four participants.

#### **Jordan**

Jordan knew he wanted to play college football at a young age. The influence of the college teams in the south had a huge influence on his dream of playing college ball. Although he was unsure of the steps of reaching his goal, he knew that in order to reach that level he would have to work hard to be able to play football at the collegiate level. As Jordan spoke about what influenced him to want to be a collegiate athlete he said:

I just knew early on. I wanted to be on TV on Saturdays. I remember watching the emerging Alabamans and LSU on big Saturday games on CBS. I knew then that I wanted play on TV. Making that dream come true was a realization that I ran into once I got in high school because it wasn't just handed to you. So, coming into high school, I knew I wanted to go far away to play football. I was playing basketball at that time, I asked myself the question what's going to be that thing that's going to get to be my ticket to go to a university and get a scholarship for football? Those early teenage years, those asking

meters, it was just a matter of figuring out what that look like, and just understanding the action plan to bring that to reality.

Jordan knew that at a young age there were things he needed to do to make this dream a reality. There were many factors and influences that played a role in his determination to reach this goal. “I know, there was a lot of people that were influences, like, in support of the path that I wanted to go pursue my dream, which was going to play college football. You know, good and bad influences.”

From family and peers to his environment all had influences on the choices and mindset that he made for himself. Jordan shared, “To be honest, I mean, my family, my coach, you know, my peers around me. You know, they all had an influence into like, what I wanted, and they understood like, what I didn’t want.” Because of this he was able to work toward his dream while also fighting the odds he faced.

That's why I just like going all in into what I was trying to get out because like, I had the support and also had, you know, an environment where I kind of didn't have a choice.

And it was either this or that that like, you know, growing up in north Mississippi, you know, the Memphis, Tennessee area. Your only ticket out sometimes is your sports or, you know, academics and like for me, I understood that early on.

Jordan also talked about his high school too and how it wasn’t common for a student athlete to make it as a college athlete,

I was actually the first student-athletes that went to a Division I School. Since 2014 there's been a wave of student-athletes out of my high school, that play on the Division I level. It’s a neat thing, just to look back on it, like, it's almost 10 years and I mean, how many individuals like athletes that we produce,

And Jordan shared that he understands the impact his high school experience as a student-athlete has left on himself as well as others who have followed after him.

### ***Becoming a College Athlete***

As Jordan spoke about coming to college to play football, he shared what shaped his perspective about what the experience would be like. He had visited several colleges as he made his decision, “Visiting other places like my official college visits, got to experience a different type of college experiences in different places. I really didn't know what to expect, to be honest.” He also had an uncle who had attended college,

The only thing that I could at least understand about college walking in was from the stories from my uncle and all of his experiences. And to be honest, it was kind of spot-on once I got to college, though, I didn't know what to expect.

These helped shape what he perceived as the experience, and they prepared him as he entered, “I just like walked in and like would come in like these conversations I have with my uncle all the time to do so.” As Jordan reflected back on those early first days of being a college athlete, he shared that he felt he had a pretty realistic perspective and at the same time just jumped in and experienced it all day by day. He shared,

I didn't expect it to be like this, you know, movie-like experience. Just the reality was the reality day to day and your new experiences uncovered themselves as time went on. I couldn't tell you what was going through the 17-year-olds, or 18-year-old mind of mine.

### ***Being a Member of the Team***

Jordan spoke about having an amazing support system all around him. Although Jordan was considered an out-of-state athlete he was not far from home or family. He explained

it's a straight shot down to Memphis, Tennessee. So, a five or six-hour drive max. My family was able to see me often. When I redshirted my freshman year, they were still at the games. So, I had that support system there. They're a phone call away, and six hours away.

Jordan also had positive interactions and support from his coaches and teammates, I was fortunate enough to have some coaches that were very genuine and welcoming. As my career progressed, I could lean on those guys, because, my family wasn't, present. I had to lean on the available resources, and I was glad that I was able to be vulnerable, and build those meaningful relationships with certain coaches, and also my teammates, and roommates.

Support was a constant throughout Jordan's experience as a student athlete and played a part in his success as a student and athlete. As an athlete Jordan described devoting over the required hours to his sport. Jordan stated,

Just to be realistic. I devoted all my time to the sport in general, you know, like the game in general. Yeah, we got to go to class by default. But, if I could always do something, or if there was a window for me to do something it didn't matter if it was getting an extra set in, extra film time. Knew it didn't matter if I can, like sneak back into the stadium and just like, you know, just be there, just put the work in on the outside. For me, that was the glory of it being able to always work and craft at what I was trying to get at. Who you were trying to be. The evolution of me as a student athlete is a reflection of me trying to get a scholarship. Let's just say from 6 to 10pm that is just what it looked like.

Jordan's work ethic on the field was dedicated to spending as much time into perfecting his craft. Jordan dedicated much of his time to whatever he needed to do in order to work toward

his goal of receiving a scholarship. Jordan's work ethic superseded the recommended hours through the NCAA, hours that weren't required by the coaches.

### *Academics*

As part of the interview, Jordan was asked to talk not only about the athletic piece of his experience, but also the academic part. He spoke about how academics fit in to his time in college. Jordan spoke about his first few adjustments were learning balance,

It's almost like a full-time job, you know, you're waking up early for workouts, you have at 8am. Then from two to six, your perspective sport, you know, you're executing that section of your day. And then you got to find time for dinner, and then study hall and just getting your stuff done before you know 9 or 10 and you're exhausted, you got to do it all over again. So that was my first adjustment.

Although one of his challenges was learning to balance his time as a student and athlete Jordan had spoken about the structure that was provided being a student-athlete provided and how that helped him in his current day to day life.

I'm like, very fortunate to be able to; even though we came there, we went to school for a purpose to run track or play football, we received a hell of a structured day to day. That allowed us to grow in other areas of our life. So, like, that was big for me, as far as like a developmental piece of that.

As Jordan went through his undergraduate program he did very well in his classes. He spoke about how the closer he got towards graduation the higher his GPA was due to prioritizing his classes and figuring out what he wanted to do next. His freshman year he redshirted due to an injury and was able to use that extra year of eligibility to compete while he received his Master's degree. Jordan spoke on how much time he devoted the classroom,



I think it was very average on how much I devoted my time. I graduated with a 4.0 in my master's program, I think my average GPA in my undergrad was like, maybe 3.2 3.3. But each semester, I was like, banging out a 3.5 or 3.7.

Jordan spoke about how well he did after his first semester and really pointed out some classes where he was able to take away and apply it to his day-to-day life. The learning style was really what he emphasized in how it helped him develop

I just really appreciated the classes that had had a lot of open discussion classes that had open mind discussions than just a lot of work. Because, you know, for me that I think the best way to learn is to be practical, rather than receiving a lot of information that little know-how to apply.

### ***Support***

Jordan spoke about having a strong support system as a student-athlete that included family, staff, and faculty. Jordan spoke on some of the people he felt supported him “I built meaningful relationships with the athletic advisors, one of them was Wendy. That support system opened doors.” Jordan also talked about how his support varied based on his needs in the moment and how sometimes it required a faculty member, other times an academic advisor, and other times coaches, and so on. Jordan also found mentors on campus.

There were just certain people on campus that I've built relationships with, and through college just leaned on. And, like, I am heavily indebted to those people, because as a young guy, I appreciate it; like the love and the support that I received from the people that were on campus.

### ***Life After College***

Jordan graduated with his Masters in 2019 in Sports Administration. He worked in corporate for different companies and recently landed a position in sales as a freight broker for a digital tech logistics company. Jordan described what his role was in sales

As freight broker, I don't have any assets. However, I just connect the dots. Basically, that consensus look like “okay, you worked for Nike, you got stuff to ship from Chicago to Dallas, okay, I don't have any assets, However, we have the capacity as far as our trucks to help you move that freight,” and we negotiate the cost and like that agreement that differences is what we profit.

As Jordan described what he did professionally he also identified how being a student-athlete plays a role into how he navigates through his day and the structure that he keeps himself on to stay disciplined. His structured schedule as an athlete has helped him as a professional. “I'm like a hybrid athlete post being a true athlete. It's still in my blood you know, I like to basically start my day early, I've got solitude.” He went on to speak about how much of the day is not under his control. “I read in the morning, get a cup of coffee, run. Make sure I get some nice nutrition to start the day. So, by the time I walk in office, you know people are already like I'm already wired.” He identified that those life skills he learned as an athlete; like having a schedule, prioritizing what is important, and managing how the day unfolds, were things he learned as a student athlete that he has carried over into his life now.

## **Jackie**

### ***Before College***

Jackie started running at the age of 9 but due to a serious car accident took some time off to recover and returned to track when she was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Most of her life she was an athlete but started to focus more on track as she got closer to high school. She identified that her support

system played a huge role in the guidance and direction she had going to college. Her natural talent took her far and Jackie has great relationships with her coaches that really looked out for her and saw how far her talent could take her. In high school, Jackie knew that she would run in college because that's what she was told throughout her life; she just did not know where. Jackie, in talking about her senior year of high school stated,

To be honest, college came kind of fast. To put it in the nicest way, I don't think I had the proper guidance in what it took to look into schools or how to react when schools were looking into me what my thought process was as a student athlete. At the end of my high school career, it kind of came and smacked me in the face.

Although Jackie did not know where she was going to go, she always knew that she was going to go to college and get a degree. Being a good athlete, she knew that she was a good runner, and running in college was always encouraged by those around her. Her athletic identity was a huge part of who she was and was very confident in what was next for her.

I knew I was going to go to college, because that's what was always repeated to me from, like middle school to my freshman year, I knew I was good. So people would be like, "Oh, when you go to college..." so I knew this was something that continues throughout college. I knew it was going to happen I just didn't think too much into it like how it's going to happen.

Jackie described how there were moments where she felt discouraged to run because of how intense the sport itself was but that looking back on it now she understands that it was only to make her better. Before she looked at it differently and as she matured her mindset shifted. Jackie stated,

Track is a lot... now in this mindset that I am in... maybe because I'm more mature I wouldn't have had that thought process back then being who I am now. But back then, as a young, immature child growing up, I thought it was a burden.

