

WHO DROPPED THE BALL: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACE,  
MEMORABLE MESSAGES ABOUT ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND  
GRADUATION RATES FOR FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES

By

Nathaniel J. Colón

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2011

## ABSTRACT

### WHO DROPPED THE BALL: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACE, MEMORABLE MESSAGES ABOUT ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND GRADUATION RATES FOR FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES

By

Nathaniel J. Colón

This study explored memorable messages that former football student-athletes recalled regarding academics and athletics. Respondents were asked via interviews and a survey questionnaire to recall memorable messages and to describe the source, context, and importance of the message. Student-athletes were asked what memorable messages were evoked when making decisions with respect to academics and athletics while they were participating in intercollegiate athletics. Sociological theories were used to analyze the graduation gap difference between Black and White football student-athletes. These theoretical perspectives were used to explore the messages student-athletes received during socialization from parents, coaches, teachers, friends, teammates and others. The socialization agents of student-athletes, and the memorable messages they sent, were analyzed to comprehend why Black football student-athletes graduate at a significantly lower rate than their White counterparts. The findings examined positive and negative memorable messages and how they contributed to academic and athletic achievement. The research explored the association of memorable messages to the time commitment and significance of academics and athletics and the connection to graduation rates for Black and White football student-athletes.

Copyright by  
NATHANIEL J. COLÓN  
2011

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee and everyone who helped me for all their time and dedication in guiding me through the Ph.D process. Tammy Spangler has been amazing supporting me from day one and always being there to answer all my questions. My committee chair Dr. Tom Conner has been a terrific support system in guiding me through my dissertation. Dr. Zak Neal was especially helpful in finding resources that helped make my project more manageable. Dr. Ralph Pyle has served as a great mentor and tremendous asset in helping me with every aspect of my Ph.D. Dr. Sandi Smith has been wonderful every step of the way and without her commitment and perseverance, I would have not have made it through this journey.

To every teacher and professor that I ever had, I appreciate all your work. I want to especially thank all the people I grew up with and all those who helped raise me on 118<sup>th</sup> street in Harlem, NY. I am grateful for the late Ms. Carrie Boyland, Rena Spencer and others were always there to support me. Also my three best friends Jason, Johnnie and Seneca have been true brothers to me.

I would like to thank my family for everything they have done for me; my sisters Alicia, Moshanique, LaWanda, and my nieces and nephews. My aunt Loretta and cousin Felix (Junito) have always been there for me for whatever I needed. My mother Vanita and my father Domingo always stressed the importance of education and constantly set high goals for me. My grandfather Domingo Sr. who is 96 always taught me the meaning of having a strong work-ethic. Erica, my wife always encouraged me and has been absolutely incredible, as the backbone of our family. I have been blessed with two amazing sons Nathan and Jonathan who have served as my inspiration and motivation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM STATEMENT	
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Research Questions.....	4
Hypotheses.....	5
Significance of the study.....	5
Need for Study.....	6
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Overview.....	8
Socialization and Race.....	12
Football.....	17
Structural Factors.....	18
Cultural Influences.....	21
Collegiate Athletics and Academics.....	24
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	
Methods.....	32
Research Design and Data Collection.....	32
Sampling.....	32
Research Methods.....	33
Data Collection Procedure.....	38
Instrumentation.....	39
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS	
Hypothesis I – Academic Memorable Messages (Positive or Negative).....	40
Black Student-Athletes – Academic Memorable Messages.....	40
White Student-Athletes – Academic Memorable Messages.....	42
Hypothesis II – Academic vs. Athletic Memorable Messages.....	43
Black Student Athletes – Athletic Memorable Messages.....	43
White Student-Athletes – Athletic Memorable Messages.....	44
Hypothesis III – Sources (parents, coaches, peers/teammates) of memorable messages with regard to academics and athletics.....	46
Emphasis for parents of White Student-Athletes.....	46
General Emphasis of parents by graduation status.....	47
General Emphasis of coaches.....	50
General Emphasis of peers/teammate.....	51
Hypothesis IV – Football student-athlete graduates/ memorable messages.....	53
Hypothesis V – Football student-athlete non-graduates/memorable messages.....	56
Good Character – Good character and memorable messages.....	59
Research Questions.....	63

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Discussion.....	77
Recommendations.....	91
Conclusion.....	96
Limitations.....	100
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	103
REFERENCES.....	107

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS BY RACE AND GRADUATION STATUS.....	33
TABLE 2: OTHER MOST MEMORABLE MESSAGES.....	35
TABLE 3: MOST MEMORABLE MESSAGE SOURCES.....	35
TABLE 4: AGE BY RACE.....	37
TABLE 5: AGE BY GRADUATION STATUS.....	37
TABLE 6: YEARS COLLEGE FOOTBALL BY RACE.....	37
TABLE 7: YEARS COLLEGE FOOTBALL BY GRADUATION STATUS.....	37
TABLE 8: NFL STATUS – AVERAGE BY YEARS (played in NFL).....	38
TABLE 9: ACADEMIC MEMORABLE MESSAGE – POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE.....	40
TABLE 10: MOST MEMORABLE MESSAGES BY TOPIC.....	43
TABLE 11: GENERAL EMPHASIS OF PARENTS.....	46
TABLE 12: GENERAL EMPHASIS OF PARENTS BY GRADUATION STATUS.....	47
TABLE 13: GENERAL EMPHASIS OF COACHES.....	50
TABLE 14: GENERAL EMPHASIS OF TEAMMATES.....	51
TABLE 15: MEMORABLE MESSAGES BY TOPIC (ACADEMICS).....	53
TABLE 16: MEMORABLE MESSAGES BY TOPIC (ATHLETICS).....	56
TABLE 17: ACADEMIC MOST MEMORABLE MESSAGES BY VALENCE.....	65
TABLE 18: ATHLETIC MOST MEMORABLE MESSAGES BY VALENCE.....	67
TABLE 19: MOST MEMORABLE MESSAGES SOURCES.....	68
TABLE 20: IMPORTANCE OF GRADUATION BY RACE.....	70
TABLE 21: IMPORTANCE OF MAKING IT TO NFL BY RACE.....	72
TABLE 22: IMPORTANCE OF GRADUATION BY GRADUATION STATUS.....	73
TABLE 23: IMPORTANCE OF MAKING IT TO THE NFL BY GRADUATION STATUS..	75

## CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

### **Introduction and Statement of the Problem**

The journey to becoming a Division 1 football student-athlete can be very challenging. It takes a great deal of athletic and academic ability to develop into a Division 1 football student-athlete. The odds of becoming a Division 1 football player are miniscule as merely 4 percent of high school football players will be able to participate in football on the collegiate level (Eitzen & Sage 2009). The student-athletes who are fortunate enough to become collegiate football players receive plenty of academic and athletic messages. Everyone receives countless messages during their socialization that help influence their individual characteristics. People learn a great amount of their values, beliefs, norms and customs through the messages they receive. These messages come from numerous sources such as parents, coaches, teammates, and others. The unknown factors about many of the messages are what do the student-athletes retain, remember and recall, these messages are referred to as memorable messages. Memorable messages can have a great impact on the academic and athletic success or lack thereof, for many student-athletes.

Research has shown that White football student-athletes graduate at a higher rate than their Black counterparts. There are many social factors that play into the equation of why White student-athletes outperform Black student-athletes academically and have higher graduation rates. The impact of memorable message in regard to academics can have an impact on how important education is for Black and White student-athletes. Almost equally as important as the memorable message is the source of the message. The perspectives of parents, coaches, teammates and others can have a direct impact on the messages they give towards academics.



According to the research football is more of a priority for Black student-athletes as compared to White student-athletes. Many Black football student-athletes see football as a means to collegiate and professional athletic careers. Although the chances of becoming a professional football player are very small, this still does not prevent a large number of Black student-athletes from devoting a majority of their time in reaching that aspiration. One of the key questions is: do as many White student-athletes strive to go to the NFL as the Black student-athletes? White student-athletes may receive less memorable messages about the significance of athletics. Although the goal for many Division 1 football student-athletes is to play professional football, there are distinct differences in how essential that goal is.

Black and White football student-athletes receive countless memorable messages. One of the key aspects is: how do they decipher the positive and negative messages? What types of memorable message are recollected more, the positive or negative ones? When analyzing the academic and athletic memorable messages one can postulate which are remembered more, the positive or negative messages, but the answer will vary depending on the individual and situation. The interpretation also will vary between student-athletes, and what each will deem as positive or negative may depend on the individual and their experiences and perspectives.

Graduation is supposed to be the most important component and goal for any student at an institution of higher learning. Student-athletes and more specifically Black student-athletes continue to have low graduation rates at many institutions. What responsibility if any does the institution have to make sure that the student-athletes graduate? In the grand scheme of collegiate football where does graduation rank in the order of priorities for the student-athletes, coaches, parents and other stakeholders? Research and evidence continue to point to the fact that winning and generating revenue appear to be more of the focus when compared to academic

endeavors and graduation. Memorable messages can be influential in motivating and encouraging some student-athletes to graduate. On the contrary, memorable messages may also hinder some from graduating because they place more value on the messages they have received with respect to athletics over academics. Every student-athlete that graduates or does not graduate uses memorable messages to help in their daily and long term decision making process.

All football student-athletes make conscious decisions on a daily basis regarding their time management. The time demands for student-athletes are extremely high, and the sport of collegiate football has become a year round endeavor. Those who are able to wisely budget their time between academics and athletics prove to be more successful. The student-athletes who do not dedicate the proper amount of time towards academics will most likely find themselves not graduating. Are there any messages that can be sent to those student-athletes to help motivate them to place more importance towards graduating? Who are the people who have the power and ability to encourage student-athletes to graduate?

One of the key components of this research is to understand the impact that memorable messages have on football student-athletes. By having a better understanding of both academic and athletic memorable messages, it will allow for the exploration of methods that can help improve academic and athletics goals and achievements. The graduation rate gap between Black and White football student-athletes is one of the most alarming factors in collegiate athletics. Someone must take responsibility for investigating some of the core elements that contribute to the graduation gap. In principle graduation is supposed to be the main objective for institutions of higher learning and all student-athletes. In actuality more resources and finances have been spent in trying to improve facilities, raise coaches' salaries and other non-academic avenues which are geared towards producing more victories on the football field. In the quest to win at

almost any cost, academics and more importantly graduation has become a secondary goal. By understanding what memorable messages student-athletes receive and recall, more education can be given to coaches, parents, administrators and others about what messages can be effective in aiding the academic exploits of the student-athletes. Sending the right memorable message can have a tremendous impact on the lives of the student-athletes and can be very influential in helping guide them towards graduation.

### **Research Questions**

What are the memorable messages recalled by student-athletes with regard to academics?

What are the memorable messages recalled by student-athletes with regard to athletics?

What is the most important memorable message recalled in regards to academics?

What is the most important memorable message recalled in regards to athletics?

What is the valence of academic memorable messages recalled by Black and White student athletes?

What is the valence of athletic memorable messages recalled by Black and White student athletes?

Who are the sources most often associated with sending academic memorable messages to student-athletes?

Who are the sources most often associated with sending athletic memorable messages to student-athletes?

Do academic memorable messages differ for Black and White student-athletes?

Do athletic memorable messages differ for Black and White student-athletes?

Do academic memorable messages differ for student-athletes who did and did not graduate within 6 years?

Do athletic memorable messages differ for student-athletes who did and did not graduate within 6 years?

## **Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1** - Black student athletes will recall more negative academic memorable messages and White student athletes will recall more positive academic memorable messages across all sources.

**Hypothesis 2** - Black football student-athletes are more likely to have more most memorable messages with respect to athletics while White football student-athletes are more likely to have more academic most memorable messages than Blacks.

**Hypothesis 3** - The parents, coaches and peers/teammates of Black student-athletes are more apt to emphasize athletics over academics when compared to Whites.

- A. Parents – The parents of White student-athletes may put greater worth in academics than Black parents.
- B. Coaches – Black student-athletes who display Division 1 football potential are more inclined to have youth and high school coaches who stress athletics over academics than White student-athletes.
- C. Peers/Teammates – White student-athletes are more likely to have peers/teammates who place more value in academics than Black student-athletes.

**Hypothesis 4** - Football student-athletes who graduate from college recall more memorable messages with respect to academics than those football student-athletes who do not graduate.

**Hypothesis 5** - Football student-athletes who do not graduate from college recall more memorable messages in regards to athletics than those who graduate.

## **Significance of study**

This study is important because there is abundant research and data regarding socialization into sports and academic outcomes by race but very little on the memorable messages that help create these outcomes. Socialization is vital when studying why particular races decide to play certain sports and also the importance that sports have in their lives.

Student-athletes are the central component to the collegiate athletic programs, but they are also the most overlooked in many instances. Rules, regulations and legislation are frequently created without the best interest of the student-athlete in mind. Student-athletes regularly face difficult decisions on a daily basis. Like most people, student-athletes use recalled memorable

messages in their everyday lives to make decisions (Ellis & Smith 2004). Socialization is central to the choices student-athletes make in all aspects of their lives. More research is needed in the area of socialization and how memorable messages are perceived during that time which impacts the decisions of student-athletes. “The notion of memorable messages seems well suited to the study of socialization given its emphasis on message activity and its use in previous socialization research” (Barge & Schlueter 2004:237). The outcomes of sport selection and academic achievement are often studied without looking at the factors that contribute to these outcomes. Memorable messages need to be researched to analyze the decision making process for student-athletes. Student-athletes are often making rational choices about how much time and attention they spend on academics and athletics due to the messages they receive during their socialization. The thought processes of student-athletes are often ignored in research because there is not a great deal of research that questions student-athletes about the memorable messages they have received. This study is also significant because it gives an in-depth look at what messages are recalled by athletes and how they interpret and use these messages in their lives.

### **Need for study**

This study is needed because there is very little literature and research on this topic. Most of the research in this area looks at collegiate athletics on a broad level. There is very little data that focuses on academic and athletic motivation and values for student-athletes. The study is needed to explore the rationale for academic and athletic motivation for Black and White football student-athletes. Interviewing the student-athletes will allow for a greater understanding of memorable messages they receive and the source of the messages. Examining the memorable

messages will allow this research to differ in that it explores how the memorable messages impacted the student-athletes motivation towards gradation.

While there is a minimal amount of research regarding student-athletes, especially in the sport of football, there is even less research that examines student-athletes by race. There is a great need for sociological research on collegiate athletics that can examine the different decision making processes for student-athletes of different races. Sociological studies are able to use race to examine the differences of student-athletes during socialization. Most of the research does not explore the backgrounds of student-athletes along with their memorable messages and usually puts them into one category once they enter college. It is difficult to get a true understanding of the problems of collegiate athletics and race without understanding the backgrounds and situations of the student-athletes.

There is a general misconception about collegiate football. The lofty salaries of collegiate football coaches combined with the enormous bowl and television revenues skew the public knowledge about the sport and collegiate athletics. Collegiate football has become a powerful entity at institutions of higher learning across the nation. Football student-athletes are exploited. They are alienated labor because they do not see much of the revenue they generate in monetary form. Statistics show that African American males are the most exploited group in the collegiate athletic system because they have the lowest graduation rates, and hold very few administration and coaching positions. The collegiate athletic model which places African American males at a disadvantage serves as a reflection of a more general pattern of structural inequality which places many African American males in unfavorable economic circumstances.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Literature Review**

Football is the most popular sport in American culture and also the most racially diverse (Goldsmith 2003; Harrison & Harrison 2002; Eitzen & Sage 2009). At the Division 1 collegiate level, Blacks account for 46.4 percent of football student-athletes while Whites account for 46.6 percent which makes them the two most statistically significant racial groups in terms of those who participate in collegiate football (Lapchick 2009:76). However, this diversity does not translate into equality for all participants. There is a well documented gap in college graduation rates between Black and White student-athletes, especially in the sport of football where the gap reaches almost 20% (Beamon & Bell 2006; Hodge, Harrison, Burden & Dixson 2008). At the collegiate Division 1 level, White football student-athletes graduate at a 77% rate, while Black football student-athletes graduate at only a 59% rate (Lapchick 2009:1). The graduation rate for Black males in the general student population is 38% compared to Whites whose graduation rate for the general population of students is 62% which is a 24% gap (Lapchick 2009:2). The academic gap in graduation rates between Black and White males in the sport of football may be in part due to the academic and athletic memorable messages that they receive and recall from important members of society such as their peers, parents and coaches. Although scholars have learned a great deal about athletic participation and academic outcomes, there is minimal research on why certain factors, such as memorable messages, affect those areas.

Memorable messages received by student-athletes can influence their views about the importance of academics and athletics (Kassing & Pappas 2007). Knapp, Stohl, and Reardon (1981) define memorable messages as verbal statements “which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of

their lives” (Kassing & Pappas 2007:539). Student-athletes are likely to use memorable messages to understand their environment and make everyday decisions about both academic and athletic pursuits. “Memorable messages may serve as part of the foundation for personal standards people employ on a daily basis” (Ellis & Smith 2004:98). As communicative performances, memorable messages represent a socializing force (Stohl 1986). These messages are likely to have a direct impact on the attention and efforts put forth by student-athletes in their academic and athletic endeavors.

Athletes’ everyday actions can be attributed in part to memorable messages. Student-athletes face dilemmas on a daily basis such as deciding whether to attend class or how much time and effort they put forth towards their academic duties, and the rationale behind these decisions often comes from the messages they received and recall. Memorable messages are often associated with behaviors that exceed or violate personal expectations (Ellis & Smith 2004). Some people will regularly use memorable messages to help make decisions and those same messages may affect their actions. It is important to understand that everyday behavior of college students is often related to memorable messages (Ellis & Smith 2004). The vast majority of research pertaining to student-athletes often ignores how their everyday behavior relates to how well they perform both academically and athletically. The messages student-athletes receive have a direct impact in how they act on a daily basis which is also related to how they perform in the academic and athletic arenas both in the short as well as the long term.

Society, in general, sends various messages with respect to football and its importance on all levels. Socialization is vital to understanding the sport selection process and why football is so prevalent in youth, high school and collegiate athletics (Eitzen & Sage 2009; Goldsmith 2003; Halone 2008). Football has become a principal aspect to the decision making processes of



colleges and universities in connection with university and conference expansion. This is evident with the recent addition of the University of Nebraska to the Big Ten Conference in June 2010. Collegiate football has become a billion dollar entity that is able to generate an enormous amount of revenue. The revenue produced by the sport of football has many institutions of higher learning evaluating their missions and values and assessing how much of a factor football revenue is in the equation (Langelett 2003; Upthegrove, Roscigno & Zubrinsky 1999). The general public sends a clear indication of the significance that football has on many levels, but too often researchers do not explain the potential ways that this societal fascination is transmitted to student-athletes.

Coaches have a significant role in the value student-athletes assign to football and how influential it can be in their lives. “Coaches have the capacity and opportunity to influence youth athletes, but will vary in their ability and competence to do so. One way in which this variability could manifest itself is through the expression of memorable messages” (Kassing & Pappas 2007:539). Coaches are one of the key sources of memorable messages for student-athletes. Examination of the player and coach relationship is essential to understanding the ideology and thought process of student-athletes. Current research shows that the pattern of many major collegiate football coaching salaries continues to rise to unprecedented levels, due to the enormous salaries this phenomenon places added pressure on the student-athletes. However, one of the key problems beyond the wins and losses of coaches is that there is not much exploration of the relationships with respect to coaches and athletes. The everyday decisions made by student-athletes can often be attributed to the messages they receive from their coaches. Thus, there are other essential elements of coaching that are often overlooked in the process of yearning for victories.

Many of the memorable messages that student-athletes recall come from their parents. Many student-athletes report their parents pushing them to excel in athletics from early ages (Coakley 1992). This strong push for athletics from parents may have a direct impact on the significance and priority of athletics in the minds of student-athletes. Young athletes can be placed in situations in which they must choose between academics or athletics with regard to their time commitments. Research has shown that memorable messages are prominent in the behaviors of young athletes (Kassing & Pappas 2007). For many parents, the desire for their children to do well athletically has overshadowed the pursuit of academic achievements (Eitzen & Sage 2009). Research has shown a difference with respect to the messages that Black and Whites parents send and how they influence and impact the academic and athletic achievements of their sons. White parents are more likely to emphasize the significance of education and often come from higher educational backgrounds themselves (Woods, Kurtz-Costes & Rowley 2005).

While there is a good deal of research that documents the graduation rate differences for Black and White football student-athletes, more needs to be done on what leads to these results. Memorable messages can be one of the strongest components in understanding the values and decision making process of student-athletes. The amount of time one devotes to academics or athletics is often correlated to how much success one will have in those endeavors (Miller & Wiggins 2004). One can postulate that Black and White football student-athletes receive different memorable messages and these guide them in the choices they make and effort they put forth towards graduating from college. Memorable messages can be used to analyze the meaning and importance that academics and athletics have with regards to Black and White football student-athletes.

Memorable messages are instrumental in regard to socialization and sports (Kassing & Pappas 2007). There are various components that lead to the differences in participation rates in sports by race. Black and White males are introduced to football and learn to play that sport for various reasons. There are certain messages newcomers receive when they first become involved in football or any organization that has a significant effect on how they feel about the sport and how relevant it will be in their lives (Barge & Schlueter 2004). Memorable messages are also significant to academic performance and graduation rates, just as they influence athletic accomplishments and the everyday decision making of student-athletes (Ellis & Smith 2004).

### **Socialization and Race**

Socialization has a significant role in the sport participation rates for Black and White athletes (Coakely 1992; Eitzen & Sage 2009; Goldsmith 2003; Halone 2008 Ogden & Hilt 2003, Wiggins 1997; Zirin 2008). In particular, Black and White males differ greatly in their rationale for the respective sports they choose to participate in (Eitzen & Sage 2009; Goldsmith 2003; Halone 2003). There are various structural factors and cultural influences that contribute to the process in which one selects the sports they prefer to play. Race is a central element in examining the socialization differences for Blacks and Whites with respect to sports (Goldsmith, 2003; Harrison & Harrison, 2003; Tracy & Erkut, 2002).

Socialization is a complex concept that guides humans to behave and act within the boundaries of their society. All human beings share the process of socialization in common, but the various agents and methods of socialization help make people distinct. “Human beings are socialized – that is, taught the criteria by which to make judgments. Children learn from their parents, peers, churches, schools, and the media what is right or wrong, moral or immoral,

correct or incorrect” (Eitzen & Sage 2009:48). Socialization helps determine our values, norms and behaviors. The socialization process usually begins in the home and extends to the world which we encounter (Downey, von Hippel, & Hughes 2008).

The “nature vs. nurture” debate is one of the central elements of socialization. Beyond the influence of genetics, nurture is the socialization aspect of the “nature vs. nurture” dynamic. Most of what we learn as people comes from our environment and or the people around us, because we learn from the world in which we live. Parents are often considered to be the chief agents of socialization. “Most sociological studies implicitly assume that parents’ actions shape children’s behavior, aspirations, and achievement” (Hawkins, Amato, & King 2007:991). The people and places we learn from are agents of socialization. The agents are essential in how people act and what they think about others and themselves. The manner in which we are socialized helps us understand who we are and the roles we are expected to play.

Race is a very complex area when analyzing the process of socialization into sport. “Race is a social, rather than biological factor that reveals a common sociopolitical history. Being African American has more to do with shared experience than shared genetic material” (Harrison & Harrison 2002:35). Race in connection to sport socialization is not merely concentrated on skin color but more on social factors and conditions that are shared by a group. African Americans and Whites do not choose to play sports because of what they look like with respect to pigment; the choice is correlated to their environment.

Black males also have the highest rate of living in households without fathers, which is estimated to be well over 60 percent (Zirin 2008). This is important because research has shown that mothers are the primary source of memorable messages (Ellis & Smith 2004). Thus Black

mothers are more likely to send memorable messages to males because of the dynamics in that culture. Simply stated, a large percentage of Black males are living without the influence and guidance of fathers and many Black males also have fathers who are incarcerated. According to Harry Edwards, the social conditions of Black males make it extremely difficult for them to be successful in any stratum of society. Edwards claims that young Black males are “disconnected from virtually every institutional structure in society” which explains the high significance of sports for Black males because it is one of the places where there are highly visible successful Black males (Edwards cited in Zirin 2008).

In many Black communities there is a lack of positive role models which helps explain why sports are of such importance due to the visibility of prominent Black athletic figures in the sports world. High profile athletes have been historically held in high esteem in the black community (Wiggins & Miller 2003). African Americans are more inclined to participate in sports that they see other African Americans playing. Basketball and football are the preferred sports for African American males (Goldsmith, 2003; Harrison & Harrison, 2002; Wiggins, 1997; Zirin, 2008). White male athletes do not need to hold sports in the same regard because they have higher frequency of fathers in the households and other White males in prominent positions in society (Hawkins, Amato & King 2007). White males tend to have various avenues in society in which they can be successful and have positive role models. Whites, and other males from higher socioeconomic backgrounds do not need to use sports as a vehicle for upward mobility (Wiggins & Miller 2003).

The weight of the evidence indicates that the differences between participation patterns of black and white athletes is primarily due to differences in the history of experiences that individuals and their particular racial group have undergone. Blacks in this country have traditionally not enjoyed equal cultural and socioeconomic opportunities, having been oppressed, discriminated against, impoverished, and generally excluded from the good things in life. The result is that

blacks and whites have shown different preferences and inclinations in their choice of sports (Wiggins 1997: 198).

The circumstances and characteristics to which boys are born are highly influential in the opportunities that they have in life. “The ‘world’ is a very different place for males from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Because males have substantially different interactions with the world, based on class, race and other differences and inequalities, we might expect the construction of masculinity to take on different meanings for boys and men from differing backgrounds” (Messner 1990: 440).

The labeling process plays a significant role in the socialization of African Americans males. The younger an African American is labeled for their athletic ability, the more problematic this becomes. This can affect their stature because the popular perception for many African American males is that they will become athletes, because that is the role deemed best fit for them (Adler & Adler 1989). A component of labeling theory for Blacks males that is instrumental is that they are not always labeled by Whites but by Blacks and others races. Black males tend to label each other as athletes and thus often associate being an athlete as their main role. The labeling usually takes place from society in general including parents, friends and others close to the child that is labeled. Thus, many young Black males often succumb to the label and participate in the sport that they are expected to be in (Zirin 2008).

Thus, socialization is instrumental in the sport selection process for collegiate athletes (Goldsmith 2003; Harrison & Harrison 2002). Most collegiate athletes start participating in their respective sports at earlier ages; some athletes reported having strenuous training regimens as early as when they were 10 years old (Coakley 1992). Training and devoting such a significant amount of time and energy focused on athletics, sends strong memorable messages to young

athletes. The current drive to get collegiate athletic scholarships is so challenging, that the push to train and learn sports has become exceedingly demanding. Besides the fact that many athletes are starting their sports at earlier ages, they are also specializing in sports at an early age (Coakely 1992; Eitzen & Sage 2009). This generation as compared to those of the past has seen less multi-sport athletes (Wiggins & Miller 2003; Ogden & Randall 2005). Time requirements and all year long games and training make it difficult for many elite athletes to be involved in more than one sport. The competition has become so intense in youth athletics that many children are not able to play multiple sports because there is a vast emphasis on winning. “Most of our social institutions are grounded in a rather domineering form of competition” (Eitzen & Sage 2009).

The quest to become a scholarship Division 1 athlete has become so pervasive, encompassing and extensive that many athletes are not choosing the sports for which they participate in. Parents, coaches, siblings and friends are directing athletes to sports they like or are familiar with or have access to. “From the structural perspective, marginality becomes prominent in shaping sports interest, as evidenced in studies of coaches and authority figures for youth” (Ogden & Hilt 2003:224). Most young children do not have the cognitive ability to understand what sport they would like to play in college, especially from an early age. Most athletes are socialized or introduced into their respective sports by various social agents. Parents or coaches put children in sports of their preference because they have affinity for that sport. In the African American community playing the sports of basketball and football are social norms (Ogden & Hilt 2003).

## ***Football***

Football is the most popular sport in American culture (Rhoden cited in Wiggins & Miller 2003). There are various reasons for the popularity, some of which include the opportunity to hit and tackle. Generally at all levels, football has the largest crowds when compared to others sports (Lipsitz cited in Bloom & Willard 2002). Football is also immensely attractive for young males because it is the largest sport in regards to the number of members on a team that are able to play at one time (Goldsmith 2003). Football usually consists of twenty-two people on the field at most times. A football team can often consist of over one hundred team members, which makes it the most accessible sports opportunity for many athletes.

The sport of football at its essence is a violent activity. Football athletes are trained at young ages to attack their opponent (Messner 1990). It is the aggressive nature of football that conditions and encourages the athletes who participate to be ferocious in many cases. Thus, the mindset of football players becomes one to attack and dominate their opponent (Wiggins 1997). Memorable messages are sent to football players about physical toughness that center on having a high pain threshold and being able to play despite physical ailments and injuries (Kassing & Pappas 2007). Football is especially violent because there are rewards and recognition for being aggressive. Some football players are thus acknowledged in a positive manner for hits to their opponent that cause bodily harm and damage.