As time passed and Jackie was able to think about her experiences and what she was able to take away from track and she spoke on how maturity allowed her to reflect on her experiences differently,

Looking back, it really wasn't a burden, but at the time, like those workouts were hard, but they were hard to make me better is my thought process now. But because they were hard, and I missed out on stuff that I thought I needed or I needed to be at. I didn't want to run in track often.

### ***Becoming a College Athlete***

When Jackie described her experience as a student athlete, she explained how it was different than her experience running in high school and running on a summer track team. The biggest difference she pointed out was the leadership on the team when she got to college. When Jackie spoke, she talked about not feeling as valued and the difficulties she had with that experience. Jackie mentioned

College track was different from AAU track, it was definitely different from high school track. I thought college track would be a lot better than those two, but it was not. A big part of it had to do with not necessarily the people on my team, but like the leaders leading the track team.

That lack of support from her coach was really discouraging for her. She did not feel valued unless she was doing well. Being a scholarship athlete Jackie understood that it was a

business, the dynamics from high school had changed but not feeling valued during her injuries, did not sit well with her experience as a student-athlete.

It wasn't really like a friendly environment, the vibes I got from it. And with that it's like, why am I running for somebody who doesn't make me feel like I should be here, like all my other coaches in the past have. I've had coaches call, check on me, you know, even if I've done bad, like they're encouraging me... There was a disconnect.

Jackie emphasized what she did like about being a student-athlete is what it taught her. She explained how learning discipline has been something she has been able to take away and apply in everyday life,

My favorite thing I would say being an athlete was the discipline I obtained from it, like even though that's probably not a fun thing to say. As an adult now outside of my school, discipline is very important and that discipline I gained from having a routine”.

When Jackie was asked about her experience as an athlete she reflected and spoke about how it was a cool experience, but it could have been better. She explained she felt if she had better leadership she felt as though she would have been more motivated and invested in running.

As Jackie talked about how much time she devoted to athletics she mentioned how much time she devoted to athletics each week,

I would say, I devoted about... Three to four hours, if not, and that's just for practicing and lifting. So, including study tables, it's like at least three to four hours a day, maybe sometimes five. If you really want to sum it all up for a week from Monday to Friday, 20 hours of my life, minus eight hours sleep, went to prepare for track. Then when it's time to go to track meets 48 hours the whole weekend for track meets. So a good chunk.

### *Academics*

Jackie spoke on her student perspective and shared how much time she felt she devoted to being a student and doing well in her classes. Jackie originally was an engineering major but changed her major her sophomore year.

I changed my major to accounting the second semester of my sophomore year because I found out that I would have to transfer to an engineering school to get the full engineering degree and do two years because my college did not have an engineering program or degree. If I were to switch schools as an athlete, I would have had one full year without scholarship money. I would have to sit out and I didn't know where that money was coming from.

Jackie described herself as a good student and enjoyed her time in the classroom, although she felt like she could have devoted more time to her academics. When she reflected on her experiences as a student she said

I believe my experience as a student, it was... Great. I wasn't a terrible student. I could've maybe been better, but due to my other commitments for track, my full potential for being a student wasn't met really because I have another stress that I had to also commit to. So, I have to like kind of split myself in that case. But I think overall, I was a good student.

Jackie explained how her time devoted to her academics shifted over the years as a student. Her commitment to both really tied together her last year of competing. So, if I had like two classes, maybe on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, maybe like 15 hours. Jackie also mentioned she did better as she got closer to graduating,

I think I became more dedicated as a student, my senior year, because I wanted to graduate and became more dedicated as an athlete. That changed over the years because

my last season I wanted to be at my best because I didn't know if I had another season.

Yeah. My senior year was more dedicated than other years for both student and athlete.

### *Support*

When Jackie spoke on her support system, she named some coaches that heavily contributed to how she got involved in being an athlete and the type of support she got that helped during her transition into college. "I got my support mainly from my mother, my AAU coach, and the close group of people on my track team." Jackie also explained how she felt the people in this group supported her,

My mother, because I'm on scholarship and I'm doing this for her, she's going to support me, even if I call her on a bad day. She would tell me we just got to stick it out. Coach because he bought me my first pair of track shoes. If he didn't see that I had this potential, I would not have been running at all. Then, like my teammates that I was close to, we all were in the same boat. So, if they can do it, I can do it.

Jackie's support group was a source that kept her going through tough times. As Jackie described her support system, she stated they were,

Motivational, I would say, like my backbone, because I could have been like, OK, disregard everybody that's been there for me this and everybody that's rooting for me, you know? But because they root for me and I want to make them proud.

Aside from Jackie's mom, she spoke highly of her AAU coach who believed in her before she was his athlete. Jackie moved from Ghana as a child and his consistency and influence has been a big deal in her life

One of the biggest advocates in my life is a man by the name of Coach Carter. He just recently turned ninety-three years of age. He's a very big factor in my life on why I am the person I am today.

Jackie mentioned the sacrifices he made for her and other teammates on his AAU track team.

Coach Carter would make sure that I was at every practice by picking me up if my mom was at work or he'll drop me and a whole bunch of kids off and pick us up individually.

He bought me my first pair track shoes, so he's very much a big factor in my life. He was a big supporter of making sure I saw my talent out for what was.

### ***Life After College***

As Jackie talked about her transitions, how prepared she felt, and what everyday life was like now she mentioned how she felt when she was graduating, and she said:

I was so unprepared that I like applied for grad school because, like I say, I've been I don't know what life is without being a student-athlete. Like I was just going to go back home and live with my mom and then figure it out from there. But I did not want to do that. I like the freedom that I had in college, so I was not prepared at all to the point I had to sign up for grad school and get myself in more debt because I don't know what I'm doing.

Jackie landed her first job as an accountant after she graduated with her Master's in 2018. Currently, she works remotely as an accountant and she described what she currently did for work,

I'm a full-time accountant for this hospital network in Baltimore, Maryland. Currently, I'm about a year and a little over a year, a little under a year and a half with the company,



I am with full time. I work remotely because I'm currently in Illinois. But for the near future, it will be remote because the circumstances of the pandemic that's been going on. I. I kind of like what I do, Accounting is cool.

Jackie also talked about some of the hobbies she did outside of work. She expressed that, Ever since the pandemic happened, I picked back up going back to the gym. There was something that was missing. So, I just went to go search for it and I think like getting back to the gym and getting back to this routine of fitness, I take fitness very seriously now. At one point it was kind of like a joke to me, but right now it's part of my daily routine on how to be a better me.

After being an athlete for so long Jackie cherishes the memories, she created during her time as an athlete. Jackie described how,

Life after college has its good days and has its ehh days. There have been days where sometimes I look back at myself. I miss college, I miss being a college athlete that comfortable environment that I was used to for so long,

## **Tristan**

### ***Before College***

Tristan started playing football at the age of 4. He knew that financially, being a student athlete would help put him in a better situation with being able to afford college. He started to take football serious competitively his freshman year of High School. Tristan stated

I kind of always had the dream of being a student athlete, but I didn't really get serious about it until I got to high school. I did enjoy sports and I did enjoy football, but it was more so a business decision because of my financial situation. My family looked at that as a way to provide or get to college, so I could get the education that I needed to and

hopefully, put me in a better position. So I didn't get serious about it or I wasn't really focused solely on it until I got to ninth grade and then it just kind of grew and grew each year.

Before coming to college Tristan talked about what he expected college to be like and he spoke on having an ideal image of what college was like for student athletes and the difference he experienced when he became one. “When you're young and you're an athlete you have this perfect idea, or you have this great image of how you think it would be. It wasn't like that” As Tristan continued to speak, he also mentioned how the media played a role in his expectations because the media provided an idealistic view. Tristan stated

You just only see the glamorous side of it, you don't really see like what the players go through on a day-to-day basis, you only see the product on the field and then you just see like the success that comes with it and you know, the fans and all that. So, I would say media was the main thing that portrayed that image because I'm the oldest sibling and I'm the first one in my family to go to college playing any sport. So, I didn't have anything in reference. The media was the only thing that I had to reference.

When Tristan spoke about how his expectations met his experience, he mentioned his positive experience and said:

I would say for the most part it did, because looking back at it, I had some great experiences football-wise and college-wise. I always try to live by the thought that it could always be worse. So, I definitely think that my college experience and football experience lived up to my expectations. And I'm, I'm blessed and I'm thankful for those experiences.

Tristan was asked if he ever considered not being a student athlete and although he faced trials and tribulations he mentioned

I had thoughts of stopping, quitting or giving up on the idea of playing college sports. But for some reason I always and maybe because of the person I am. One, I'm not a quitter, I don't like quitting. Two, I just always felt like it was a deeper purpose. Part of it was me just being in a bad state at points and times in my life, especially in college. So I was just able to kind of get through that with the help from my dad, friends and family. I was able to just get through those points in my life.

### ***Becoming a College Athlete***

As a college athlete Tristan spoke about how busy his schedule was and what his typical day looked like. Tristan talked about the amount of time he devoted and the difference between in and out of season, sharing

If we were in season, our only off days were Mondays, and that's only because we had a game on Saturday. But for example, Tuesday, we would have class all day, treatment, meetings, film, practice, film after practice or treatment based on whatever it is that you need. So, I wouldn't get out of practice every day till roughly about seven or eight o'clock. Then during the season, including the game I was probably spending about 40 hours a week, because you got to include the traveling if it's an away game. If we got to drive to the game, stay in a hotel, that's a whole different topic. If it's off season, you're probably not spending as much time, but you still spend close to about 20 to 30 hours a week.

Being a college athlete also came with challenges that Tristan spoke on that he overcame such as time management and adjusting to the Midwest. Tristan stated, "Some challenges, I

would say, were time management because you always have to find a way to manage a lot of things.” He also shared that

Another thing for me was getting accustomed to the Midwest because the Midwest was a lot different from where I am from. The weather, for instance, the culture, the environment, and the way that people interact was a little different. So that took me about a semester or so to get accustomed to.