Football is also the most racially diverse of the four main sports (Goldsmith 2003; Harrison & Harrison 2002; Eitzen & Sage 2009). The four major league sports in the United States are baseball, basketball, football and hockey. The racial makeup in football at the



collegiate and professional levels makes it the most diverse from a social aspect (Harrison & Harrison 2002).

### ***Structural Factors***

One of the major reasons that Black and White males choose to play particular sports is due to their social structure. Structuration theory allows one to investigate how the social structures have an impact on the daily decisions of Blacks to participate in football (Halone 2008). Halone (2008) uses Giddens' structuration theory to look at racialized sports organizing in three aspects: 1.) agency, 2.) reflexivity, 3.) duality of structure. The individual who makes a decision to participate in the sport is the agent. Reflexivity deals with how parents, coaches, and others support and observe Blacks participating in football and how they contribute to the ongoing cycle. Duality of structure deals with how limited resources allow for basketball and football to continue to be the sports of choice for Blacks, but also how the decision to continue to fund and support those sports contributes to the cycle. Ogden & Rose (2005) used Giddens to further explain structuration: "Structuration theory focuses on the fundamental circularity (recursiveness) of social life. It focuses on how 'the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems'" (Ogden and Rose 2005:226). Social structure is an important aspect to observe in examining the sport selection process (Goldsmith, 2003; Wiggins, 2003). Social stratification deals with social inequalities on the basis of class, race, and gender and allows one to understand that in many cases Black males are selecting sports due to what they are exposed to and have the opportunity to play. "The economic plight of black Americans has not changed dramatically enough nor has the basic structure of organized sport evolved to the point where black athletes would suddenly find themselves overrepresented in golf and excluded from basketball" (Wiggins 1997:199).

Access to sports is connected to the resources and facilities are available. In many cases there is a deterministic factor that Black males will only be able to play basketball and football. Thus the social structures in place constrain the options Black males and especially those from lower socioeconomic status have with regard to sport selection. Pierre Bourdieu has a similar perspective to Giddens in that he looks at how social structures affect and are affected by to social actions (Bairner 2007). Economic systems are instrumental in the social behaviors (sport selection) between Black and White males. Class and socioeconomic status are influential when examining the reasons why African Americans choose basketball and football and why Whites choose to participate in a wide range of sports. Some sports such as golf, swimming, and hockey are expensive due to the equipment and facilities. Economics has proven to be one of the most restrictive factors when examining the differences in ability to partake in particular sports. Bourdieu deems class as vital to relationships and or the domination or control of particular groups. Bourdieu would claim there is a “class habitus” in which groups have long held beliefs and or principles regarding their place in the world (Bairner 2007). Thus, according to Bourdieu people from similar social conditions tend to partake in the same activities which helps explain the sport selection process for those who are differentially placed in socioeconomic hierarchies. In many inner cities throughout the country, one would be hard pressed to find quality baseball fields and ice hockey rinks. The lack of those facilities in the Black communities limits the access and opportunities that Black males have to participate in those sports. Economic factors and social encounters push young Black males toward basketball and away from sports that require more time, space, and facilities such as baseball and ice hockey (Ogden & Rose 2005).

When persons access structures to produce/reproduce interaction sequences at the micro level, they don’t necessarily do so in the same manner. Rather, they do so based on how they are positioned within a particular set of social structures. For Giddens, the

positioning of persons both constrains and enables their actions, but because there are differential distributions of knowledge and resources in social systems, individuals aren't necessarily situated in equal ways within them (Ogden & Rose 2005: 228).

In Giddens's view, the individuals (black and white males) are not making the choices for which sport they choose to play; instead society is selecting the options given to the groups. Society constrains or limits the opportunities that one has not only to participate but also to learn about different sports. An example would be that most inner city Black high schools do not offer hockey as a sport. "Racial differences in culture exist because things are not equal, especially things like social class and neighborhood residence" (Goldsmith 2003:148). For instance, if a Black inner city male wanted to play hockey, he would have to make special accommodations which would be expensive and time consuming. Thus, many inner city Black males have not had the opportunity to learn about hockey or to experience how to play the sport. The disparity in neighborhoods and subsequent schools are essential to sport selection in the fact of what is offered. Structuration theory allows one to understand how social institutions along with values and norms play a role in sport selection. From Giddens's (structuralist) perspective, social practices are connected to resources which ultimately are tied to structures in society (Halone 2008).

Social class and social institutions are directly related. In most cases a higher socioeconomic status of a family allows one to attend a better quality of schools at all levels. There are cultural differences between Blacks and Whites due to economic inequality between the groups (Goldsmith 2003). The higher property taxes in an area allows for certain communities to be able to have better school facilities, equipment and teachers. In many areas of the country some private and parochial high schools have tuition rates in excess of \$20,000 a

year. This is another illustration of the socioeconomic differences amongst families in which some are able to pay more in tuition than some households earn a year. Schools on the higher end of the socioeconomic echelon are able to offer more sports and opportunities for their students (Harrison & Harrison 2002). Many schools in influential White neighborhoods are able to offer a vast variety of sports. “Thus, racial differences in sports participation may occur because Blacks’ and Whites’ schools differ in size, resources, and sectors” (Goldsmith 2003:152). Sports are just like most other entities in a capitalistic society in which the economic power, influence and money equate to more opportunities and knowledge (Eitzen & Sage 2009).

### ***Cultural Influences***

There are subcultures among Black and White males that help further explain the motivation and rationale for playing different sports. Cultural differences between Blacks and Whites are created by structural inequalities and relations between them (Goldsmith 2003). One of the areas often overlooked when studying athlete sport selection is the differences within particular groups. For instance, Black males from different regions tend to value sports that have been historically associated with their area (Wiggins & Miller 2003). An example would be that in a colder climate such as New York, basketball seems to be more prevalent whereas in the warmer climates such as Florida and Texas, football is more the sport of choice.

One of the key differences between football and other sports is the physical nature of the game (Harrison & Lynch 2005). There is constant physical contact and activity in football which leads it to be deemed as a more masculine sport (Harrison & Harrison 2002). “Participation in contact sports have been associated with higher perceived legitimacy of aggressive behavior and lower levels of moral functioning in comparison with noncontact sports” (Rutten, Stams, Biesta, Schuengel, Dirks, Hoeksma 2007:256). Stigmas are associated with some children who play

contact sports related to their mentality and behaviors. Children from low socioeconomic and high violence areas are often able to take their frustration about their conditions out, through sports (Harrison & Lynch 2005). Many children who show aggressive behavior at early ages are often steered towards football and hockey because it is viewed as a way to release aggression in a controlled manner. “Individuals who exhibit aggressive behavior and receive approval for it will tend to employ aggressive behavior in future situations that are similar (Eitzen & Sage 2009:132). This is one of the reasons that football and hockey players are notorious for fighting and belligerent behavior. According to Eitzen and Sage (2009) aggression is a learned behavior and many who participate in football and hockey learn these behaviors at an early age.

Some parents push their children towards sports that they believe are the best fit them or that they have themselves played (Coakley 1992). A growing problem is the extreme pressure that parents impose on their children to not only perform, but perform well. Parents and coaches are pushing children at earlier ages to excel in sports with hopes of them having a collegiate and professional career in sports (Coakely 1992). The memorable messages sent by coaches are highly influential in the actions and behaviors of young athletes (Kassing & Pappas 2007). Aspirations to do well in sports have become so common that it has changed the structure of youth sports and families (Eitzen/Sage 2009). Many parents are pushing their children extremely hard in sports with the aspiration and hope that they become professional athletes, often for the financial benefits. Parents and coaches are spending thousands of dollars for children to be involved in sports. In many cases, children are often looked at as investments.

School is not always of the utmost important for some minority students. In a study done by Beamon & Bell (2006), African Americans students were found to put less focus and attention on academics compared to White students. “African American respondents were found

to have less emphasis on academics than athletics during their socialization process, as well as have less emphasis on education than white respondents” (Beamon & Bell 2006). One of the elements that tend to hinder a number of African Americans in the socialization process with respect to academics is the influence of their parents.

Parents can have an essential role in how children value education and their perceptions about school. White parents tend to be more involved in their children’s education during the socialization process (Beamon & Bell 2006). Research has shown that students whose parents are well educated and involved with their lives have greater success in school (Broh 2002). Parents who have more education tend to have higher socioeconomic status. There are various benefits to being in a higher social class, such as one’s education can be greatly affected by the social benefits afforded to those who are privileged. Students from lower and working class families are at an academic disadvantage (Eitle & Eitle 2002). Low socioeconomic status has a negative effect on education success for Black students (Cureton 2003). Children who have low family educational resources are more susceptible to social forces that promote athletics over education (Eitle & Eitle 2002). Not only do some Black parents place less importance on academics, they place greater value on athletics. A number of Black parents have been noted to put athletics above academics thus sending the message to their children that athletics trumps education (Beamon & Bell 2006). Parents play a pivotal role in children’s views towards academics and athletics. Parents can have an instrumental role in regards to the values their children have towards academics and athletics.

## **Collegiate Athletics and Academics**

The fact that the only two revenue producing collegiate sports at the Division 1 level, basketball and football are also the sports of choice for the majority of African American males is no coincidence. African American males are overrepresented in the collegiate sports of basketball and football in which they make up over 50% of athletes at the Division 1 level. Although it is common knowledge that only 1% of collegiate athletes become professional athletes, it does not stop an overwhelming majority of collegiate athletes from focusing their time, energy and efforts in becoming professionals (Wiggins & Miller 2003; Zirin 2008). This is a prime case of labeling theory in which African American males view themselves as athletes primarily and deem all other roles such as academics as secondary (Adler & Adler 1989). Howard Becker is credited with many of the concepts associated with labeling theory. The aspects of labeling theory reach far beyond the perceptions of the individuals themselves. Society has a tendency to label African American males as either basketball or football athletes (Goldsmith 2003; Stone & Sjomomeling 1999).

It is critical to document the factors that lead to this gap and to provide theoretical lenses on those factors in order to solve the problems that can result from the gap in graduation rates. Education can be invaluable for those who are able to comprehend the benefits of education and who are able to graduate. The rewards of education are often immeasurable and can lead to career success and financial upward mobility. "Education has been viewed in both popular discourse and sociological theory as a potential meritocratic inroad for disadvantaged groups. Empirical evidence has disputed this claim, however, suggesting that the educational system as it currently exists may in fact reproduce, rather than alleviate, societal inequalities" (Upthgrove, Roscigno, & Zubrinsky 1999: 718). The current structure of Division 1 institutions is such that

athletics are often emphasized over academics for college athletes. This situation places minority students in an unfavorable position due to the fact they perform at a lower rate academically, which leads to other social injustices (Harry Edwards cited in Miller & Wiggins 2004).

The academic problems for minority student-athletes begin long before they step on a college campus. “African American student-athletes relatively poorer academic performance is more a function of structural inequalities in their precollege educational opportunities than their overemphasis on athletics” (Sellers & Kuperminc 1997). For the most part, minority students perform at lower levels academically at all stages, especially when examining Black males. “Black males consistently perform less well academically than their White peers; while underachieving on academic measures, many Black males seek to excel in athletics” (Hodge, Harrison, Burden, & Dixon 2008:940). Social conditions contribute to hinder the academic performance of Black students (Small & Winship 2007). In particular, African American males, many from the inner cities, are exposed to various obstacles that place them in the lowest achieving group of all races and genders. There are many social problems that contribute to the academic woes of minority student-athletes (Anderson 1990). Some of the social problems that are prevalent in many inner cities include poverty, drugs, high crime rates, and violence (Earl Smith cited Ross 2004). Many African American males, who fill rosters of Division 1 institutions across the country, come from backgrounds in which the social factors do not always lead to academics being a priority.

Studies have shown that numerous minority student-athletes, in particular males, care a great deal more about their athletic endeavors than about academics ((Leeds, Miller, & Stull 2007). “Commitment to athletics was negatively correlated with GPA, meaning individuals with



a high commitment to athletics had low college GPAs” (Gaston-Gayles 2004:77). Research has revealed that countless Black basketball and football student-athletes are concerned more with sports than education (Beamon & Bell 2006; Eitle & Eitle 2002; Hodge, Harrison, Burden & Dixon 2008). Some of these athletes do not see graduation as important and thus do not make it a priority or a goal of theirs. “Black basketball and football players have consistently fared worse than their peers in terms of graduation rates” (Gaston-Gayles 2004:81). What many in academia fail to realize is that many Black athletes do not care if they do not graduate because that was not their purpose for going to college (Melendez 2008). Thus, some of these athletes do not view college as a place of higher learning; instead, they look at it as a stepping stone for their professional athletic career. Black student-athletes have shown more desire to play professional sports than White student-athletes (Gaston-Gayles 2004). Rational choice theory helps further explain the circumstances for retention and graduation rates for minority student-athletes. Rational choice theory looks at the decisions made by individuals, which in this case are minority student-athletes who in their own self interest, in many situations, actively choose athletics over academics (Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell & Sabo 2005). According to this theory minority student-athletes are making a rational choice to pursue athletics over academics. Minority student-athletes in the revenue sports of Men’s basketball and football often make the choice to devote a great deal of their time, energy and efforts towards athletics (Beamon & Bell 2006; Eitle & Eitle 2002; Gaston-Gayles 2004; Hawkins 1999; Small & Winship 2006). These athletes are socialized in this way and thus take these same beliefs and values onto college campuses. “Resources adolescents devote to competing pursuits are finite; when young athletes’ time and energy, as well as the resources of their schools and communities, are diverted from the classroom to extracurricular activities such as sports, academic objectives are undermined”

(Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrel, and Sabo 2005:188). African American males are the greatest culprit of this thinking for various reasons. A great number of African American males do not see the benefits of education which is one of the reasons they have the lowest graduation rates (Beamon & Bell 2006; Hodge, Harrison, Burden, & Dixson 2008).

The economic benefits of obtaining a degree can often pale in comparison to a professional athlete contract. Starting salaries for college graduates are substantially lower than that of professional athletes (Miller & Wiggins 2004). Those athletes fortunate enough to be drafted into professional baseball, basketball or football stand to receive guaranteed contracts worth millions of dollars. Many minority athletes aspire to be professional athletes to such a great extent that they are willing to sacrifice almost everything else (Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell & Sabo 2005). Those from disadvantaged areas do not see alternatives that have the financial benefits of being a professional athlete (Hawkins 1999; Upthegrove, Roscigno, Vincent & Zubrinsky 1999). The mindset of these student-athletes becomes one in which they make rational choices to place athletics above all else. After exploring rational choice theory it is clear to see why many minority student-athletes are devoting a great deal of their time and energy to athletics. Many of these student-athletes have received and internalized memorable messages about the significance of athletics.

The pressure of balancing academic and athletic pressures can make the job of being a student-athlete extremely strenuous. Student-athletes often have to deal with demanding situations from both the academic and athletic realm that in many instances, forces them to choose one. Colleges and universities have to realize the dilemma they place student-athletes in, especially in the revenue sports that are more arduous.

“There is evidence that athletes in the male revenue sports of football and basketball have a relatively low probability of receiving an education compared to non-athletes or athletes in the other sports. Because of the revenue producing potential of football and basketball, the pressures are intense to win. This means that coaches in these sports are likely to be excessive in their demands on the time of their athletes during and between sessions. The serious and far-ranging financial consequences of “big-time” sports also increase the likelihood that coaches will recruit exceptional athletes who are unqualified for the academic demands of college” (Purdy, Eitzen & Hufnagel 1982).

The entire premise of collegiate athletics as an institution is a conflict (Hawkins 1999). Student-athletes provide all labor necessary for athletics to function but the coaches and administration reap the financial benefits. There are two distinct groups in collegiate athletics which is the equivalent to the haves (coaches and administration) and the have not's (student-athletes). Student-athletes have always served in the subordinate role in the collegiate athletic configuration. The current economic model of collegiate athletics is configured in a way by which Blacks males are overrepresented in the labor (playing) duties but are severely underrepresented in the management positions. Many believe that Black males are exploited in the collegiate athletic organization structure (Hawkins 1999; Hodge, Harrison, Burden & Dixon 2008; Melendez 2008; Ross 2004). Most predominately White institutions of higher education are not set up to serve the needs of Blacks and other minorities. In fact, “the social, cultural, and racial make-ups of the institutions are not necessarily situated to accommodate Blacks in general and Black student athletes specifically” (Harrison 1999:7).

“One way Black student-athletes are exploited for their labor is because there is no place within Black communities where they can benefit from their athletic skills and talents, therefore, Black student-athletes must contract their talents out to these institutions. These predominantly White NCAA Division 1 Institutions act as a monopsony, where they are the only buyers of this service” (Hawkins 1999:8). Thus, Black student-athletes are trained and socialized to set goals

to attend predominately White institutions. This path is the most successful way to garner the exposure and recognition necessary to play professional basketball and football in many cases (Brown, Jackson, Brown, Sellers, Keiper & Manuel 2003). The goal of intercollegiate athletics is to win, a task often best accomplished by having the best players. In the quest to win, coaches are often willing to recruit athletes who are under qualified and not of the same academic caliber as other students admitted to the institutions (Eitzen 1999; Gatson-Gayles 2004; Hawkins 1999; Rishe 2003).

A fundamental problem is that athletes are recruited as students. Yet, demanding coaches, as well as the athletic subculture, work against the student role. At the heart of this contradiction is the fact the institutions of higher learning allow the enrollment and subsidization of ill-prepared and uninterested students solely for the purpose of winning games, enhancing the visibility of the university, and producing revenue” (Eitzen 1999:123).

A faction of society have held a long standing stereotype in which minorities and more specifically African Americans have been viewed as intellectually inferior to Whites (Green, Bischoff, Coleman, Sperry, & Robinson-Zanartu 2007). This stereotype along with the statistics and harsh realities of African Americans performing on a lower level academically has led to a self-fulfilling prophecy. “African American athlete students must contend with two negative labels: the dumb athlete caricature and the dumb black stereotype. This double negative tends to result in a self-fulfilling prophecy as professors, fellow students, and the athletes themselves assume low academic performance”(Eitzen 1999:111). A number of minorities buy into the self fulfilling prophecy in which they do not deem themselves as intellectually capable of achieving academic success (Green, Bischoff, Coleman, Sperry, & Robinson-Zanartu 2007). Self-fulfilling prophecy was introduced as a formal concept and theory by sociologist Robert Merton (Von Hippel, Hawkins, Schooler 2001). Merton suggests that self fulfilling prophecy is when a false concept or idea is sent, it changes the behaviors of people making the false prophecy become

true. Research has shown that no group is intellectually superior to another (Eitzen 1999; (Green, Bischoff, Coleman, Sperry, & Robinson-Zanartu 2007; Miller & Wiggins 2003). Countless minority student-athletes adhere to the self fulfilling prophecy and never see themselves as smart enough to do well on the collegiate level and be able to graduate (Beamon & Bell 2006; Hawkins 1999; Rishe 2003; Small & Winship 2006). Minority student-athletes from impoverished backgrounds are even more susceptible to the self-fulfilling prophecy.

A further examination of the self can be viewed by identity theory. Some of the memorable messages presented to student-athletes can be internalized at times. Those who send memorable messages to student-athletes often express their views or desires of what they want that individual to be. The student-athletes that internalize those messages tend to make an assessment of themselves based on the ideas, views and opinions of others. “Having an identity that is based on the views of others, as well as on broader social definitions, will tend to produce behaviors that conform to these views and definitions” (Stryker cited in Turner 2003: 371). Identity theory helps explain why if the sources of memorable messages deem the person as an athlete, they tend to view themselves as athletes and may ignore the academic component. Parents, coaches, teammates and others are often responsible for placing their beliefs and opinions on the student-athletes and in many cases they tend to view themselves in the manner in which others see them in.

One of the biggest areas of concern regarding retention and graduation rates for minority student-athletes is the special admittance process. “Minority students typically enter college with less academic preparation, the added problems in the academic domain of the college environment exacerbates the negative impact on academic motivation for these students” (Gaston-Gayles 2004:81). Self worth theory examines how if minority males value athletics

more than academics combined with a low motivation for doing well in school, it becomes comprehensible how they underachieve academically.

The special admittance process consists of colleges and universities lowering their standard admission criteria in order to allow student-athletes to enter the institutions (Eitzen 1999). In actuality a large number of minority student athletes would not be admitted to school if not for the special admittance process (Hawkins 1999; Melendez 2008). According to Eitzen, “Special admissions criteria should be targeted to assist underprivileged minority students. This is a legitimate argument because many young people live in a ‘third world’ of grinding poverty, violent neighborhoods, inadequately financed schools, and few successful role models” (Eitzen 1999:108). Most schools have a special admittance procedure in which student-athletes are able to attend the respective institution because of what is considered a special talent. Athletic talents are taken into account when student-athletes apply for admissions. The fundamental problem with this procedure is that student-athletes who are not of the same academic caliber of their peers are not able to compete with them in the classroom. This task becomes more problematic when considering the athletic demands and requirements placed on student-athletes (Hodge, Harrison, Burden & Dixson 2008). There have been egregious examples of student-athletes being admitted to schools well below the standard guidelines. It has been reported that some schools have had close to 400 point differences on SAT scores between football student-athletes and general admission students (Eitzen 1999). Black males have the lowest SAT scores compared to any other ethnic group (Hodge, Harrison, Burden & Dixson 2008). This is what some researchers refer to as the “Black-White test score gap” which examines some of the social and structural differences for the gap in test scores (Green, Bischoff, Coleman, Sperry & Robinson-Zanartu 2007).

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Method**

#### **Overview**

One of the best methods to truly understand the ideology and mindset of football student-athletes is to talk directly to them. In-depth interviews with former football student-athletes will help understand how memorable messages play in a role in academic and athletic importance.

Because there is a need for research that aids in understanding the circumstances described in the previous pages. The best way to study student-athletes is to engage in research in which student-athletes are the source. Conducting research that focuses directly on the student-athletes will allow for comprehension of the issues and problems that student-athletes encounter that may cause them to have difficulty in graduating.

#### **Sample**

A sample (N=42) of former collegiate football student-athletes participated in the study. All of the participants for this study came from a large Midwestern university. For the purpose of this study federal graduation rates and graduation success rates were used as a guideline, the graduation success rate accounts for scholarship student-athletes who graduate within six years of their enrollment and takes into account those student-athletes who transfer out of the institution and thus do not graduate. According to latest data reported in 2010 from the NCAA, the graduation success rate for football student-athletes at this university is 55%. Black football student-athletes graduated at a 45% rate, while White student-athletes graduated at a 74% rate. There is a 29% graduation gap between Black and White football student-athletes at this institution. At this same institution federal graduation rates report that Black males graduate at a 53% rate and White males at a 78% rate which leads to a gap of 25%. For the purpose of this

study, the sample closely represented the population that reflects the graduation rates of the football student-athletes. The last reported recruiting class was 73% Black and 27% White.

A quota sampling procedure was used to select participants for this study, in order to make sure the sample was proportional to the student-athlete population described above. Quota sampling is a non-probability sample method that allows the researcher to be selective when choosing the sample (Moser 1952). The student-athletes for this study were selected from a database in which their race and graduation status were displayed. The researcher contacted student-athletes who fit the needed criteria. In person and phone interviews were conducted with the selected participants. The response rate for this study was 95%.

The respondents included 29 Black and 13 White former football student-athletes. The breakdown for the interviews closely represented the demographics with 13 Black student-athlete graduates and 16 Black non-graduates and 8 White graduates and 5 White non-graduates. Table 1 provides a breakdown of respondents by race and graduation status.

Table 1 Respondents by Race and Graduation Status

Race (Student-Athletes)	Graduate	Non-Graduate	Total
Black	13	16	29
White	8	5	13
Total	21	21	42

The respondents had exhausted their eligibility or played their last collegiate game within the last eight years. IRB approval was granted and all data reports do not identify specific student-athletes in any way.

## Research Methods

This study contains a mixed method approach which includes qualitative and quantitative research methods. For the qualitative component of the research the Nvivo program was used to



compile and analyze the data. The quantitative component used the SPSS program to analyze the data and produce different statistical data and information. The combination of qualitative and quantitative measures allowed for the results to be examined in various forms.

### Independent Variables

*Race.* The student-athletes in this study are classified into *Race* according to whether they were entered into the database as Black or White. As shown in Table 1 there were 29 Black and 13 White respondents.

*Graduation Status.* The *graduation status* of the participants was either graduate or non-graduate. This was determined according to whether they graduated within six years of eligibility as shown in Table 1. There were 21 graduates and 21 non-graduates.

*Message Status.* The memorable messages reported were the results of two different interview questions. The first question asked for the most memorable message that they recalled while a student-athlete in college. All but one respondent reported a most memorable message, that respondent was a Black graduate. Therefore, a total of 41 most memorable messages are included in the data set.

The second question asked whether the respondent had another memorable message, and 27 respondents reported another memorable message. Please see Table 2 for a breakdown of respondents who had another memorable message by race and graduation status.

Table 2 Other Most Memorable Messages

1 Message	Black	7	11	18
	White	6	3	9
Total		13	14	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>White</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>
Total		<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>42</b>
Other Memorable Messages	Race	Graduate	Non-Graduate	Total
None (no other Memorable Messages)	Black	7	5	12
	White	2	1	3
Total		9	6	15

*Message Source.* Two trained coders independently coded the memorable messages sources in order to establish reliability. The coders agreed on all source codes. After reliability was established the second coder independently coded the sources of the other memorable message. Source categories included: Family members, general Coach, High School Coach, College Coach, Teammates/Peers, General Speaker, and Mentor. Table 3 presents the percentage of all messages by each source.

Table 3 Most Memorable Message Sources

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Family Member	24	28.6	28.9	28.9
	High School Coach	10	11.9	12.0	41.0
	College Coach	36	42.9	43.4	84.3
	Teammates	4	4.8	4.8	89.2
	General Speaker	5	6.0	6.0	95.2
	Mentor	4	4.8	4.8	100.0
	Total	83	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System (Missing)	1	1.2		
Total		84	100.0		

### Dependent Variables

*Valence.* Operational definitions for positive and negative valence of messages are as follows: positive messages help student-athletes to perform well, be responsible, and strive for positive and tangible goals, whereas negative messages discourage student-athletes and do not attempt to make them accountable. They undermine the student-athlete in reaching for positive and tangible goals. Two coders used these definitions as they independently categorized memorable message valence into positive or negative messages. The two coders agreed 41 out of 42 times. They then resolved the difference on the one which they did not initially agree. Percentage of agreement was 97.6%.

*Memorable message topic.* Two trained coders independently coded the most memorable message topics in order to establish reliability. The coders agreed on all topic codes. After reliability was established, the second coder independently coded the sources of the other memorable message. Memorable message topics included: academic, athletic, both academic and athletic, or good character.

*College general emphases.* All respondents were asked four questions about general emphasis between academics and athletics while in college. They were asked to report *personal general emphasis, coach general emphasis, parent general emphasis, and teammate/peer general emphasis*. Four categories of emphasis emerged: academic, athletic, both academic and athletic, or said academic and meant athletics.

*Importance of Graduation.* The *importance of graduation* was sorted by the following: very important, important, and not important. Respondents were asked whether graduation was very important, important, or not important personally.

## Demographics

### Age

Table 4 Age – By Race

Race	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Black	25.52	29	2.18
White	24.15	13	1.67
Total	25.10	42	2.16

Table 5 Age – By Graduation Status

Grad Status	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Graduate	25.19	21	1.96
Non- Graduate	25.00	21	2.30
Total	25.10	42	2.11

### Years College Football (participated)

Table 6 Number of Years Played College Football – By Race

Race	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Black	4.38	29	.56
White	4.62	13	.65
Total	4.45	42	.59

Table 7 Number of Years Played College Football – By Graduation Status

Grad Status	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Graduate	4.57	21	.50
Non- Graduate	4.33	21	.65
Total	4.45	42	.59

### Highest Level of Football

#### Years at that Level

NFL Status (years played in the NFL)

Table 8 Average Years in the NFL for Those Who Reached that Level

Grad Status	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Graduate	2.66	6	1.86
Non-Graduate	2.92	14	2.20
Total	2.85	20	2.05

### **Data Collection Procedure**

In depth interviews were conducted for each participant in the study. Each interview was recorded by audio tape and transcribed and analyzed. NVivo software was used. It is a qualitative research software program. Each tape was transcribed and entered into a word file that contains a template that can be read into NVivo. NVivo uses heading levels in Word to organize data. In the case of this research, Heading Level 1s are the case IDs for each respondent. Heading Level 2s are the main variables of race, graduation status, message type, message valence, and source. Taking source as an example, the categories of parents, coaches, and teammates, were given Level 3 Headings. The transcription of memorable message by each source was inserted in the appropriate place at the level three heading. Similarly, message type will have two corresponding Level 3 Headings of academic and athletic messages. Those messages were inserted in the appropriate place at those level three headings. Thus, messages appeared in more than one place in the NVivo files. NVivo also allowed coding more finely after all data was entered. NVivo allowed for matrix coding where two variables are examined at the same time to see patterns of responses. For example race and message type could be entered as queries in the NVivo analysis. A report of the number of academic and athletic

memorable messages by black and white student athletes would then be generated. NVivo is a powerful tool that greatly enhanced data analysis for this research effort.