Tristan spoke about how he battled with a season ending injury that heavily impacted him. Tristan described his experience by saying “I had an injury my freshman year, it was season ending and I had to walk around campus on crutches. So that was challenging as well”. Although Tristan battled an injury, he kept a positive outlook and had a great experience as a student athlete. When describing his experience Tristan mentioned how much he grew and said,

Overall, I would say it was a great experience. It taught me a lot. It made me the person I am today. It also gave me a lot of insight just being able to, you know, be around different people from all over the world and have a lot of experiences, people say that they can’t experience

### *Academics*

Tristan spoke about how he took his academics seriously and spoke about the connections he made with his professors while in college and although he felt like he was stigmatized at times he said

I think a lot of times they already had a vision in their head about how they expected student athletes to be, especially football players. So, I think once I kind of broke the stigma and they saw that I was serious about my education, I think they helped me out a

lot. Sometimes I would go to their office hours and just kind of get to know them and talk to them and show them that I'm not just an athlete and that I cared about my education.

Tristan also spoke honestly about the amount of time he felt he dedicated to his academics in comparison to his athletics. Tristan said

I think the amount of time that I spent on academics can vary depending on my class makeup and how many hours I was taking that semester. I'm not going to lie; it was some classes that I would only go to class, and I wouldn't do anything outside of class dealing with that class. It was some classes where I had to, go to the library and study. For example, anatomy where it was memorization, and it was very particular to the T. You know where you have to know the specific muscle, you got a lab practical and there is 100 things that you got to know. I think it would vary based on my class coursework and how many hours I was taking and the combination of classes that I had at that time.

When he spoke about his overall experience as a student, he also talked about the type of classroom setting and how that played a role in his engagement with the class. "I think it was a good experience. I especially liked anatomy and biomechanics. The classes that were interesting to me and I knew I would use in my future." Tristan also mentioned how the dynamics of his classes that were more discussion based were more intriguing due to the dynamic. Tristan said:

I got to see different perspectives on the topics that we discussed. In ethics, we may be talking about steroid use, or something interesting and not only are we just listening to the teacher talk, but she actually gives us a platform to give our opinion. Then you get to kind of not necessarily debate, but just bounce ideas off one another. So that's what I would appreciate the most about that my student experience.

Tristan also spoke about what his senior year in college was like academically and as he spoke about his mindset he said, "My last year in college, student wise, I was just more so focused on graduating" As Tristan spoke more on why he was focused on graduating he mentioned that "I was focused on trying to pursue my dreams and make it to the next level."

### *Support*

Tristan mentioned the support he felt he had during his student athlete experience and mentioned that he felt as though he got most his support from his family and friends sharing

I would say, my family and my closest friends like I give a lot of credit too, my dad, and my mom as well. My roommate Jordan, we have a tight bond because we were both from the South. So, we kind of instantly clicked and we were always there for one another.

And some of the other players that I was around most of the time based on positions.

Tristan spoke about his dad and how he influenced him in playing football. When Tristan spoke about his father and his influence in the process of being an athlete he said

Ever since I was little, he would always take me out and practice with me and kind of motivate me and make sure that I was doing positive stuff. He's always been there regardless of whether it was good or bad. He's the one that guided me throughout the process, and he's the one that I kind of give of the credit to.

When Tristan described his support system, he mentioned how they were there no matter what,

One thing I can say, they're always there. So, no matter whatever the situation was, even if they couldn't financially support me the way that they wanted to, they could provide emotional support, spiritual support, or support in whatever way they could at the time.

So that's one thing I can't say about them.

Outside of Tristan's family, friends, and teammates he also mentioned the support he received from his coaches and athletic advisor. Tristan mentioned his support in the athletic community and said "My position coach and my academic advisor, Ms. Wendy. I would definitely say my position coach because he was most familiar with me." During Tristan's freshman year he suffered a season ending injury and described how he found support using the campus counseling services as well explaining:

I actually had a very dark time in my life while I was in college my freshman year because I suffered a season ending injury. And at the time, I was kind of, you know, ashamed because I'd never been to anything like that before, and I really needed help, I needed to talk to somebody and just be able to express my feelings, so I actually did use the on campus counseling center.

### ***Life after College***

Tristan's is currently teaching and coaching football while mentoring young men. He spoke about how prepared he felt after graduating stating,

As far as what I do now, I think college prepared me. I do actually use some of the coursework that I learned in college in my everyday life in regard to what I teach. So, I think for the most part, college, did prepare me in a way in which I could portray to my students now. So, I would say so.

Speaking on Tristan's transition out of college he said "Well, initially, once I graduated college, I really didn't have a plan and I kind of just got stuck doing something that I didn't enjoy." Tristan talked about where he started compared to where he is now "I started as a peer pro and now I'm a teacher. I have my own classroom; I have my own schedule." Tristan began talking about where he is in life and what he currently does:

I spend most of my time teaching trying to be a positive influence on the kids now, giving them my experiences. I work with another coach from my school, he asked me to come help coach. I'm a member of the operational discipline team at the school, so we try to just look at a lot of the problems that we have, whether it be the number of write ups, skipping, fighting or whatever it is and come up with ways to try to change the behavior. You know, just trying to implement new strategies to help influence the kids to just do better.

Outside of work. Tristan described how he spent his time saying

For the most part, if I'm not working, if I'm not working out, I'm generally either chillin, hanging out with friends, doing some sports, maybe going to a basketball game, going to a football game or eating. That's pretty much it for the most part.

## **Julian**

### ***Before College***

Julian knew since high school that he wanted to compete at the college level. He went to small to medium high school where not many athletes went on to compete at the Division I level. Julian said

I knew I wanted to be a student athlete at the division I level. Specifically, whenever I was in high school, it was just always goal of mine. Coming from a medium to small size high school. Not so many kids even make it to the college level in sports at all, really. So, after qualifying for state in track, that was kind of a way to gauge if I could make it at that level. I never considered not competing in track he said “No, there was it was almost a necessity to be a college athlete. I had to play sport.” Julian talked about what he assumed the college athlete experience would be like and said:



Yeah. Well, just like I said a little bit ago, not too many kids are athletes from my high school to college to play, and if they did, it was like the junior college, so it's not like that, many people. So going into it, I just expected it to be the college experience, but you just throw a sport on top of it. So, with that, it was just a matter of just balancing and having good time management skills, which I already knew that would be the case. It was a balance. You know, after practice in the afternoon, it was time to go to the chow halls, and then go back to the dorm and then start on our homework. Suddenly, that just became, the way to get things done and pass those classes.

### ***Becoming a College Athlete***

Julian mentioned that he began track through reaching out to the coach. Julian said I've found a former teammate of mine. Named Drew, just walking behind my dorm and he looked like he ran track. So, I asked him if he did. And then from there on, I told him to get me a contact with the head coach. So right, then and there, I got signed up on the portal then I was started going to practice. Then my career pretty much took off from there.

Julian also explained how he felt his experiences met his expectations as a student athlete. Julian explained by saying

It definitely met expectations. Competing at the Division I level, you're going against the best in collegiate in competition. You already know you're getting the highest of quality regardless of where you are, where you go. So that definitely met the expectations.

Julian also spoke about the team environment and said:

Traveling and being in that team environment, at the high school level is one thing it's different in college. Whatever they do at the collegiate level, you know, when you spend that extra time with your teammates and sometimes you even live with them so it's another level of bonding. That definitely just made the experience 10 times better because it just kept me more focused and really immersed in the sport.

Although Julian had a great experience as a student athlete, he also spoke about some of the challenges he overcame. Julian said

The standard requirements for my event. I compete at the visual level and got to have certain standards in order to qualify or be competitive. So, starting or being in the event like long jump and triple jump, your field events are a lot of extra work off the track that you got to do in order to be good at it. So that's probably the hardest obstacle. Try to catch up to the physical level that I would need to compete and be competitive at that level. So. Yeah, put in that overtime.

### *Academics*

Academically Julian described himself as a good student. When he spoke about his classroom experience, he mentioned:

From a classroom perspective, it was pretty standard to high school, you know, block schedule. You get to pick your classes. Certain semesters have more credit than others, so the workload was a little bit heavier during certain semesters, depending on the time frame. So, most of the time I had no problems in the classroom, I was pretty on top of my assignments and everything. Like I said earlier after eating and having to practice and everything, you just get your homework done. So, I would spend usually like three to four hours at night. The worst part was having to stay up late nights to study.

When Julian asked if he had ever considered changing his major, he said “Nope, I maintain the same nature throughout my undergraduate and graduate.” Julian described his interactions with his professors and said, “I would go to professors if I had questions on assignments.” When Julian spoke about his classmates he said “if we were doing like group projects, I would talk to fellow students’ classmates. We had our little groups formed, so we were there for each other”.

### ***Support***

Julian spoke highly of his support system and mentioned the crucial role each person played in his life. His self, family, teammates, and friends kept Julian motivated. Julian said: Support came from family specifically, just dad and just kind of getting like the occasional good jobs after meets. Outside of that, Personal motivation is mainly how I got myself through it because I started college and it was seen as an expectation that I realized it’s up to me to get through it. So, a lot of self-motivations as well and then teammates as well. When you join a team it's not about you anymore. In a sport like track and field, you know, you realize every point matters, every bit counts and that's when you got to really put others before yourself. I learned about sacrificed. So that definitely helps off the track.

Julian shared in his interview that he learned a lot from the people he spent the most time with. Julian stated “My jump squad and my roommates because that's who I spent most my time and that’s who I lived with. I learned a lot about those people.” When Julian explained why he said, “I always went to my teammates because we were damn near going through the same thing.”

### ***Life After College***

Julian spoke about his journey in the workforce and talked about what his typical workday looked like as an Admissions counselor for his Alma Mater. Julian described what his typical workday was like and said:

So, me personally, I'm just freshly new in the workforce, so I was working in admissions at the university, to my alma mater. A typical day for me would be waking up. In the morning at about six A.M or so to go work out. After that, I grab breakfast and go to work at about eight o'clock, depending on what time of the month it is, because we have a travel season during the early fall where, like three months out of the year, we're busy visiting all types of schools, trying to recruit students, in our respective territories. If not, there was kind of like more downtime office work, making calls, reaching out to students, asking questions. So depending on what time of the year, that's typically what I'll be doing till about 4:30 p.m. Once I get home, since I'm a bachelor, I usually start making dinner, I'll read for about a couple of hours before I get on the phone, I'll listen to music, or I'll go to sleep. So that's pretty much the cycle for a guy like me around the Sun.

Julian described his personal life and how he felt life has been since college. The amount of time that went towards being an athlete is put into being a working man. Julian said

Life since college is a lot more free time. More work centered. Myself, a lot quieter, a lot lonelier, but it's fine. With work being the pinnacle of everything since I got to get these bills paid. That's where time is mostly spent. So, you I don't really concern myself with too many outside hobbies other than working out just to maintain health because that is always important. That is where you kind of get a little bit of therapy.

Julian talked about what he felt that being a student athlete taught him and what he was able to take away as he has transitioned into the next phase of his life. Julian mentioned, “It taught me character, humility, how to win, perseverance, success, and how to handle defeat.”

### **Chapter Summary**

The narratives of this help provide insight in to how these participants reflected on and perceived their time as a student athlete and how their experiences have impacted who they are today. Two of the participant’s Jordan and Tristan were recruited from out of state for college and had to adjust to being in the Midwest as opposed to Jackie and Julian. Julian and Jordan were not recruited with scholarships but eventually received them through hard work on the field and track. How these experiences impacted their lives during and after college are analyzed in the next chapter.

## Chapter V

### Analysis

The narratives above speak much about the participants' experiences as a student-athlete in college. They described time in and out of the classroom, time in their sport, and some experiences beyond both. The narratives provide insight into some of the experiences but not all of them. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into former college student athletes' experiences in college as well as their transition out of college. In this section this will be further explored through the lens of Astin's (1999) theory of involvement as their experiences are analyzed. To understand their transition the analysis utilized Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory.

#### **The experiences in college of former Black college student-athletes**

In understanding the experiences of these student athletes, it was important to learn more about the ways in which being a college athlete influenced their development as well as what they were involved in beyond being an athlete and a student in a classroom. Asking them questions about how they perceived themselves provided this information, and they spoke about themselves as students, as athletes, and who they are today. When asked about things they were engaged in and the ways in which they moved about on campus brought out information about student involvement, time management, discipline, and insight into who they were beyond the student-athlete persona. The participants spoke about their academic identity, student involvement, and their athlete identity throughout their time in college and how it shifted as they gradually reached graduation. Managing time for themselves to be involved on campus, networking opportunities, as well as clubs and organizations will be further analyzed below through Astin's (1999) involvement theory. Chapter two discusses Astin's (1999) Involvement

Theory which explains that a student's *input, environment, and output*. Input is what characteristics they came to college with, in this study it included being former high school student athletes. The *environment* refers to the location they are in and what opportunities are around them. The environment in this study is what they experienced while in college as a student athlete and how that helped shape their different experiences. The environment then impacts a student's *output* which is the outcome of their experiences and is analyzed in the second research question below. Astin's theory also provides five postulates regarding involvement, and these are used to analyze the participants' involvement.

***Postulate 1: Involvement is an investment of Physiological and Psychological Energy***

The participants in this study spoke about how they needed to devote physical and mental energy to both their academics and their sport. But they addressed the academic side as they described how they were perceived by instructors because of their athlete identity. Jackie shared that being an athlete and student is like having two full time jobs and it weighed heavy on her sometimes. Tristan invested his time to not only athletics but also his class work and attended his classes because he wanted to make sure the professors knew he cared about his grades.

Tristan described how he felt as though athletes were stigmatized, especially football players and wanted the professors to know that he cared about his education. As a student athlete Tristan explained how he had a demanding schedule and sometimes questioned the purpose of his academic assignments that took longer to complete.

A lot of times, the professors, would assign us work and in that moment, I'll be like, why they assign me this paper but at the end of it, I would understand the purpose behind the assignment. I appreciate it now.

Tristan spoke positively about his academic experience and was able to describe the reasons why he had to do the assignments in order to succeed in the class. Tristan talked about how he worked hard in and out of the classroom and had great relationships with his professors. He spoke about having to put in effort to be successful in the classroom as well as on the field. Tristan also shared his perspective of how his energy was invested into football and said,

You're kind of selling your body, in some sense, because you are going to always be busy. You're not going to have much free time. So, you're going to be going from meetings to practice to film, you know, to games, to traveling for games or whatever the case may be.

Jackie acknowledged the psychological and physical impact that being a student athlete had on her. Jackie who received her bachelor's in accounting and shared "Overall, it was okay. I just remember being tired often in class. So that might have taken away from me being the best." She acknowledged that she may have provided more energy to the sport and less to the coursework.

Each of the participants identified that they needed to put in time and energy toward success. They explained their efforts to succeed as an athlete and a student. They also shared how it impacted them mentally and physically.

***Postulate 2: Involvement occurs on a continuum***

In the second postulate of Astin's (1999) involvement theory, it states the amount of energy invested in involvement overtime may vary. The participants in this study provided examples of giving different levels of attention to different areas of their lives based on various things. Jordan who majored in Business management described how over time his commitments changed as he redirected his focus and priorities.



You know, interests change, the reality is that I was really watering some buckets more than others, as I progressed late in my career or just like another class. I was more so about a sport rather than the class, but if it was class, it was something that really had my attention. Over time, I just really obsessed with ball and like what interested me at that time. Probably until 2017, I just kind of went in one direction from 2018 to 19 I kind of went in the direction of the, the unknown and like here I am.

Jordan is describing how his priorities shifted to focus more on his career as he found his interest in the classroom. Jackie spoke about how she began to focus more on her academics toward her senior year addressing her shift in motivation.

My last year in college, I just wanted to graduate on time, and I wanted to do good because I felt like I was kind of messing around in the first few years. I knew my potential, but I don't know if I really cared if anybody else knew until my senior year.

Julian, who participated in jumps on the track and field team stated that he used his extra year of eligibility during his graduate year. During his senior year of his undergraduate degree, he said “My last year in undergrad my focus was going to grad school, so I wasn’t focusing on track. That's really what I was focusing on.” Tristan played football and said that his last year he was more focused on graduating and “making sure that I had everything in order so I could graduate because I was having hopes of moving on to the next step of my life. That was kind of just the mindset that I had.” In chapter four Tristan identified that his biggest goal was to make it as a professional athlete.

Jordan, Tristan, and Jackie’s senior year was when they began to focus on more of their academics all for different external reasons. Jordan wanted to focus more on his career route and educating and preparing himself on what was next. Tristan focused more on his academics so

that he could make it as a professional athlete. Jackie focused on putting more emphasis on her academics to meet her expectations of herself and the goals she had. For Julian, knowing he had another year of eligibility for track, he focused more on his academics his senior year and more on his sport during his first year of graduate school. Three out of the four who anticipated their time coming to an end shifted their interest from their athletics to more of their academics and graduation.

***Postulate 3: Involvement has both qualitative and quantitative investments***

Postulate three is focused on how involvement does not only consist of the amount of time that is invested but also the quality of effort put into the college experience. For example, previously, Jackie talks about how during her track season she would invest 48 hours a week with practices, traveling, the athletic trainers, and meets. But when out of season she put more effort in to her academics. As Jackie talked about her experiences outside of being an athlete, sharing:

I was a little late in the game. I didn't really start using resources until late. Freshman year I went to study tables because I had to. On the track team, it was a requirement. I went to tutoring there because once again it was a requirement so why not take advantage of it? Sophomore year, I kind of lost my way. But junior year, I became a little more active. I joined clubs, I went to career services to update my resume, I went to different career mock interviews, workshops.

As Jackie began to see the benefits of using the resources, she was able to invest her time and see the value of how different departments could be used for her advantage. Jordan described his involvement outside of athletics by committing his time to student organizations. As Jordan

became more invested in his academics and his future, he was looking for opportunities that would enhance this, he shared

I joined this international business fraternity. It was within the school of business, just a community of people, meeting once a week and just kind of developing an environment or a community of business students. Just kind of everyone having a responsibility where we were running the entire thing, everyone had a responsibility and for me, that was pretty cool.

Jordan explained why he chose to become involved beyond athletics, "I only did that to challenge myself, to get more involved on campus." He went on to say, "Outside of the community of being a student athlete and like the community of athletes, like there was more to it." Jordan recognized the importance of involvement outside of athletics and how that was a decision that was intentional. Tristan not only played football but described how he was involved on campus with student organizations. He joined a fraternity

"I still am involved in Omega Psi Phi Incorporated, which is a African-American fraternity. I joined the organization, my junior year, the spring of my junior year. I can say it was a great experience, a great college experience. It still is a great experience. Now with networking and community events"

Although he wasn't as active in the Black Student Union, he spoke about his experience with the organization saying,

That was a good organization because it was the African American community, and they would meet weekly. I mean, it was kind of like a safe haven for a group of people just to talk about, current events going on in the campus.

Getting involved in academic organizations was identified as becoming more important over time. Julian also spoke about a club within his major of Kinesiology that held events related to sports management and described his experience as a positive one “I think that opened a lot of people's eyes to different experiences.” He was able to take trips and network with people within his field of interest toward his career pursuits. Julian also speaks about his experiences in the same kinesiology club and seeing the value of being involved within his major.

Each participant identified having a positive experience investing their time in and outside of athletics and seeing the benefit in what they were able to take away from these experiential learning experiences.