### Coding Template

CASE ID: Level 1 heading

GRADSTATUS: Level 2 heading

RACE: level 2 heading

MESTYPE: Level 2 heading

MESVAL: Level 3 heading under MESTYPE

SOURCE: Level 3 heading under MESTYPE

\*See Appendix A for a list of interview questions.

### **Instrumentation**

In depth interviews and a survey questionnaire were used in order to have the participants recall memorable messages. The types of memorable messages fell into two main categories of academics and athletics. Under the two main categories of academics and athletics there are several sub-categories. The sub-categories are the valence and sources of the messages.

Two focus groups sessions with current football student-athletes were also conducted. The focus groups consisted of five or six student-athletes for each session. The goal of the focus groups was to ask the groups about the questions and see what types of responses were received. These focus groups helped analyze the interview questions and overall theme of this dissertation. None of the information or the identity of the participants in these focus groups will be published.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

### **Hypothesis 1**

Table 9 All Academic Memorable Messages – Positive or Negative

	Academic Memorable Messages		
Race	Positive	Negative	Total
Black	15	1	16
White	4	0	4
Total	19	1	20

The first hypothesis predicted that Black student-athletes would recall significantly more negative and White student-athletes would recall significantly more positive academic memorable messages. These predictions are addressed separately below in Hypothesis 1A and Hypothesis 1B.

Hypothesis 1A - Black student athletes will recall significantly more negative than positive academic memorable messages.

No support was found for the prediction in Hypotheses 1A. Black student-athletes overwhelmingly had more positive than negative academic memorable messages. Black student-athletes recalled 15 positive academic memorable messages as compared to only 1 negative academic memorable message.

Ninety three percent of the academic memorable messages recalled by the Black student-athletes were positive. This shows that while Black student-athletes graduate at lower rate than White student-athletes, they are still receiving and maybe more importantly recalling an extremely high rate of positive academic memorable messages. Black student-athletes recollect academic memorable messages from various sources and in many cases seem to understand the importance of academics. Some examples of some positive memorable messages were:

A pregame speech was given by a speaker and a Black student-athlete found the following message to be memorable and helped put things in perspective.

“Football can take you a lot of places, but nowhere further than your education and doing right by people.”

A collegiate football coach gave a Black student-athlete the following message in which he placed a great emphasis on academics.

“The emphasis of my position coach always said make sure we leave here with paper. I think for him especially being a coach and always making a point of emphasis, he has it (a list) in his room all the people who he coached that graduated. How important it is to know that football will not last forever but your degree will. That was something that stuck with me.”

One student-athlete recalled receiving this message from a mentor when he was around 16 years old.

“You can take a stack of books and stand on them, then you take a football and stand on it, which one is going to be more stable, which one going to be there, which one you going to be able to stand on the longest, just think about it or try it.” It lets you know real quick those books will be there, if you get on the football, I don’t care how good your balance is the football will deflate or you will lose your balance. That message means a lot and it was huge to me. Going back to thinking about what was said, you better get your education and degree, because that education is going to take you places. Football can take you places but eventually football will run out and you will need fall back on something and you need to fall back on them books, so get your education.”

There was only 1 negative academic memorable message for Black student-athletes which accounted for 6 % of the academic messages. Having just 1 negative academic memorable message was somewhat surprising when considering the graduation rates for Black student-athletes. Here is the one negative academic memorable message:

One student-athlete remembered a message from his high school football coach warning him to stay on task because he could be sent home if you did not do what was expected by his college coaches.



Actually before I come to college it came a from high school coach, he told me “they are going use so you might as well use them for everything they going to give you, make sure you to class, make sure you go to tutoring, make sure you get your stuff in on time, don’t give them a reason to send you back, because once you come back it is never the same.”

Hypothesis 1B - White student athletes will recall more positive academic memorable messages across all sources

Support was found as White student-athletes had all positive academic memorable messages which accounted for 100 % of their academic messages showing that they did not have one negative academic memorable message. The White student-athletes in all the cases had positive academic memorable messages, which was a bit astounding that they did not recall one negative academic memorable message. Here are some examples of the positive messages:

One student-athlete recollected this message from his mother when he was feeling pressure about selecting a major and career. His main concern was finding a major that would be financially rewarding but his mother gave him advice that helped put things in perspective.

“My mom always told me that if you do something that makes you happy you will never work a day in your life.”

This student-athlete recalled this message his father gave him when he was struggling finding the balance between academics and athletics in college.

“That’s all it is a constant grind, and even with academics, my Dad would always say keep pushing. Basically college is just a teeny tiny part of your life but it could lead to a lot of things in your life in the future. It’s just those little things you remind yourself, you can’t give up.”

In regards to academic memorable messages Black and White student-athletes are very similar due to the fact that almost all of the messages they recalled were positive. White student-athletes (100%) only had slightly more positive messages than Black student-athletes (93%). This is a significant finding with respect to the type of academic messages student-athletes recalled in that 95% of all the academic memorable messages were positive. The fact that 95%

of all academic messages were positive, shows how similar Black and White student-athletes are in the regard of what kind of academic memorable messages they recalled.

## **Hypothesis 2**

Table 10 Memorable messages by topic

Most Memorable Messages Topics						
		Academic	Athletic	Good Character	All 3	Total
Race	Black	12 (23%)	16 (30%)	20 (38%)	4 (7%)	52
	White	3 (12%)	12 (50%)	8 (33%)	1 (4%)	24
Total		15 (19%)	28 (36%)	28 (36%)	5 (6%)	76

Hypothesis 2A - Black football student-athletes are more likely to have more most memorable messages with respect to athletics

Support was found in regards to the fact that Black student-athletes had more most memorable messages about athletics when compared to academics. The most memorable messages topic of athletics proved to be of importance in what was recalled by the Black student-athletes. These findings are not astounding when looking at the great emphasis football is placed in society in all facets. The popularity and cultural relevance of football leads to many messages being placed about the importance of football. Here are some examples of the athletic memorable messages of the Black student-athletes.

Another student-athlete spoke about a message that was given to him by his position coach in college. This message was about giving effort when performing in the athletic realm.

“Something my position coach said to me, “effort requires not talent.” All you have to do is give me some effort, you don’t need no talent as long as you give it what you got. That was one of the most memorable messages I got.”

This message was from a high school coach and referred to working hard because of the harsh realities of collegiate athletic recruiting.

“I would probably say what my high school coach told me “when you get to college no matter what you do always work hard and make the coaches see that they need you, so that they don’t bring in somebody new and let him take your spot to the point where they think they no longer really need you”.

One student-athlete recollected this message about the emphasis of football and the financial rewards that can be associated with performing at a high level in the collegiate game. A theme among some of the Black student-athletes was about messages they received about the economic benefits of football, if you are able to take your skills to the National Football League (NFL). Many of the student-athletes talked about how the economic rewards would be not only for them but also for their families.

“My friends uncle, one of the things he told us was: when you are in college and playing football and doing your work just remember don’t have that selfish attitude and just think this is all about you, that’s important but try to remember if you need motivation think of the people you love and remember that while I’m out here doing my work trying to achieve greatness in school and in football remember this is something that can possible help take care of my family and not just me, this is something I can help make a future my kids, kids that’s as far as football and bring in money so they can have it better than I did growing up.”

Hypothesis 2B - White football student-athletes are more likely to have more academic most memorable messages than Blacks.

No support was found as the White student-athletes were ten times more likely to have athletic most memorable messages when compared to academic most memorable messages. Both groups of student-athletes were similar in that they recalled a substantially higher number of athletic most memorable messages than academic most memorable messages. In fact only one White student-athlete had academics as a topic listed in regards to their most memorable message. This finding was fascinating because even though White student-athletes have a higher graduation rate they still recall athletic most memorable messages at a substantially greater rate

than academic most memorable messages. Here are some of the athletic most memorable messages recalled by White student-athletes:

A White student-athlete recollected a quote about the hard work and discipline it takes to become a champion in the athletic realm.

The quote we have in our football building, “Champions are built on a thousand invisible mornings”, I like that because it’s so true, that’s the one I try to remember.

This student-athlete talked about a message his father gave him about hard work and how vital a component it is for athletic success. His father parlayed the message that talent can only take you so far and your work-ethic and drive will be beneficial for your athletic career.

“My dad when I was younger when I was in middle school about to go to high school, when I was in high school I wanted to play college football and I set that as a goal for myself and my Dad told me, “you got a lot of talent but talent don’t carry you everywhere, harder work is going to be the one to separate the good people who want to be good and the people who actually make it, he said if you work hard a lot of things can happen, you can make up for a lot of athletic ability like not being as good as some people athletically if you work harder than them, so that’s something I always carry with me and it’s paid off so far.”

The strength coach relayed a message that was about effort and how your work reflects on your family. The coach made the point that you have to play for more than yourself and your represent your team and family when you step on the field.

“One day the strength coach gave a speech about playing for the guy next to you and the name on your back. When you go out there you playing for the guy next to you, but you are also representing yourself, your family, and the team. It was a way to get you to put more effort out there and leave it all on the line.”

The fact that Black student-athletes had more athletic most memorable messages than academic memorable messages was significant. The unforeseen measure was that White student-athletes were more likely to have athletic most memorable messages when compared to academic most memorable messages, which was a startling find. The extremely high ratio of

athletic most memorable messages showed how substantial football is in the lives of student-athletes. The finding shows that football has a significant place in the psyche of student-athletes and especially in regards to what they recall as their most memorable message.

### **Hypothesis 3**

Hypothesis 3 - The parents, coaches and peers/teammates of Black student-athletes are more apt to emphasize athletics over academics when compared to Whites.

Table 11 General Emphasis of Parents

Race	Academic	Athletic	Both	Total
Black	18 (62%)	7 (24%)	4 (13%)	29
White	7 (53%)	0	6 (46%)	13
Total	25 (59%)	7 (16%)	10 (23%)	42

Hypothesis 3A - Parents – The parents of White student-athletes may put greater worth in academics.

No support was found that Black student-athletes perceive that their parents are more apt to emphasize athletics over academics. In fact the opposite was found to be true. Black parents stressed academics at a much higher rate than athletics. Sixty two percent of Black parents of student-athletes emphasized academics more prominently than athletics. Another 13% of the Black parents were reported to emphasize *both* academics and athletics. Only 24% of Black parents stressed athletics more than academics. This was an interesting finding, especially in regard to the graduation rates of Black student-athletes. These statistics show that Black parents overwhelmingly placed more emphasis on academics over athletics in the most memorable messages recalled by student-athletes.

Support was found for the premise that the parents of White student-athletes put greater worth in academics over athletics. Fifty three percent of the parents of White student-athletes placed academics as paramount. The other 43% placed value in *both* academics and athletics in their memorable messages. None of the parents of White student-athletes held athletics as the

most prominent feature of their memorable messages. These numbers show that an athletic focus was minimal in regard to what the parents of White student-athletes value and deem of importance. The fact that there was no emphasis on athletics in the memorable messages for the White parents may be a factor in the higher graduation rates of White student-athletes. Parents play a vital role in what their children focus on and place value in with regards to academics and athletics.

Table 12 General Emphasis of Parents by Graduation Status

			Graduate	Non-Graduate	Total
Academic	Race	Black	12 (66%)	6 (33%)	18
		White	5 (71%)	2 (28%)	7
	<b>Total</b>		<b>17 (68%)</b>	<b>8 (32%)</b>	<b>25</b>
Athletic	Race	Black	0	7 (100%)	7
		White	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>7 (100%)</b>	<b>7</b>
Both	Race	Black	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	4
		White	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	6
	<b>Total</b>		<b>4 (40%)</b>	<b>6 (60%)</b>	<b>10</b>
Total	Race	Black	13	16	29
		White	8	5	13
	<b>Total</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>42</b>

When probing further to see the breakdown of the parents of the student-athletes with regard to graduation status and what they emphasized, there are some distinct differences. Of the parents of Black student-athletes, 12 parents of graduates (66%) and 6 non-graduates (33%) emphasized academics and held them as the highest priority. One of the most significant findings was that only the parents of Black non-graduate student-athletes emphasized athletics. There were 7 non-graduate Black student-athletes who reported that their parents emphasized athletics more than academics. The fact that no other group reported that their parents held athletics in higher regard than academics could be a factor in why those 7 Black student-athletes did not graduate.

There were an equal amount of White student-athletes graduates (3) and non graduates (3) who reported that their parents emphasized both academics and athletics. Of all the parents of both Black and White student-athletes, 10 (23%) emphasized both academics and athletics equally. The majority of parents (25) of both Black and White student-athletes (59%) placed academics only as the main focus and area of emphasis. The 7 parents of the Black non-graduates are the only parents who emphasized athletics more prominently, this shows that just 16% of all parents considered athletics to be supreme.

Black and White student-athletes reported that they were similar in that 82% of all the student-athletes communicated that their parents emphasized academics or academics and athletics. Here are some examples of what the student-athletes recalled their parents emphasized:

One Black student-athlete who graduated spoke about how his parents liked athletics but put a greater focus on academics. His parents accentuated how much they aspired for him to graduate.

“Academics, even though they liked athletics. They emphasized academics because they wanted me to graduate from college.”

Another Black student-athlete showed the contrast between his Mother and Father. He said that his parents supported sports but he did not have to participate and his Mother focused on education.

“Mom – Academics, Dad – never really mattered, we did good in the sports and they always supported but it wasn’t something we had to do.”

One of the White student-athletes recalled how his parents and especially his Mother concentrated on him doing well in school in order to gain access into a career that would fulfill him. She wanted him to focus on the big picture and life after college and being able to have a good quality of living.

“They wanted me to focus on academics first, my Mom’s whole thing was get a degree so you can get a good job so you can be happy, do something you like while making money so you are safe financially.”

Another White student-athlete mentions how his parents, peers and the community in which he was raised centered more on education. He was raised in a culture that preached the importance of academics and his parents always valued academics and placed them as a priority in his life.

“Academics were always stressed in my life from day 1. I would say in some places in the country people stress athletics more. Where I grew up it was academics, it was like you play football that’s cool, how good are your grades.”

This particular White non-graduate mentioned how Dad was into football but his parents and specifically his Mother spoke about the importance of education and graduating. His parents made it clear that they would like him to get his degree and it would mean a great deal to them.

“They were really concerned about my academics. My Dad is a football junkie, he will talk about it all the time. Then all of sudden out of nowhere, he would start talking about academics. My Mom would do the same thing talk about academics. They know how important it is, and for them if anything would happen to me it would be if I could get my degree that would be the most important to them.”

The parents of the Black non-graduates were the only ones who placed athletics as more prominent than academics. This Black student-athlete who did not graduate mentions how he placed his desires on making it to the NFL and his parents supported him because they lacked knowledge about the higher educational process.

“They were what was best for me and what I wanted. At that time I wanted to play in the NFL. So my parents backed me up on that. They really didn’t know much about school, they just wanted to support me and be there at every game and if you need something.”

The parents of this Black non-graduate put more weight into athletics and he mentions how his parents drove him to focus more on football. His parents realized his potential in football and placed their efforts in helping to harness his talent in the athletic realm.



“My parents pushed me with athletics really, really hard. I think they only talked to me about academics because they realized how good I was in athletics. They definitely pushed me in athletics a lot more.”

Another Black non-graduate made reference to how his parents lack of education played a role in his upbringing. He claimed that his parent’s lack of knowledge about formal education led them to place greater value in football because they had a better understanding of athletics.

“My parent don’t have experience or educational background, they really didn’t get that part so the only part they would see is the football part. That was the only thing they could really see, they emphasized football.”

The biggest difference in regards to the parents of Black and White student-athletes were the parents of the Black non-graduates. The Black student-athlete non-graduates were the only group to have parents who reported focusing more on athletics. The immense attention Black parents of the non-graduates placed on athletics may have added pressure for those student-athletes to perform athletically with academics becoming a secondary concern.

Hypothesis 3B - Coaches – Black student-athletes who display Division 1 football potential are more inclined to recall messages from youth and high school coaches who stress athletics over academics.

Table 13 – General Emphasis – Coaches

		Academic	Athletic	Both	Total
Race	Black	9 (31%)	16 (55%)	4 (13%)	29
	White	4 (30%)	4 (30%)	5 (38%)	13
Total		13 (30%)	20 (47%)	9 (21%)	42

Support was found as Black student-athletes reported that the coaches they had stressed athletics over academics. The Black student-athletes stated that 55% of their coaches placed athletics as more prominent over academics. In comparison, the White student-athletes claimed that only 30% of their coaches put athletics over academics. This shows the different mindset

and values of the coaches of the different athletes. Coaches can have a great influence on what student-athletes concentrate on and consider priority.

Hypothesis 3C - Peers/Teammates – White student-athletes are more likely to have peers/teammates who send memorable messages that place more value in academics than Black student-athletes.

Table 14 General Emphasis – Teammates

		Academic	Athletic	Both	Total
Race	Black	1 (3%)	24 (82%)	4 (13%)	29
	White	0	11 (84%)	2 (15%)	13
Total		1 (2%)	35 (83%)	6 (14%)	42

No support was found and the vast majority of both groups stated that most of their teammates emphasized athletics. White student-athletes asserted that 84% of their teammates focused on athletics. The Black student-athletes declared that 82% of their teammates accentuated athletics. One of the unexpected findings was that not one of the White student-athletes recalled their teammates emphasizing academics. Here is a quote from one of the White student-athletes who said their teammates focused on both.

“It’s kind of half and half. I am not necessarily close with every teammate I had. Some of them were really concerned, some of them are concerned about their grades, some of them don’t seem like it’s not as important. In the end you all have a requirement and if you don’t fulfill that requirement you don’t play. They all know what they have to do and what they need whether it’s the bare minimum or they want to exceed.”

Many of the Black student-athletes were more adamant about the thoughts of their teammates and what they paid attention to. One particular Black student-athlete mentioned how he had teammates who noticed the academic quests of their teammates. He went on to further mention that although some guys paid attention to academics, he was not one of them and he associated

with teammates that worried about athletics and did not care much about the academics of teammates.

“It depends on who you are talking to. Some guys were big academics guys, most of the guys I hung around with it was all about football. It was all about how can I play better, it was never about what you are getting in this class. That was never brought up, the only time it become a conversation is when you were ineligible. Other than that I could care less about what the next man is doing in his academics, as long as he was blocking or running good we were good with him.”

This student-athlete spoke about how his teammates had goals of making it to the NFL and pushed each other in that avenue. He indicated that his teammates placed more significance in football than anything else.

“Athletics, always trying to get each other better in the weight room and on the practice field. When you young and in college you always talk about the NFL and going to the league. They emphasize more athletics than anything.”

This Black student-athlete commented on how his teammates were mostly concerned with athletic feats. According to him they did not pay much attention to one another’s athletic endeavors.

“Teammates were just straight athletics, as a teammate all you care about how good your teammate is, you don’t care about his grades.”

This Black student-athlete speaks of some of the underlying social issues related to the game of football. He makes reference to the fascination and obsession with making it to the NFL and what he believed the majority of athletes aspire to do. He claims that the mindset of a football player is set at an earlier age and making it to the NFL is the primary goal for most athletes who participate in the game of football.

“Football you get a lot of ignorant people, everybody been sucked into game since there were a little kid. They emphasize going on to the next level. Everybody that plays football wants to play at the next level, so athletics all day. I don’t care who you are if you play football you want to go to the NFL.”

#### **Hypothesis 4**

Hypothesis 4 – Football student-athletes who graduate from college do recall more memorable messages with respect to academics than those who do not graduate.

Table 15 Memorable Messages by Topic – *Academics*

Memorable Messages by Topic						
		Academic	Athletic	Good Character	All 3	Total
Grad Status	Graduate	6 (16%)	11 (30%)	16 (44%)	3 (8%)	36
	Non-Graduate	9 (22%)	17 (42%)	12 (30%)	2 (5%)	40
Total		15 (19%)	28 (36%)	28 (36%)	5 (6%)	76

No support for hypothesis 4 was found as non-graduate student-athletes had more academic memorable messages. This was an unpredicted finding as it would be predicted that those who do not graduate would have less academic memorable messages than those who did graduate. These results show there are other variables that contribute to why those student-athletes do not graduate because they are recalling more academic memorable messages than those who do graduate. A key difference in the memorable messages may be the context of the message and who delivered it and in what manner. Many of the student-athletes who graduated recalled that messages they received regarding academics often motivated them and served as a source of inspiration to lead them to graduate. Several of the student-athletes who graduated spoke openly about how in many instances they focused on athletics and at times it was of more significance. The student-athletes who graduated were able to find a balance between athletics and academics and understood not to allow academics to decrease in magnitude.

This student-athlete expressed that athletics were first priority in his mind and how he had to regroup his thoughts and evaluate his values. It took athletics not working as he wanted, for him to finally put academics back in perspective for him. He goes on to talk about how academics become his number one goal and how important graduation was for him.

“It was extremely important (graduating). My athletic career in college didn’t go as I planned it would go. Academics, graduating from college was my number one priority and I kind of got away from that when I was too much into my athletics. So I had to regroup myself and focus on graduating and that’s one of the biggest accomplishments I have achieved so far and it’s very important to me. “

Some of the student-athletes who graduated, recalled memorable messages about taking advantage of the opportunity afforded to them by becoming a Division 1 athlete. This student-athlete mentions something his parents told him during his senior year of high school. His parents reminded him to capitalize on the chance to play football at the collegiate level because it is an opportunity that not many people receive.

“Everybody doesn’t get the opportunity to go to school for free and play for a Division 1 University. Make the best out of it because it ain’t always promised to everybody.”

Playing in the NFL was a central theme for the student-athlete graduates and non-graduates. A great number of Division 1 student-athletes have aspirations of playing football at the next level. Some of the student-athletes who graduated, recalled messages that help balance their goals and dreams and keeps things in perspective. This student-athlete reported hearing a message from a speaker about the statistics of how difficult it is for a collegiate football student-athlete to make it to the NFL and the short career span of an NFL player. He gains a point of view of how most student-athletes will become professional in fields and industries outside of the sport they participate in.

“We had an assembly and I don’t remember who the speaker was, it broke it down and showed how long people be in the NFL and how long it is until they get their pension. It shows how short the time you have with football is in your actual life. You got to figure out something else to do after that. That message was pretty big to me. Kind of like that commercial where it says, “there are over 800,000 student-athletes in college (NCAA) and almost all of them will be going pro in something other than athletics.” Basically that kind of message is the most important message, I say.”

Another example is of a memorable message from a graduate that came from his Mother, who helped him put his NFL dream in perspective with receiving his education. She stated how important education was and it was a message that he was able to recall on a daily basis and may have attributed to his ability to fulfill the requirements necessary to graduate.

“My Mom telling me that you came into college looking to go to NFL but the one thing you can do no matter what you do athletically is you can graduate and that stuck with me everyday.”

The messages the student-athletes received in many instances played a great role in their mindset and thought process. A great deal of the student-athletes said the messages they obtained helped them focus and place an immense emphasis on academics. This person speaks about how his Father also placed great value on education and he did not want to disappoint him by not graduating.

“It was very important (graduating), even though I went to college to play football, the main goal was to graduate and get my degree. That is everybody’s dream even if you don’t play athletics is to get your degree. That is one thing my Dad really emphasized growing up was to make sure you graduate college and get your degree. I didn’t want to let my family down and not graduate from the university.”

Another student-athlete remembered messages he collected throughout his childhood with respect to education and what it means. His parents explained that there would be obstacles along the way but he needed to work hard and overcome them in order to be successful and graduate.

“Very important because a lot of people in my family didn’t graduate, some didn’t graduate from high school, I wanted to graduate from college, I always had a dream to graduate from college, my parents always told me different steps elementary, middle school, high school, college just to graduate and be one of the chosen in our family to beat the system.”

## **Hypothesis 5**

Hypothesis 5 – Football student-athletes who do not graduate from college do recall more memorable messages in regard to athletics than those who graduate.

Table 16 Memorable Messages by Topic – *Athletics*

		Athletic	Academic	Good Character	All 3	Total
Grad Status	Non-Graduate	17 (42%)	9 (22%)	12 (30%)	2 (5%)	40
	Graduate	11 (30%)	6 (16%)	16 (44%)	3 (8%)	36
Total		28 (36%)	15 (19%)	28 (36%)	5 (6%)	76

Support was found for hypothesis 5 as student-athletes who did not graduate recalled more athletic memorable messages than academic. These student-athletes who did not graduate recollected having more athletic than academic memorable messages. The student-athletes who did not graduate also recalled more athletic memorable messages 42% than those who did graduate 30%. The results show that the non-graduates remember the most messages in regard to athletics and that could be a source of why they may put greater emphasis on athletics and did not graduate. Student-athletes recalled messages that played a role in their ideology and reinforced placing athletics as a higher priority than academics.

Some of the student-athletes talked about the pressures to perform well athletically. Many of those student-athletes who did not graduate spoke about the desire to do well in football. The drive to do well in football can contribute to the time and priority many of the non-graduates placed in football. One of the student-athletes who did not graduate recalled his desire to want to be great and messages he heard from great players who played before him.

“I don’t know if it a message but I always wanted to be great. Wanting to be great, I won’t say it’s something I said but it was listening to the players that were great, they would come back and talk. It was always I wanted to be one of them. I wanted to walk into my stadium and know that I made a difference. I guess that message would be, the great ones that come here living in their shadows and trying to catch as much stuff as possible and wanting to be that great player at my school. Wanting to be those legendary guys, I guess quietly that was the message that they left just the information they left and the grit as they left as my school and the legacy that was enough, looking at

the trophy from our biggest rivalry game didn't need words for that it was a legacy, you had to go get it."

Another non-graduate recollected a message he received from a friend who was playing collegiate football at the time and gave him this message while he was in high school. His friend felt that he was developing a big ego because he was a high school star and needed to keep things in perspective and understand that there is competition nationally.

"One of my friends who played always told me that you have to work harder than everyone else because you are the best where you are at in our hometown, just means you the best where you are from, not in the whole country. So you have to work harder than the competition basically."

This student-athlete elicited a message from his position coach in college which was about how he needed to work in order to receive playing time. Many of the student-athletes mentioned the difficult transition from high school to college football and how much time it takes to perform up to expectations athletically. The coach gave a harsh assessment to help motivate the student-athlete to perform better on the football field.

"I had a meeting with my position coach and he pretty much told me that I was not good in his own words. Then after I had that meeting I started the last 2 and half years. During that meeting he pretty much laid out the person I was and what I needed to do, so basically he helped me throughout my college athletic career." He told me specifically, "That I won't see any playing time and that he doesn't see anybody that I am better than and I am not better than any of the incoming freshman and that I pretty much basically should look for another school"

Another student-athlete remembered a message from his college coach about how he was no longer in high school and that college football is another level. The athletic demands from coaches and others place a great deal of burdens and expectations on the athletes. Student-athletes are recruited to play football so it is expected that football becomes a major part of their psyche.



“When I first got to college, my coach said to us there is no more high school, it is more than everybody is talented and it’s not just, you are not the best guy on this team no more, we recruited 32 others guys just like you.”

One student evoked a message he received about how difficult college can be and how it was imperative to align yourself with people who can help you. He spoke of the struggles that African American males typically face while at predominately White institutions in a message he received from a mentor. His message gives some understanding to some of the reasons he did not graduate, the obstacles that he faced and why he feels African Americans football student-athletes have a low graduation rate.

“Surround myself with minorities that are positive, that’s educated, that have your best interest in mind. You have to realize at this institutions or wherever you go its 10 – 1 or more could be 20-1 in the classroom so you have to surround yourself with people who been there and done it and going to support and give you positive advice because it rough, I mean I hated it here. You know, I going to be honest you, know you have fun partying with your teammates and the girls but outside of that it is designed for you to fail in my opinion. I’m going to be honest, I don’t think my time at my institution, I don’t think it is set up for you to win, it is set up for you to just keep being a part of the matrix.”

Some of the messages recalled about athletics led to the mindset of the student-athletes focusing on playing in the NFL and doing well athletically and leaving academics as secondary emphasis. The dream of playing in the NFL was very apparent in many of the statements and it was of utmost significance. Various student-athletes who did not graduate indicated that academics and graduation were not necessarily important to them. This particular student-athlete discussed how graduating from college was not his primary objective.

“When I first go to college, I didn’t really care if I graduated or not, I just knew that I wanted to play football in the NFL. That (academics) was on the back burners.”

## **Good Character**

It was predicted that either academics or athletics would be the most prevalent topics with respect to most memorable messages. Neither academics or athletics proved to be the highest topic in regard to most memorable messages, character proved to be the topic most recalled by both Black and White student-athletes. The Black student-athletes stated that character was the topic in 38% of their most memorable messages while White student-athletes stated character as the topic in 33% of their most memorable messages (see Table 10). Overall both groups of student-athletes had character as the topic of their most memorable messages 36% of the time. This is a stark contrast to academics which only held 19% of the most memorable messages. Athletics were 36% of the most memorable message topic which is equal to character which was somewhat surprising.