***Postulate 4: The more you become involved the more you will be involved***

In postulate four, Astin (1999) refers to how as one becomes more involved in something they will find further opportunities to become engaged in other things within the organization as well as other organizations. The participants in this study who invested more time into their athletics were able to see the benefits in their athletic performance. The same goes for the participants who also shifted into using more resources into their academic involvement. For example, Tristan got injured his freshman year and used the counseling services on campus which helped him overcome the obstacle of not competing for the remainder of the season. Postulate four states that the more a student becomes involved the more he, she, or they will benefit from the involvement and the more opportunities they may be connected to. Another example is all of the participants in the study received a scholarship at some point in their student athlete career whether it was walking on the team with a scholarship or earning their scholarship as a walk on. For the participants who walked on the team, they put in time to their athletics to

compete at the level where they earned their scholarship. Julian, who walked on the team described how his involvement shifted over time:

When I first started out it was a hobby, just to finally make it on the team. Then once you start to develop and get better with the training, you start to see progress, you start to do more. My perspective is when I was completely immersed in sport devoting maybe four to five hours outside of practice, just trying to get better at the sport. Those numbers reflect in the competition.

Through Julian's commitment to his sport, he was able to not only secure a spot on the team but also became a top competitor in his conference. Although jumping started off as a hobby he was eventually able to secure a scholarship to help pay for his education.

Outside of athletics Tristan, who played football, talked about how he realized that his involvement required investment and the resources he used on campus helped to further enhance his involvement. For example, he utilized the counseling center when he was injured,

At the time, I didn't really tell anybody I would just go there and just talk to the counselor. I forgot his name, but it was a was a Caucasian man. We would sit there, and he would just ask me questions. I would kind of just spill all my issues and what I was going through at the time, and I will say today, it helped me out a lot because I was able to just express myself and get everything that was bundled up out.

Tristan went on to talk about other resources on campus such as the writing center saying

I also used the writing center on campus. I would go to write a paper and then let them read it and revise it or look at it and tell me some changes that they thought that I should try to use.

Tristan shared how he used resources through the athletic academic center which helped him keep his GPA high.

I used the academic center as well on campus. They always had free printing so I could print whatever I wanted to print out and they also had tutors. So, if I had trouble with a class, they could assign me a tutor. I was having trouble with this math class. Math was kind of my weakest subject; I would go to the tutor and he would help me out in preparing for the test. Without him I probably would have failed, but I appreciate him for it.

Understanding that the more you put in the more you want to invest takes time to learn.

Jordan, who played football, received his bachelor's in Business Management and his Masters in Sports Administration, described how being a student-athlete impacted his career choice,

I wanted to be rewarded for my performance. I wanted to feel that "okay, when you cross that finish line and you're excelling against other people, next to you that there's a certain type of reward." I didn't want that through just being a manager or receiving a linear source of income. I wanted to be rewarded for my work. You put the work in, you work your tail off for six months. Indoor season comes around, it's time to shine. That's what I wanted. I wanted something that was big, bigger than me and I wanted something to work towards. And that's why I got into sales, to be honest.

Whether it was in athletics or utilizing resources on campus the time and commitment put into bettering themselves athletically, mentally, and academically the participants identified that it had a positive result.

***Postulate 5: Educational practice is related to the capacity of the practice to increase student involvement***

Interacting with faculty was identified by each of the participants. In postulate five Austin's (1999) involvement theory provides information about how to design more effective educational practices for students. This group of participants spoke more about their athletic involvement first and then how it led to their increase in academic engagement. They speak about the expectations of them as athletes and using that to be role models and engage in the classroom. They speak about mentors and coaches that talked with them about what to expect in college and how to be. The conversations Julian was able to have with his coaches and instructors contributed to him being able to think about the foundation of the path he wanted in his life. His family and teammates were a support system he leaned on for guidance during his college experience.

Tristan talked about adapting to the campus as a new student he spoke about his professors and how he navigated learning the expectations they had of students and the perceptions they had of student athletes. Tristan stated,

Well, in my experience, it was kind of like within the first week, you know how the professor would be. You had some professors who didn't necessarily like student athletes. You had some professors who didn't necessarily not like student athletes, but they were kind of in the middle. Then you had those professors who would like student athletes. So, you could kind of get the gist of it.

The participants in this study expressed that they understood the need to sometimes utilize faculty and staff to help them through their time in college. Jordan, who played football, had a mentor who really had an impactful presence in shaping his college experience. He spoke about how his mentor who was the Dean of Business, talked to him about the evolution of

different leaders and Jordan was able to take away how to maximize his time through those conversations.

He talked about Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, and the evolution of where they are now. It's not that they were born with this unbelievable skill to invest in these principles and these concepts. They started at some point and when they did, they overly obsessed about that one thing. There's a concept about putting 10,000 hours plus hours to be great at that one skill and that's kind of like my reflection on the time spent on being like the best student, just maximizing my experience as a student athlete.

Each of the participants spoke about how impactful coaches, advisors, and professors are on the experience that shapes the path of college student athletes.

### **How student athletes describe how their experiences in college impacted their life post college through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory**

This study focused on how these student athletes transitioned to life away from being in school and being an athlete. Participants were asked questions about what their life was like now and what that transition was like for them. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory speaks about the four S's *self, situation, support, and strategies* as helping a person move through transition into a new chapter of their life. Schlossberg also talks about transitions can be anticipated or unanticipated. In this study the participants all describe their transitions as anticipated. They knew their time as a student was ending as graduation drew closer, and that also meant athletic retirement in most cases. Questions were directed to understand each of these identified and analyzed in a way that would help in understanding how they made it through the transition. Each participant's experiences were different leaving them with different ways in which they coped with transitioning out of that student athlete lifestyle.



## *Self*

During the interview each participant was asked in what ways did they see themselves differently from when they were in college. They described who they are today and what their experiences had taught them and how they saw themselves differently from before. Tristan who played football said

When I graduated college, I was still immature. What I thought was important wasn't really that important in comparison to now. With me being a working man and I see how the world works with a little more perspective. I would just say that I'm more of a deep thinker, I think things through more. I try to always see the positive in situations because I know, especially in times, that we are in now in our society, people always just want to focus on the negative. So, I just try to focus on the positives and find good at a situation and not judge individuals.

As Jackie spoke, she talked about how much she felt like she grew since college:

I see myself as a more mature individual. Instead of putting up a fight or being upset with what's left or a lack thereof, whether it be good leadership, support or what I want. I just take it upon myself from what I've learned in college to just do my own research. If somebody isn't telling me what I want to hear, not saying, I'm entitled to everything, but if it doesn't sound good to me; I'm going to do my own research to make sure I see the big picture before I make a decision.

Jordan who played football felt like life was his biggest teacher. As Jordan spoke about how his experiences molded him into who he is today he stated

Just more mature, more seasoned, I guess, life has sucked me up. The real world has sucked me up. I kind of got some thicker skin. It's not easy transitioning out of college

trying to figure it out but I don't know, if you're not doing the things necessary to evolve and to continue to grow, it's only up to you to understand if much has changed since then.

Julian shared how, as he transitioned out of college, what he realized about himself was that he grew in the manner of being able to be advised and coached. Julian described himself saying he was “A lot more levelheaded, Time management skills are better, and more coachable.”

The participants described all shifting into more mature adults. They speak about being able to approach things in a more mature way. They identified the importance of having mentors and learning about resources through their time as student athletes.

### *Situation*

Schlossberg (1981) identified that a situation is any event or nonevent that is anticipated or unanticipated. For the student athlete moving toward graduation is an anticipated event however the participants speak about not fully anticipating or being prepared for the transition. To understand how the participants saw themselves now post their college time and no longer as a student athlete they were asked questions about their experiences of transitioning out of college. Questions about their transition process, the way they interacted with faculty, staff, coaches, and other students were asked. This provided a perspective on how they saw themselves transitioning from being a student athlete to where they are today and the impact of their changing identity. Some identified that they were completely unprepared for what they experienced, some spoke about the importance of interacting with faculty as they transitioned out of their sport, some spoke about their relationships and their interactions with teammates, and about the gradual shift in priorities as they got closer to graduation.

The participants identified the shift in their identity and how big of a transition it was for them to move from being a student athlete full time. This described how the situation left them feeling directionless and not knowing what to expect. When Jackie was asked in her interview if someone spoke to her about what to expect as she left college she shared,

Shockingly, no, no. No one talked to me about it [graduating] and you would think that someone would because that's a big transition. Like I said this is a sport that I've been in and out and since the age of nine. So, this is a big part of me, and I don't know how to be a student without being an athlete. You know, they go hand in hand. So, to go into the real world, not being a student or athlete, like, I don't know myself, so it's like I was fighting with myself, and no one was there to help. It was scary.

Tristan who played football was preparing to go to the next level of his sport spoke about his experiences of transition and conversations about what was next saying

I think a lot of times athletes just get solely stuck on just playing and they don't really think about the next steps. I will say, once I graduated or even before I graduated, I didn't really have a plan. My only plan, I was just focused on trying to make it to the next level.

Tristin continued as he spoke about how he approached people who questioned him about the next steps in his future.

I didn't really have a backup plan. I didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't know what I wanted to do. People would ask me, and I'm like, Man, I don't know. So I do wish maybe I would have had somebody to sit down with or have someone sit me down, and force me to come up with a plan. I would have had more structure of what I wanted to do next in case I didn't make it to the next level, which I didn't. So no, I didn't really have anyone who supported me in that manner.

Tristin identified wanting to have someone to talk to or tell him what to expect but was able to reflect on what he was able to teach himself through the experiences he encountered on his journey saying

I appreciate that it's taught me responsibility, accountability, determination, perseverance, and time management. A lot of the qualities that I needed to instill within myself on a day-to-day basis. I will say that it has made my day-to-day life a lot easier because I always can think back to a time where I thought, like, man, this is the worst thing ever. I look back like I got through it, you know? So that has helped shaped me into the person that I am today.

Two of the participants were able to identify people who helped get them thinking about what to expect. Jordan who played football, spoke about how his peers and mentor, who was the Dean of the department of Business at the time, helped him during his transition.