This student-athlete recalled a message from his father about the importance of good character. His Dad told him that it is important to be a leader and have your own mind and thoughts. His message was to help his son understand that situations would come up and he should not follow others but stand by his own principles.

“My Dad when I was a child, I remember he told me and my brother, a situation happened and he said, “be a leader not a follower” at that age I never knew what that meant. As I got older I know I knew what that meant “being a leader, not a follower” but before that he said “be your own man”. Those two stuck with me and still sticks with me now, “be your own man” which means “be a leader not a follower.” When you do something make sure you are doing it and you are not following someone into a situation make sure what you do it right. You want people to be like you and see you in certain situation and want to do the things you do and want to be like you. See you be successful and see you move forward and they want to follow in your football, you don’t to be the one dragging and staying behind somebody. “Do your own things”, be your own man” that really helped me in college and now.”

Another Father gave his son a message about the importance of working hard and understanding the value of doing things the right way. The Father explained that you have to work every day and have the character to things right if you want the goals and results that you strive for.

“My dad used to always tell me “What you do today will affect your tomorrow” and he would say “Do nothing today, look for nothing tomorrow, do nothing yesterday, look for nothing today”

Many of the parents sent messages to their sons about the importance of doing the right things and understanding right from wrong. Going to college is a difficult transition for both the student-athletes and the parents. The parents go from establishing and enforcing rules to sending their sons to be on their own and hoping they live by the principles and values they taught them. Going to college tests the integrity and work-ethic of the students because they attain a new sense of freedom and responsibility that they never had before. Some of the parents stressed the importance of being an individual and not falling into the pitfalls, distractions and troubles that can be found on every college campus.

The high school football coach had a tremendous role in the lives of many of the student-athletes. Many of them served as more than a coach and in many cases were a father figure and role model. High school coaches spend a great deal of time with the student-athletes and can help mold them not only as an athlete but also as a person. High school is a transition for the young men and for those who are able to continue their football careers on the collegiate level there are many lessons they must learn in order to be successful on and off the field. Many of the student-athletes credited their high school coach with being instrumental for helping them get into college and being successful.

Here is a message from a student-athlete about the relationship with his high school coach and some of the things that he emphasized. His coach talked about doing well on and off the field and doing the right things.

“I have a great relationship with my high school football coach. He emphasized doing the right things and he was strict. Being a good person, it wasn’t just about football, he always preached about being a man and how football teaches you life and life lessons. That’s one thing I think about when I think about my high school football coach, he was tough and a player’s coach. You could laugh and joke but he wasn’t about games and he expected the best out of you, on and off the field.”

Another student-athlete talked about how much his coach stressed the word character and how important it was to him. He stated that his coach stated the word character every single day and multiple times a day. He remembered the following quote from high school coach because it was used so frequently during his high school days.

“He always instilled character, “character wins out.” We always finished weight room, practice, everything with, “character wins out.”

This student-athlete mentioned his relationship with his coach and how he talked about doing the right things. His coach mentioned one of the fundamental statements with regard to character which is doing the right thing when no one is looking. Character is all about having the fortitude to do the right thing when it is not the easiest or most popular thing to do. This high school coach wanted to teach the significance of character.

“I have a great relationship with my high school football coach. He didn’t really emphasize football, he always emphasized life lessons football can teach you like being on time for lift, practice, school. He emphasized working hard for what you want in life. If you work hard you will get what you want, if you don’t work for it you get what you work for. He always emphasized working hard and doing the right things and being a good person but not only in public but behind closed doors. Doing the right things when nobody is looking, because it is easy to be a good person when somebody is looking but doing the right thing when nobody is looking, he always emphasized that.”

College coaches also stressed the value of character. College coaches have a lot of duties and responsibilities but still made focusing on character a priority in many cases. Character is vital to college coaches because when the student-athletes behave poorly it often reflects on the college coach and program. Many college coaches had lost employment due to student-athletes making bad decision, behaving poorly or showing bad character. College coaches understand a great deal of their livelihood depends on the decisions their athletes make off the field. One student-athlete recalled his college coaches emphasizing being mature and becoming a better person. He said that the coach was concerned about more than just football and what happens on the field.

“Coaches emphasized just really discipline and maturity and just improving yourself, it really wasn’t about winning and losing.”

This student-athlete recalled a message from one of his college coaches about doing the right things when no one is around. He mentioned how goals and aspirations were important but not more than being a good person.

“He always preached be a good person and work hard when no one is looking. Achieve the things you want to do but more importantly be a good and a wholesome person.”

Although character was not in the original hypothesis it proved to be an important category among most memorable messages topics. Character was covered by most of the sources and was prominent among parents, high school and college coaches. The maturation of a young man is key to their success or lack thereof. Character is important in making the transition to college and being able to excel on the collegiate level. The fact that character was the most remembered topic shows how much it was stressed in the lives of the student-athletes. All of the people associated with the student-athletes understand the magnitude of good character and how it plays a role in them becoming better people.

## **Research Questions**

Research Question 1 – What are the memorable messages recalled by student-athletes with regard to academics?

Ninety five percent of the memorable messages recalled about academics were positive. Many of the messages focused on graduation and its importance. The overwhelming majority of the memorable messages remembered were positive, so it was interesting to see the student-athletes perception of the messages and how in many cases, the messages motivated them to achieve academic success and in some cases graduation. Some of the messages focused on reminding the student-athletes to keep academics and football in perspective and understand what college is about. Many of them were prompted to make academics as their top priority and not let football and athletic related activities consume their time. Staying eligible was a topic in a few of the memorable messages and working to remain eligible in order to play football was of importance.

One of the central themes of the memorable messages in regard to academics is that one needs to graduate because football will end for all athletes at one point. The odds of making it to the NFL are extremely miniscule so many of the athletes received the message that it is vital to graduate in order to maximize their college experience and have viable options to do well after college. Here is a message a student-athlete received from his father about the importance of education.

“I guess, my Dad always said for like academic wise that education is the key and so when I am feeling like I don’t want to do this no more, I know I need to do it because without it I’m just going to be playing catch up my whole life. “

One student-athlete recalled keeping things in perspective and balancing his expectations and goals with reality. He mentioned what the mindset is of many student-athletes and how they hope to come to college and dominated from the start. A great deal of student-athletes, anticipate

leaving college after three years and turning professional and going to the NFL. The harsh reality is that most student-athletes will not play in the NFL and injuries are a significant part of the collegiate football experience for many. This student-athlete spoke about preparing for life after football and using academics to have a healthy financial future.

“Always coming into college, everyone thinks they are the next big shot. They think I going be done with college in 3 years, man I’m leaving you know it don’t matter. When that point comes, you think about it and you like you see how people get hurt all the time and you like you can’t play this game forever so you be like I need my academics so that life after football I can get a good job and make good money, they kind of money I want to make.”

For the most part the academic memorable messages recalled by student-athletes were positive messages about the significance of graduating from college and making academics a priority.

Research Question 2 – What are the memorable messages recalled by student-athletes with regard to athletics?

A central theme in the memorable messages recalled by student-athletes about academics was working hard in order to gain a Division 1 scholarship and be able to excel athletically on that level. A lot of the student-athletes remembered messages about how much hard work is required if you want to be an outstanding performer on the collegiate level. Some of the student-athletes also mentioned memorable messages about playing in the NFL and how that was a major goal. Another key component of some of the athletic memorable messages was the ideal of competition, and working to be the best you can and becoming champions. The difficult journey of becoming a high level Division 1 athlete was discussed and also beating the extreme odds and playing in the NFL was mentioned on numerous occasions. Overcoming obstacles was also talked about and how you have to persevere if you want to play, because you have to work up the depth chart and it can be challenging; dealing with coaches and internal and external expectations and pressure. The mental focus and toughness was another theme and how you have to stay strong mentally because there will be numerous challenges that you will face athletically.

One of the recurring messages in regard to athletics was that you have to compete and work very hard to play and excel on the collegiate level. Many student-athletes have preconceived notions about coming to college, starting at their respective position immediately and then leaving to go to the NFL. They often do not understand the difficult demands of being a collegiate student-athlete until they arrive at college. The central theme of the most important messages was about hard work and how you have to constantly need to work hard because at the college level there will be athletes who are stronger and more talented and your work ethic often determines how successful you will be. This student-athlete spoke about working hard and how playing beyond college takes another level of dedication and commitment.

“Time in college – That’s one thing I try to use in different aspects of my life. On the field more than anything especially on the football field now that I’m trying to carry my career to the next level, there are always guys that are more talented. Maybe where as in college, I was a starter and I was the best guy we had or one of the best guys here at the time, but in the pros there is always somebody that is better than you, so you have to take those things with you those intangibles, those things that come from within, not a muscle not something you just have, something you have to work on. So that what I try to carry with me every practice, I’m saying ok, I got to work harder than this guy, I got to be more driven, I got to be more passionate, I got to be you know.”

The athletic memorable messages recalled by student-athletes pertained to working hard to play in college. Athletic memorable messages also stated the impact of making it to the NFL and being able to play football beyond the collegiate level.

Research Question 3 - What is the valence of academic most memorable messages recalled by Black and White student-athletes?

Table 17 - Academic Most Memorable Messages by Valence

Academic Most Memorable Messages by Valence				
		Positive	Negative	Total
Race	Black	6 (85%)	1 (14%)	7
	White	1(100%)	0	1
Total		7 (87%)	1 (12%)	8



The overwhelming majority of the most memorable messages recalled by Black and White student-athletes are positive. Eighty seven percent of the messages are positive so it shows that Black and White student-athletes are receiving positive messages for the most part. There was only one negative academic memorable message recalled with regard to academics. The student-athletes recalling positive messages show that the people around them hold academics in good esteem. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the messages were positive shows that those students who recollect messages about academics do so in a positive manner.

This student-athlete spoke about a message he received from his Grandmother reminding him about the importance and significance of academics. Her message was similar to some of the other positive messages in that they emphasized the magnitude of graduation and how big a factor it will be in the future.

“It was my Grandmother, she said they can take sports away from you but your degree your academics they can’t, they could never take.”

The point for many of the academic messages was to explain how academics and education are more important than athletics. Some of the messages mentioned how the field of athletics has many external factors that determine your success. Academics may have more of an internal focus because you have more control over your academics when compared to athletics. The student-athletes were reminded that for the most part they can control their academics. The valence of the messages recalled about academics, were almost all positive.

Research Question 4 - What is the valence of athletic most memorable messages recalled by Black and White student athletes?

Table 18 Athletic Most Memorable Messages by Valence

Athletic Most Memorable Messages by Valence				
		Positive	Negative	Total
Race	Black	8 (72%)	3 (27%)	11
	White	9 (90%)	1 (10%)	10
Total		17 (80%)	4 (19%)	21

Eighty percent of the messages with regard to athletics were positive. This demonstrates that the student-athletes remember positive athletic messages for the most part. The positive messages can be viewed as a source of encouragement and motivation for the student-athletes. Some of the athletic messages were essential in aiding the student-athletes to gain a strong work-ethic and values that they can use even when they are done with athletics.

A student-athlete remembered a message he received from his position coach in college. The coach relayed a message about the significance of effort and how it pertains to situations on and off the football field. This positive message had a great impact on the student-athlete.

“Something my position coach said to me, ‘effort requires not talent.’ I just thought about it today actually. All you have to do is give me some effort, you don’t need no talent as long as you give it what you got. That was one of the most memorable message I got.”

Another student-athlete recalled a quote he received from a coach in college. He said the quote served as an inspiration for him and helped increase his work-ethic.

The quote was, “Champions are built on a thousand invisible mornings”, I like that because it’s so true, that’s the one I try to remember.”

The quote was instrumental because student-athletes spend a lot of time lifting weights, participating in drill and other football activities and exercises that most people can not see. The invisible moments serve as a reference to all of the early morning and days outside of the limelight that it takes in order to perform in the actual games.

Research Question 5 - Who are the sources most often associated with sending academic memorable messages to student-athletes?

Table 19 Memorable Messages Sources

		Memorable Messages Sources						
Race		Family Member	College Coach	Teammates	General Speaker	Mentor	High School Coach	Total
	Black	13 (27%)	14 (29%)	4 (8%)	7 (14%)	5 (10%)	4 (8%)	47
	White	7 (31%)	12 (54%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	0	1 (4%)	22
Total		20 (28%)	26 (37%)	5 (7%)	8 (11%)	5 (7%)	5 (7%)	69

The sources most often associated with sending academic memorable messages are college coaches and family members. The family members were generally the parents but also included other relatives. The sources of the messages are a key component because in many cases it shows that the students respect their family members enough to remember and recall the message over a period of time. Those who give the student-athletes messages that they recall are often influential in their lives and the messages can help shape the values and principles that the student-athletes live by.

The academic memorable messages served as an important motivational factor for many of the student-athletes working hard in order to graduate. This is critical because it shows how essential messages regarding academics can be in the student-athlete's actions and behavior. Many of those student-athletes who graduated recalled memorable messages about the importance of academics and graduating from college.

The college coaches were often associated with sending academic memorable messages. This is significant because it shows that some of the coaches do not only want the student-athlete to do well on the field but also in the classroom. The college coach is a very instrumental person in the lives of the student-athletes. Their emphasis on academics can make a big difference in the student-athlete drive towards graduating.

General speakers, mentors, teammates and high school coaches have been sources of academic memorable messages. A few of the student-athletes recollected messages in regard to

academics that they were given over ten years ago. It is quite evident that a message is extremely powerful and influential if the student-athlete can remember it for over ten years. Several of the messages recalled were from a number of years past which shows how great and long lasting impact some messages can be.

Research Question 6 - Who are the sources most often associated with sending athletic memorable messages to student-athletes?

The source that student-athletes most often recall sending athletic memorable messages, are the college coaches. This would seem to be a natural conclusion because the college coach is paid to teach and coach football and that is their profession. Sending important messages to the football student-athletes is the job of the college coach and many times their success can be correlated to the relationship they have with the student-athletes. The college coaches often have the most to gain by the student-athletes performing well athletically because they can reap huge financial benefits.

Family members are the second most frequent source to send athletic memorable messages to student-athletes. Family members obviously play a vital role in the socialization of the student-athletes. Student-athletes often take heed to the messages they receive from family members because they have the longest relationship with them. The messages from the family members can be instrumental in how much focus and emphasis the student-athletes place on athletics and what role and significance it has in their lives.