I was kind of able to like talk with my peers, but when it came to it in general, I kinda wrapped my mind about, just transitioning in general. Because we all went through a big transition. I kind of wrap my mind around my transition or any transition that we could face in our lives because my mentor, he basically educated us on transitions and what it truly meant and how to really maximize it and how to best prepare for uncertainty. I appreciated that because like, you know, that was pretty much like my tool that I used to like to help me with that transit or to embrace uncertainty that that I had to embrace.

Julian shared where his support for transitioning out of being a student athlete came from: Yes, my head coach talked to me about what I was going to do, and my former supervisor, I talked to him a little bit about my plans for grad school and what I was going to do as far as getting a job or trying to find a job.

Having support and being aware of the situation one will find themselves in can be helpful in making a smoother transition. The participants identified people that aided them in beginning to think about this, as well as not being prepared. The participants were also able to identify how their experiences taught them life lessons they utilize today.

### *Support*

To understand what support looks like, Schlossberg (1981) described how it can come from a variety of different supports. As identified above by the participants moving through the situation required interaction and support from various people. The participants in this study were asked questions about where they draw support from now, as well as while they were in college. Support from the participants came from family, teammates, and coaches.

Jackie spoke about the support she felt she had through advising. She did not feel as though she had the best experience and felt she relied more on herself and her own research to navigate through major related decisions and guidance through her college experience

Jackie received her degree in Business Accounting but entered her freshman year as an engineering major. In chapter four Jackie mentioned how she changed her major her second semester of sophomore year because she would have had to transfer to an engineering school to finish her program and she did not know how she would pay for school if she didn't receive a scholarship at another school. She began by sharing how important her student-athlete scholarship was and how that motivated her to finish her degree,

I changed my whole major because I didn't want to lose my scholarship. No one came to me and told me my options. It's crazy because later on when I was doing my own research, I found out I could have gone to a different major that was similar to my major

that I originally wanted, in engineering, they had Applied Engineering. I didn't know that because I was not advised properly. I changed my whole major to fit athletics.

The participants identified academic advisors, especially those in the area of athletics and being instrumental in their transition and guidance as they moved through and out of college. Tristan described how his original major was nursing but due to his athletic schedule he changed it to Kinesiology, unsure what he would do with it long term because he was so focused on going to the next level. Through guidance and support from his advisor he was able to make that choice. Some of the participants spoke about how they were guided toward certain majors by advisors because they were athletes.

Family was a consistent area of support for the participants in this study. Jackie spoke about how her mom was her biggest support system. Tristan and his father were quite close, and he identified his father as a major support person in his life. Jordan also identified his family as being supportive “I had my family, big on family. They were always in my corner. My mom, grandma, dad, brothers.” As Julian talked about his support system, he spoke about how a lot of his support came from his dad and himself. Julian said

Support came from family specifically, just dad and just kind of getting like the occasional good jobs after meets. Outside of that, personal motivation is mainly how I got myself through it because I started college and it was seen as an expectation that I realized it's up to me to get through it.

They also talked about how their athletic environments provided support. They drew support from their coaches and teammates. Jackie shared about a coach from home that she had been in contact with since middle school supported her endeavors through college. Jordan talked about how he found his support from a variety of places on and off campus. Jordan said, “There

was a few people that I lean on in different parts of my career. There were a couple coaches that I leaned on heavily.” Jordan went on to say, “I had a few friends that, still to this day, we talk every single day, we have high level conversations.”

Tristan also spoke continuously about how his support also came from friends, teammates, staff and coaches on campus. Tristan described his support systems saying

I would describe my support system as strong minded. If they don't agree with something that I did or something that I say they will always tell me, I may not always accept it the best. But one thing I can say about them is that they always have my best interests at heart, and that's something that I appreciate. I would say they are caring, and they're precise in their way of thinking. One thing I can say, they're always there. No matter whatever the situation was, even if they couldn't financially support me the way that they wanted to, they could provide emotional support, spiritual support, or support in whatever way they could at the time. So that's one thing I can't say about them.

One of the participants spoke about drawing support more broadly as they moved through college and beyond and how it became situational. Jordan also talked about who he went to academics as he began to prepare for life after college. He used the analogy of empty buckets getting filled to describe how he soaked up everything. Jordan spoke specifically about a faculty member who helped him turn his attention toward his future.

My mentor, former business professor, interim Dean of the school business at ESU. It was just a matter of developing and nurturing those relationships that I had on campus, without the family there. And I was able to basically, water those buckets by being vulnerable getting them involved more, just having those conversations. So just engaging more, just making myself present. So, I was very fortunate of that.

## *Strategies*

Strategies are ways in which the individual copes with the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). As participants in this study were interviewed about their lives now, they were asked questions about their current identity and what they are engaged in and what strategies they utilize.

Each participant was asked if they still viewed themselves as an athlete and they each shared how that athlete persona is part of their lives now. For some, it is still a very active part of their lives as exemplified by Jordan who shared,

Day to day, I've been training for marathons, that's been my biggest sport accomplishment since closing that chapter [college athlete] of my life. It's a lifestyle, to be honest, it's hard to deviate from, that lifestyle just working out. I wouldn't even call that a grind, but it's hard to deviate from that type of process so I'm still heavily into it.

Jackie shared her experiences on how being an athlete has carried over into her new life and how she still sees herself as an athlete saying

Oh, yeah, definitely. That's something that's embedded in me just because, one of my hobbies is going to the gym like I compete with my friends on my Apple Watch because competition is embedded in me. That's something good that came out of being a student-athlete.

Tristan spoke about the competition element,

I definitely still see myself as an athlete. I'm still competitive, even with my other brothers who are still playing the game. I'm real competitive and that's just the athlete in me. So, I definitely still see myself as an athlete, and that's kind of why I still coach to kind of get bit of a competitive edge.



When Julian was asked if he still saw himself, he responded with a simple but strong response stating “Yes, I do, I still work out pretty much by the segment, it's an identity that I wear. So, I claim it”

The participants also spoke about the importance of staying healthy and staying active. Jordan shared,

I'm just like aligning like my interest and aligning, how to be healthy. I want to be and what that's going to look like and just educate myself in that spectrum, whether if it's nutrition, running more, being lean or just answering those questions, I think that's a huge piece to it, to be honest.

The participants also spoke about how their athletic training has impacted their lives outside of athletics as well. Jordan shared how his marathon training today has influenced other parts of his life,

I have attached to myself to certain vehicles that help me evolve all around and set the tone, then also marathon training or just hybrid athlete training is one that keeps me on my toes that keeps me sharp and it plays a factor in other areas of my life, whether, it's being professional or just like, making sure that I'm spending time and places that's worth my while and congruent to what I'm trying to get at rather than not, you know what I mean? So, there's a, there's a level of discipline that has sustained two years later, two and a half.

Julian spoke about how his experience being an athlete directly related to his lifestyle and career choice. Julian worked in admissions office as a student counselor and also with student athletes interested in the University. Julian, who received his Bachelors in Sports Management, when asked about his selection of the major said

it's a direct line essentially, I care a lot about the student-athlete experience based on how my experience was, so trying to pursue a career in collegiate sports just made sense, so that's what I was going to go into to help other student athletes have a good experience.

Tristan received his Bachelors in Kinesiology and his Masters in Sports Management and described how his sport played a role in his career choice. Tristan shared,

Well, being a student athlete pretty much has somewhat been the only reason why I'm doing what I'm doing; because initially, I didn't want to be a teacher, but I wanted to be a coach. So, because of me wanting to be a coach at a high school level, I kind of got stuck teaching. So, me being involved with football made me want to coach. It's kind of hand-to-hand, I would say.

Tristan described how, as he transitioned out of college, he was very close to being recruited to play for the National Football League. As he got closer to graduating with his Bachelors he described how his only focus was making it to the next level. Tristan spoke about how he decided to go to graduate school as his plan B to figure out what was next for his life.

Jackie shared,

I was so unprepared that I applied for grad school because I didn't know what life was without being a student athlete. I was just going to go back home and live with my mom and figure it out from there, but I did not want to do that. I liked the freedom that I had in college. I was not prepared at all, to the point I had to sign up for grad school and get myself in more debt because I don't know what I was going to do.

The participants' identities as athletes are still relevant today. It is what carries them through how they choose to live and engage in the world. From their careers to their personal life each participant carries the identity of being a student athlete in different but similar ways.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter five analyzes the experiences of the four participants in understanding their experiences as former Black student athletes and what their transition out of this was like. The chapter utilized Astin's (1999) Involvement theory and Schlossberg's (1981) Transition theory to analyze the participants' responses. Although they are two to five years removed from their sport, they also still share a strong athletic identity as all the participants were in their sport since their childhood. Coaches, faculty, and advisors played a pivotal role in their decision-making process while in college as well as their transition out of their sport. Their experiences during their time in college shaped their career choices, helped them mature, gained more support rather it was through resources or connecting with mentors on campus. Each of their voices speak on the experiences of a student athlete and how it shaped them into who they are today. Whether their experiences were positive or negative they each were able to grow while taking away life lessons such as discipline, time management, or keeping a healthy lifestyle.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of former Black student athletes and their student involvement, their Division I level athletic involvement, and their academics. It was also to gain insight in to how their undergraduate experience impacted where they are today, post college. The researcher asked participants to describe their experiences, resources used, support systems, and transition out of college to understand who they are today. This chapter discusses the findings that were identified in this study. This chapter will also provide implications as well as future research recommendations.

### **Discussion**

To learn from the experiences of the former Black student's athletes it was important to have them freely describe what they were involved in, who influenced and impacted their experiences, and how they talk about their development through this time period. Then, it was to have them describe how they moved beyond college and reflect on the impact their experience as a former student athlete had on their transition out of college. Each of the participants had different backgrounds and things they went through both positive and negative while they attended college. It is important to note that the support they had from their coaches, advisors, and teammates as well as their learning to take ownership for their experience is connected with how they viewed these situations impacting their decisions post college. Each participant graduated and participated in their selected sport until they reached athletic retirement.

In determining where participants are post college and how their experiences as student athletes have impacted them two theories were used in the analysis and will be used as part of the discussion below. First, Schlossberg's (1999) transition theory is used to discuss their process of

transitioning. Astin's (1999) involvement theory was also used in this study to understand how involvement on campus of student athletes shape their growth through college and journey post college. In this discussion Baxter Magolda's (2008) self-authorship theory is used to further understand their descriptions of life in college as well as their experiences post college.

### *The experiences in college of former Black college student-athletes*

The participants described how impactful being a student-athlete was to them as college students as well as its influence to the current path that they are on. Astin's (1999) theory was used in analyzing how they spoke about their involvement in college as students, as athletes, and as engaged people outside of the other two activities. Jordan, Tristan, Julian, and Jackie all reached the realization that the amount of time they invested into being an athlete, the better they became at their sport. They also learned that the same was true for their academics. The more time they invested in studying or their involvement in the classroom the better their grades were and the better their college experience was. Astin identified that the amount of energy an individual put into their activity the more they would get from it.

The participants in this study spoke about taking time to get involved in academic organizations and seeing the benefit personally and in their classroom work. What the participants identified related to this was that they had to learn how to manage their time and what they could devote to each of their activities. In season they had to make time for their sport, but during their off season they could find non-athletic organizations to join and invest time in. They also identified the importance of having support and it came from various people like coaches, academic advisors, instructors, and fellow class- and teammates. They found that relationships were part of their engagement in their sport, their classroom, or life.

All the participants varied concerning how much time they invested in their sport, academics, and involvement during their undergraduate experience. Postulate two in Astin's (1999) involvement theory describes how each student differs in the degree of involvement and the same student manifest different degrees of involvement of different objects at different times. This is a prime example of how over time Jackie and Jordan's priorities shifted as they got closer to athletic retirement; however, it happened at different times in their academic career. While Tristan and Julian focused more on their athletic career for different reasons and at different degrees as they got toward graduation.

Postulate three of Astin's (1999) theory highlights how involvement can be both quantitative with how much time is devoted, and qualitative with how serious the activity is taken. This example can be seen in this study with Tristan, Julian and Jordan with how serious they took their athletic career each year of their collegiate athletic career not only devoting time to it but crafting themselves to compete at the peak of their performance. Astin described postulate four as the amount of student learning and student development is associated with quantity and quality of student involvement in educational practices. The participants were able to take away what they learned in the classroom and apply it to their careers today. It was interesting to hear them talk about their experiences as athletes and then as students using some of the same language to talk about how they worked to be successful in the classroom. Then, as the spoke about where they are today, they made direct connections to their athletics as a key to their success today. Lastly, postulate five of Astin's involvement theory describes how academic performance relates to student involvement. However, in this study athletic performance related to increased academic performance; as they focused on their athletics, they also made sure to

maintain their eligibility to keep their scholarships and graduate, which then led to greater involvement beyond academics and athletics.

As the participants spoke about their experiences in college, they began to share examples of how they were coming to own their experience and make decisions for themselves. This included making decisions to join organizations aligned with their major as well as ones of personal interest like fraternities. Baxter Magolda's (2008) theory of self-authorship helps understand better what was described by the participants. She described this theory as the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social identity. Baxter Magolda's theory has individuals moving through four phases, and she found that most of this happens during and after college. The first three phases can be used to understand the undergraduate experience of the student athletes that participated in this study.

The first phase is following formulas and can be described as listening to and being influenced by those around the individual (Baxter Magolda, 2008). In the participants narratives we can hear them speak to coaches, parents, and others around them influencing them to continue being a student athlete into college. They also spoke about being influenced to select certain majors, what classes to take, and so forth. This also included staying focused on their athletics and academics in the early years of college and being discouraged from joining outside activities. They spoke about the role parents had in pushing them and supporting them, especially as an athlete and wanting to make them proud. They also identified coaches who were instrumental in mentoring, coaching, and motivating them in their sport and life. The participants were raised in environments that fostered their athletic abilities and prepared them to be college athletes. It is worth noting that they identified coaches from middle and high school as mentoring them through their sport and in life while they identified their college coaches as

being more invested in their athletic careers than in other areas of their lives. They also identified that this was one way to get an affordable education. The people in their lives played a major part in putting them on the path they were on, and they listened well to these people.

In the second phase, crossroads, the individual is influenced by a variety of different people, but also begins to make decisions for themselves and identifies the importance of doing so increases (Baxter Magolda, 2008). This is seen in how the participants describe wanting more from their college experience than being an athlete. They spoke about their priorities shifting, finding interests outside of their sport. In this shifting of priorities, the participants began to describe how they were making decisions for themselves and for their future. It was interesting to hear them speak more about how they made these choices and less about what others were telling them to do. This shift happened as they prepared to end their athletic careers and as they got closer to graduation. For some, being an athlete was still an option, but one they were contemplating more than seeking others input about.

The third phase is becoming the author of one's life, and according to Baxter Magolda (2008) is when the individual takes responsibility for making one's own decisions. In the analysis there are many examples where the participants provided examples of coming in to self-authorship. It may have been in their decision to join a group, or seek support or assistance, or even in making career plans. Each participant's journey led them to their own path of self-authorship. Jordan had great connections on campus and a mindset that prepared him for athletic retirement and to consider what was next for his life through his support system, discussions, books, and mindset. Jackie's athletic career did not end the way she expected it and was forced into athletic retirement due to an injury which stripped her from her athletic identity and forced



her to focus on grad school and her career. Jackie got involved later in her undergraduate journey and was able to secure her first job by going to the on-campus job fair.

Jackie and Jordan who were both in the college of business were also a part of the same business fraternity and spoke about the positive influence it had over taking on roles that gave them a voice on campus. Julian and Tristan had the strongest athletic identity in which sport commitment impacted the amount of time they committed to being a student athlete as well as career choice. Both Tristan and Julian mentioned how their athletic identity contributed to directly aligning with their major selection and what they wanted to do in life. Tristan expressed how he felt disappointed not making it to the NFL and unsure of his next move. He decided to go to graduate school and through that experience began to pick up on a new routine and find interest outside of football.

Whether the participant graduated with a degree directly related to their athletic experience, chose a profession that fulfilled their competitive nature, or chose a major to keep their scholarship, being a student-athlete influenced their current career path. All of the participants in the study mentioned how time management was their biggest obstacle their first year due to balancing their athletic and academic responsibilities. Tristan was involved in a fraternity and spoke about how his experience on campus changed for the better once he got involved on campus. Jordan challenged himself to join activities as well, such as student government to meet people outside of the athletic community and open opportunities for himself. The first phase stood out the most because during all of the participants experience of planning to go to college and while in college the influence of family, academic athletic staff, student affairs professionals, and coaches contribute to a lot of the decision-making process for student athletes. Phase two was very prominent in this research because as half of the participants got toward

athletic retirement, they started to anticipate the importance of the job search process and thinking about what was next for themselves and exploring interest outside of athletics. This aligned with research in chapter two that explains how as student athletes get closer to graduation the more their priorities start to shift to focus more on their academics.

### ***The Impact of Black Student Athlete Experiences Post College***

Each of the four participants spoke about how being a student-athlete impacted their college major as well as their career choice. They spoke about how their experience as student athletes impacted major selection and current career choice in different ways. Today all the participants are successfully living in their new roles well-adjusted to athletic retirement. The two ways to look at this transition and where they are now is through Baxter Magolda's (2008) self-authorship theory that is discussed above and will continue in this section. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory which highlights the situation, self, support, and strategies in which people navigate through transitions in their life is also used here in discussing the findings of this research. Each participants' college experience was different however they all had unique ways in which they entered into athletic retirement, learned about themselves in the process, had varying levels of support, and developed new routines for their life to cope with transitioning into the next phase of their life. Each participant gained their own independence as they moved forward in new chapters of their life. Self authorship is the internal capacity of defining one's identity, relationships, and internal beliefs (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Schlossberg (1981) speaks about anticipated and unanticipated transitions. In this study the participants all anticipated an end to their athletic career. For two participants it came slightly earlier than expected as an injury occurred and for the other it was not being able to become a professional. Schlossberg identified that individuals need support and strategies in

maneuvering through transitions. They all spoke about having support from many of the same people they spoke about helping them through their athletic career. Academic advisors, mentors, family members, former coaches were all very helpful to them in providing support and assisting with identifying the right strategies for this transition. They also spoke about utilizing strategies that they had learned as an athlete to get through the transition. Things like staying disciplined, continuing to work out, finding ways to get involved in various things, and leaning on those around them were spoken about related to their strategies for getting to where they are now.

The self is the final piece that Schlossberg (1981) identifies as one of the key parts in the transition. It would be safe to say that they all still identify as athletes today. Hearing them talk about their roles with coaching, working out, staying active are key clues to how they continue to view themselves as athletes today. The participants spoke about their lifestyle now and shared described how they are still very disciplined in creating routines, making time for things they want to work on and improve in. They identified that much of what they learned as an athlete set them up for success as students, and now as working adults.

All of the participants are successful in new careers in life and as they reflected on their experiences mentioned how being a student athlete taught them discipline, routine, and having a healthier lifestyle such as staying fit. When asked if they still identified as an athlete each participant agreed and said that it will always be a part of who they are for various reasons. Going through this transition has also helped them as they have moved through the last two phases of Baxter Magolda's (2008) self-authorship theory, that is of becoming the author of one's own life and creating an internal foundation. Jackie, Jordan, Julian, and Tristan were all able to come to a point where they created a new vision for themselves and their future. They all have created their own structure for their lives and their own routines. Through their experience

of being an athlete they all were able to apply their discipline, leadership, structure, and competitiveness into a new life for themselves and are beginning to create an internal foundation for their lives now.

### **Implications**

Student athletes have demanding schedules. As one of the participants shared, they have two full time jobs which include being an athlete and student. These students need an incredible amount of support, and it comes from various places. These recommendations are addressed to those who work directly with student athletes in an effort to encourage better experiences in the future. There are a variety of different people who work with the students including coaches, other athletic staff, athletic academic support individuals, faculty, academic advisors, and student affairs professionals. These groups will be addressed below.

Coaches play a key role from pre-enrollment through college career end, and students can anticipate having more than one coach supporting them throughout their entire athletic experience. The participants spoke about coaches prior to college as helping them become better athletes but also having realistic conversations with them about life and their personal goals; however, none of the participants spoke about this with their college coaches. They and their staff influence the experience of the student athletes through their sport. None of the participants in this study spoke about coaches influencing their lives beyond the sport, or even in their future career plans. Coaches play a powerful role in the student experience. Take time to speak to the student athletes and get to know them beyond their persona as an athlete. Invest in them as people not as members of the team. Help shape them into people beyond the sport. Take time to learn about their future plans and help them consider the possibilities.

The athletic academic support staff role is extremely important because of the close relationship that they build with the athletes and the trust student athletes put into them to help make decisions that impact their time in college as well as beyond. In the research on student athletes, it was found that they are often guided toward specific majors to accommodate the athletic experience. In this research the athletes relied heavily on these individuals to guide them in major selection that fit their schedule, and class registration to stay eligible. Athletic academic support staff should not take advantage of this trust and help athletes not only manage their eligibility but support their interest and involvement outside of athletics. Promoting career, personality, and skill assessments will be beneficial to student athletes who have strong athletic identity gain perspective about themselves and other sides to who they are.

Athletic academic advisors can also play a key role in developing relationships outside the athletic department. It would be beneficial to work with academic advisors across campus to ensure that the student athletes are getting the best academic guidance they can toward their own personal goals. Developing connections to career services can aid helping those athletes struggling with major and career decision making and building their resume around their athletic experience. Building connections to faculty, especially those where student athletes tend to gravitate toward would also be helpful. This can aid in identifying ways to improve the student athlete experience by informing faculty of the student experience and expectations. Allowing faculty to provide input and support toward a student athletes development and guidance in vocational areas.

Faculty play an important role when it comes to student athlete academic success. Student athletes are given structure to prioritize their academics in the classroom. Pairing student athletes with professors who can mentor them will be extremely beneficial to the knowledge that

student athlete can gain. Faculty who know they have student athletes in their classroom should go out of their way to make connections to the athletic department, especially the academic advising staff. This will help them best understand and support the students and their vocational ambitions.

Student affairs professionals such as the career center and counseling services can be a critical area of support for student athletes to not only prepare for what's next but also have support in considering their major, what they want to do with it, and mental support in exploring a passion that they never considered. All the participants mentioned wished they had someone to talk to about transitioning out of a support where they had been given structure from almost their entire life. Having someone to talk to a semester before the student athletes graduate or if they suffer a career ending injury will be helpful to their mental health. Also creating a career readiness program or a course that gives career assessments, teaches student athletes about the job search process, resume building, exploring new interest, the importance of internships, how to interview, and use their own transferrable skills as they interview. Developing a relationship with the academic department for these two specific areas could provide a great deal of personal support and development for the student athletes.

Finally, student athletes have some responsibility themselves to take the initiative to get involved outside of the athletic community. There are so many resources that can help in the development process of the college experience. College is like a bridge to adulthood because it provides so many resources to students through counseling services, career services, advising, and mentorship opportunities that the "real world" doesn't necessarily have. Student involvement in campus organizations allow for students to build a community of support outside of their sport as well as develop professional and networking skills that could be transferable in the workforce.

Each of these participant's experiences molded them into who they are today. Although they might not have had the experiences they anticipated, some situations led them to finding who they are without the title of being an athlete. They found and are still finding themselves and that will be a process for the rest of their lives, but it is a positive one because they will forever be growing as they reach new transitions of their lives.

Staff, faculty, and coaches play a pivotal role in student athletes lives as their support away from home. Coaches have a huge responsibility when helping guiding student athletes because they have a huge impact on their experience as a student athlete. A good coach who promotes self-authorship and self-exploration help student athletes with navigating who they are. Allowing students to get involved on campus opens opportunities for the student athlete to with their journey in self authorship.

### **Future Research**

No research can fully explore everything, thus there are several recommendations for further research around this topic. This topic should be researched at other larger division one athletic institutions as well as division two and three. It would be interesting to learn how student athletes who are not on athletic scholarships academic experience is impacted. It would be important to look at specific sports or genders, narrowing down the research even further.

One area that was not really explored in this study was the Black identity of the participants. This is an area that needs to be further explored and could be done so in the realm of being an athlete specifically, as this is a topic that is less researched than the academic experience. It could also be further explored from the student athlete perspective as well. This could provide a great deal of information to athletic departments and conducting the research at various types of institutions (HBCUs, PWIs, Division 1, 2, 3, etc.) could gain different insights.

Looking into how success is measured by athletes could be beneficial in understanding how student athletes measure success in the classroom compared to different areas of their sport. A student athlete might settle for average grades if their competing at a higher level. Understanding student athlete's motivation in future research would be helpful in gaining knowledge in where they are in career maturity during their college years.

Future research that is conducted on the dynamics of coach's relationships in a comparison of high school and college should also be explored. The participants in this study spoke little about their college coaches having influence on their life outside of the sport. Understanding why this may be the case could provide even greater information toward helping college athletes during and beyond college. Gaining insight on the different dynamics can be helpful for coaches in motivating their student athletes.

Finally, this research was conducted with student athletes that competed their whole time in college. Looking at athletes that had to end their career early may provide different insights, especially if it wasn't their choice. Or, if it was their choice what led to them making that choice would be interesting to study. Gaining more information on this topic all together is necessary.

## **Conclusion**

To better understand this study Baxter Magolda's (2008) Self Authorship was used to understand the journey student athletes took to finding their internal voice, Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory was helpful in understanding the dynamics of their transition into athletic retirement and how they coped with moving into their new chapter, and Astin's (1999) student involvement theory was used to understand the impact that campus resources and involvement outside of athletics had. All of the participants described being a student athlete as a positive experience teaching them essential life tools such as discipline, routine, competitiveness, and



leadership. Overall, they explained how looking back on their experience they appreciated the support system they had on campus and the relationships they were able to build in and out of the classroom and athletics.

All the participants spoke about how they continue to identify as an athlete and continue similar routines as to when they were a student athlete. While they did not necessarily know what the transition out of college and athletic retirement would be like they had the tools and support systems to help them through this successfully. Each of them found ways to emerge from the college-athlete sole persona and find ways to grow and challenge themselves outside of these two important college identities. These experiences helped enhance and further expand their college experience. The athletic involvement has played the biggest role in developing them into the people they are today, but the other areas of their lives and how they engaged in them has also been a big part of where they find themselves today.

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## Appendix A

### Email Invite

Salutations,

My name is Nyjah Lane, and I am a second-year graduate student in the College Student Affairs Master's Program at Eastern Illinois University. I am completing a research study, that is being advised by Dr. Dianne Timm. I am looking for potential participants to complete a short demographic questionnaire and as well as an interview with the researcher, regarding their experiences as a former student athlete and their current journey through development.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Participant eligibilities include those who are: (a) two to five years removed from the university, (b) participated on a Division I university for four years, (c) and identify as Black/African American. Attached is the demographic questionnaire, where participants will have the opportunity to complete and further participate in the study if they choose.

If you, or a potential participant, have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher,

Nyjah Lane at [nulane@eiu.edu](mailto:nulane@eiu.edu)

Thank you.

## Appendix B

## Demographic Questionnaire

1. What year did you graduate from college?
2. What was your major?
3. What is your ethnic identity?
4. What sport did you play in college?
5. How many years did you play the sport (including time before college)?
6. What do you currently do for work?
7. Are you willing to participate in an interview that will take place over zoom? If yes provide email information:

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

I will welcome the participant and introduce myself. Before starting the interview, the consent form will be signed. I will walk the participant through the interview process and assure that I am at a secure location. If the participant has any questions, I will answer them.

The following questions will help me get background information on the participant before they speak about their experiences as a former student athlete. Section two will be focused on experience.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself?
  - a. What is your work situation?
  - b. What do you do outside of work?
  - c. Tell me about a typical day in your current life?
2. When did you know you wanted to be a student athlete while in college?
  - a. Who helped you make this decision?
  - b. Did you consider not doing it?
3. What did you expect college to be like as a student-athlete?
  - a. What or who made you think this way?
4. Did your experience meet your expectations? How? Tell me about your experiences as a student athlete?
  - a. Where did you get support from as you made your way through college?
  - b. How would you describe your support system?
  - c. Did you use any resources while in college? Tell me about them?
    - i. How did you find out about them?



- ii. How did they support you?
  - d. What were some of your favorite things about being a student athlete?
  - e. What were some challenges you encountered being a student athlete? How did you approach them?
5. Thinking just about your experiences as an athlete, what was that experience like?
- a. How would you describe your athletic involvement?
  - b. How much time did you devote to athletics each week? Did it change over the years?
  - c. Who did you go to for support and/or guidance?
6. Thinking just about your experiences as a student, what was that experience like?
- a. How would you describe your experience in the classroom and other academic setting?
  - b. How much time did you devote to academics each week? Did it change over the years?
  - c. Did you change your major? Why or why not?
    - i. What influenced this?
  - d. Who did you go to for support and/or guidance?
  - e. Were you involved in any organizations outside of athletics? Tell me about those experiences.
7. Tell me about your last year in college. What thoughts did you have about being a student and an athlete at that time?
- a. Did anyone talk to you about transitioning out of your sport or retirement from your sport?

- i. What did those conversations look like and who did you have them with?
    - ii. How did you feel approaching your last season of competition?
  - b. Did you feel prepared to leave college and the classes and enter the workforce?  
Why or why not?
8. Tell me about life since college?
  - a. What are you doing?
  - b. How do you spend your time?
  - c. Where do you get support?
  - d. What influence did your time as a student athlete have on who you are now?
9. How did being a student athlete impact your career choice?
10. In what ways do you see yourself different than when you graduated college?
11. Is there anything else you want me to know, or that you thought I would ask about but haven't yet?
12. Do you still identify as an athlete?