Teammates and high school coaches are the next groups that send athletic memorable messages. Teammates spend a lot of time with each and often have similar goals and aspirations. Those teammates who focus more on athletics tend to associate with those who have similar mindsets and interest. The influence of teammates is imperative due to the fact that they are on the same journey and have a greater understanding of each other because they are going through

the same process. High school coaches have a critical role because they are responsible for preparing the high school student-athletes to play at the collegiate level. The high school coach must help the student-athletes understand the work-ethic and desire it takes to excel beyond high school. With so few players having the opportunity to compete at the Division One level, the coach often will send messages to help the student-athlete understand the opportunity they have been afforded.

General speakers and mentors gave messages about athletics but they sent more messages with respect to academics. Some of the student-athletes had mentors that were former players and tried to give them a perspective about how much more competitive college football is than high school. The general speakers and mentors tried to help the student-athletes understand their role and responsibilities.

Research Question 7 - Do academic memorable messages differ for Black and White student-athletes?

For the most part the academic memorable messages were very similar for Black and White student-athletes. The theme that was the most reoccurring was the importance of graduating from college. Both groups received messages from numerous sources about the significance of graduating.

Table 20 – Importance of Graduation – Race

		Very Important	Important	Not Important	Total
Race	Black	24 (82%)	1 (3%)	4 (13%)	29
	White	12 (92%)	0	1 (7%)	13
Total		36 (85%)	1 (2%)	5 (11%)	42

Graduation is one of the fundamental aspects of being a student at the collegiate level. In theory graduation is supposed to be the most important goal for all students and student-athletes

on any collegiate campus. Football student-athletes are unique because their scholarships are contingent on participating on the football team. Some of the student-athletes proclaimed that they would not be in college if it were not for football. Football is paramount for many of the student-athletes having the ability to finance their education. Although football is essential for all of the student-athletes, most of them felt that graduating from college was very important.

Eighty two percent of Black student-athletes and 92 % of White student-athletes stated that graduation was very important. These statistics are close and is an indication that both groups are receiving messages about the importance of graduating from college. Another revelation was that only 7% of the White student-athletes as compared to the Black student-athletes at 13% felt that graduation was not important. Almost twice as many Black student-athletes expressed that graduation was not important and would be indicative of the group's lower graduation rate.

One of the surprising findings was that the White student-athletes reported only one academic memorable message (see table10). One of the reasons only one White student-athlete recalled an academic memorable message may be because in many cases, the influence of academics was stressed at an early age and may have become a part of their psyche.

Another revelation was that there was only one negative academic memorable message for all the student-athletes (see table 9). This was a bit of a shock because you would assume that some of the student-athletes received some negative academic messages but if they did only one was recalled. The student-athletes were very similar with respect to the academic messages they recalled and a lot of what they remember pertained to the importance of graduating.

Research Question 8 - Do athletic memorable messages differ for Black and White student-athletes?

The athletic memorable messages differ greatly for the Black and White student-athletes.

There is a greater emphasis for the Black student-athletes to pursue a career to play professional football. Coaches and other influential people are more apt to send messages that stress the importance of making it to the NFL (National Football League).

Table 21- Importance of making it to NFL - Race

		Very Important	Important	Not Important	Total
Race	Black	10 (34%)	17 (58%)	2 (6%)	29
	White	2 (15%)	5 (38%)	6 (46%)	13
Total		12 (28%)	22 (52%)	8 (19%)	42

Ninety two percent of Black student-athletes emphasized that making it to the NFL was either very important or important while only 53% of White student-athletes held the same sentiments. This may be another indication of the messages that the Black student-athletes receive and is a part of their socialization process. The extremely high importance of making it to the NFL for the Black student-athletes shows that it is a goal of high priority and thus they focus a great deal of time and attention on making it to the NFL. Making it to the NFL is not as much of a priority for the White student-athletes as 46% stated that making it to the NFL was not important. This is a vast difference between the Black student-athletes in which only 6% felt that making it to the NFL was not important.

This Black student-athlete tells how important making it to the NFL was for him. It was a goal that he set and his thoughts were similar to many of the other Black student-athletes. This is what he stated when asked if making it to the NFL was important.

“Yes, it was one of the reasons I chose my school and conference. I knew I played well there I would probably get a shot at playing in the NFL. That was huge, I did not see no other way when I was getting recruited and in college, it was I had to go to the NFL, there was no other way around it.”

This White student-athlete echoed the opposite sentiments in regards to making it to NFL. His views were shared by many of his White cohorts. He made the following statement when asked how important making it to the NFL was.

“To be honest to with you, not really; it didn’t have a whole lot to do, it was more about where I was going to in academics at a school and where I was going to be at football at that school.”

The biggest difference in the athletic memorable messages is the over emphasis on athletics for the Black student-athletes. The Black student-athletes recalled more messages with respect to athletics and the big importance of football in their lives. The greater messages in regard to football can be a major role in the psyche of the Black student-athletes. While conversely the less emphasis in the athletic memorable messages for the White student-athletes may play a role in their psyche and the manner in which they do not put as much emphasis on football and making it to the NFL.

Research Question 9 - Do academic memorable messages differ for student-athletes who did and did not graduate within 6 years?

The academic memorable messages are very similar for both graduates and non-graduates. It was interesting that both groups had the same number of academic memorable messages recalled. A key difference is the context of some of the messages and how the student-athletes interpreted the messages.

Table 22 – Importance of Graduation by Graduation Status

		Very Important	Important	Not Important	Total
GradStat	Graduate	21 (100%)	0	0	21
	Non-Graduate	15 (71%)	1 (4%)	5 (23%)	21
Total		36 (85%)	1 (2%)	5 (11%)	42

A fascinating finding was that 100% of the graduates felt that graduating from college



was very important. From this it is evident that the goal of graduation is important and that they understand the messages about graduation and that was reflected in their actions. One of the essential aspects of the research is not only the messages but the actions of the student-athletes based on the messages and how influential the messages were. The fact that all the graduates believed that graduation was very important is significant.

Here are the thoughts of two of the graduates pertaining to the importance of graduating from college.

“Very important I came out of high school knowing the one thing I will do will graduate no matter I accomplish in football.”

“It was very important, even though I went to college to play football, the main goal was to graduate and get my degree.”

Seventy one percent of the non-graduates claimed that graduating was very important. One of the biggest revelations was that 23% of the non-graduates declared that graduating from college was not important. The academic messages that the non-graduates received may have a role in their ideology related to academics and how essential it was. The thoughts of the non-graduates in correlation with some of the academic messages they recall can help explain why many of them do not graduate from college.

The following two statements are from non-graduates as they express how important graduating to college was for them.

“Not important at all.”

“Early on not crucially important.”

One can come to a natural conclusion that those who do not have the interest or motivation to graduate from college will struggle academically and may have been given messages about the minimal importance of education. The mindset and thought process greatly differs between student-athletes who graduate and those who do not.

Research Question 10 - Do athletic memorable messages differ for student-athletes who did and did not graduate within 6 years?

One of the biggest goals for many Division One football student-athletes is to make it to the NFL. While the realistic chance of making it to the NFL is miniscule at best, it does not deter a great number of athletes from making it their primary goal. The memorable messages bestowed to the student-athletes can make a difference in how much emphasis they place in athletics and trying to make it to the NFL or academics and working to graduate from college.

Table 23 – Importance of making it to the NFL by Graduation Status

		Very Important	Important	Not Important	Total
GradStat	Graduate	2 (9%)	11 (52%)	8 (38%)	21
	Non-Graduate	10 (47%)	11 (52%)	0	21
Total		12 (28%)	22 (52%)	8 (19%)	42

An astonishing 100% of the non-graduates asserted that making to the NFL was either very important or important. Only 9% of the graduates thought making it the NFL was very important as compared with 47% of the non-graduates. Another bewildering figure was that 0% of the non-graduates believed that making it the NFL was not important while 38% of the graduates stated that making it to the NFL was not important.

This non graduate commented on the significance football has had in his life. He has received numerous athletic memorable messages from his family members with respect to the importance of football.

“I come from a football family. My uncle played pro, my Dad played college until he dropped out. All of my cousins, uncles, everyone played in college pretty much. Football has been a part of my life, I’ve known from the time I was 7 or 8 years old that I wanted to play college and professional football, it’s been my dream .”

Memorable messages have a tremendous role in the mentality of the athletes. The above athlete mentioned that he wanted to be a collegiate and professional athlete since the age of

seven which gives great insight into his consciousness.

Another non-graduate talked about his priority with respect to athletics and academics.

“Athletics, academics had nothing to do with it. Every man’s dream is to play in the NFL.”

The non-graduates placed greater emphasis on athletics and in particular making it to the NFL.

The focus and goals of the graduates and non-graduates were vastly different and this could be partly due to the athletic memorable messages they were given.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to analyze memorable messages for Black and White former football student-athletes. The study examined the memorable messages recalled by former student-athletes and what effect the messages may have had on the ideology and actions of those student-athletes. Memorable messages are a key component to the socialization process and relevance of sports for many athletes (Kassing & Pappas 2007). Along with memorable messages the emphasis in regard to academics and athletics was explored as well as the sources of those messages. The messages and their emphasis played a role in the psyche and actions of the student-athletes and what they valued more in terms of academics or athletics. The actions of the student-athletes were assessed along with what they deemed as being more important with respect to academics and athletics. Many of the student-athletes stated that the memorable messages they recalled played a major role in their thoughts, actions, behaviors and overall performance in their academic and athletic ventures.

### **Race vs. Class**

For the purpose of this study, race was examined when comparing memorable messages and attitudes towards academics and athletics. One of the reasons that race was chosen as a variable is because of the overall presence of race in sports in American society. Race is prevalent in all aspects of collegiate athletics and the racial dynamics are extremely recognizable in college football. The overwhelming majority of those in positions of power in the collegiate model such as college presidents, athletic directors and football coaches are White males. College athletics and especially football is vastly similar to society in general in which White males are the power brokers and decision makers. “Racial minorities in the United States

continue to face systemic and pervasive discrimination against them. Although most Americans agree with this sociological fact, they also tend to believe that sport is an oasis free of racial problems and tensions...Rather than being free from racism, sport as a microcosm of the larger society reflects the same racial problems as society” (Eitzen & Sage 2009:291).”

Many of the respondents including the majority of the Black student-athletes stated that they came from low-income backgrounds. They stated that they came from economic backgrounds that were below middle class and several claimed they lived closer to poverty.

Here are some of the statements used to describe the socioeconomic status that they grew up in.

“Close to poor, I was always on public assistance”, “Poor”, “Working Class”, “Poverty”, ”Dirt Poor”, “Lower class, borderline poverty”, “Lower class, grew up in the projects”

To explore class as a variable more than race would understate the magnitude of race in American society. Those students who were from both low socioeconomic status and Black have two characteristics that have proven to be difficult to overcome to succeed on predominately White campuses. “Being black and poor and has more negative consequences than being white and poor” (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff 1991:140).Underscoring the importance of race would imply that race is not an immense factor for success on predominately White campuses, a notion that has not be proven to be true. Racial obstacles and stereotypes that Black males encounter play a role in their ideology and mindset before and during their time on a college campus. “To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must not begin with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society – flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes” (West 2001: 3).

While a majority of the Black students reported living below middle class, the White students stated that most of them grew up in households that were middle class or above. These findings are similar to the national percentages of Black and White children under eighteen

living in poverty. According to the 2010 Census, 38.2% of Black children in the United States are living in poverty compared to just 12.4% of White children. With the number of Black children growing up in poverty being over three times more likely than Whites, there is a sentiment of how important race is and especially as it relates to class. If race and class were of equal significance, how would the disproportionate number of Black in poverty be elucidated? The extremely large number of Blacks in poverty compared to Whites shows that race is more significant than class due to the overwhelming percentage of Blacks in poverty. “The urgent problem of black poverty is primarily due to the distribution of wealth, power, and income – a distribution influenced by the racial caste system that denied opportunities to the “most qualified” black people until two decades ago” (West 2010:63).

Economic status is a substantial factor in determining the success or lack thereof of an individual (Zweigenhaft, Domhoff 2003). More specifically class and socioeconomic status are important components in American society that can enable individual achievements. Culture has proven to be more important than economics and politics as a factor that can help a person attain a certain level of educational attainment and success (West 2001). Culture is one of the reasons that a person can become successful despite socioeconomic status and race. The influence of culture is a reason why many from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to overcome hindrances and obstacles that could inhibit their academic success. “We should reject the idea that structures are primarily economic and political creatures – an idea that sees culture as an ephemeral set of behavioral attitudes and values. Culture is as much a structure as the economy or politics; it is rooted in institutions such as families, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, and communication industries” (West 2001:12).

The socioeconomic status of some of the Black student served as motivation and inspiration. Some of the Black students mentioned the fact that they were first generation college students and wanted to graduate to make their families proud and serve as role models. The culture which the Black students came from helped guide them in the right direction in regard to the importance of academics. Their culture served as a powerful influence and allowed them to overcome obstacles and stereotypes of those from disadvantaged economic backgrounds.

Here are some statements from some of the Black student-athletes who grew up lower class. These students did not let their economic background hinder them from attaining a college degree. They also used their family and culture as motivation to get through college.

“It was important for me to graduate, it would have been like a failure if I didn’t graduate and I am the first person to ever graduate from my family.”

“(Graduation) It was everything. Even just going to college, I was the first in my family.”

“Very important because a lot of people in my family didn’t graduate, some didn’t graduate from high school, I wanted to graduate from college, I always had a dream to graduate from college, my parents always told me different steps elementary, middle school, high school, college just to graduate and be one of the chosen in our family to beat the system. “

Some of the White student-athletes who came from middle class or above backgrounds stated that were expected to graduate from college. They stated it was the norm for them to graduate from college and other members in their families were college graduates. The mindset of some of the White students was that the task of graduating was presumed once they stepped foot on campus.

“(Graduation was) Very important, it kind of has been expected of me since I was younger and so just something I always figured I was going to do.”

“It was very important but I guess I had a brother and sister both graduated from college and my Dad so it was kind of like the next thing, you suppose to graduate. “

In general race has proven to have an integral role in educational achievement and graduation (Cureton 2003; Dotterer, McHale, Crouter 2009). On a predominately White campus racial issues can be a challenge for the success of Black students. “Race remains paramount in black interactions with the white community” (Zweigenhaft, Domhoff 2003:163). The contrast between class and race continue to be substantial in the quest for success on collegiate campuses (Winship, Small 2007). While class is important, in this study race appears to be more of a factor in the graduation gap between Black and White football student-athletes.

### **Good Character**

One of the most unanticipated findings of the research was the significance of good character as a topic of memorable messages. Good character was one of the most recalled memorable messages topics. Thirty six percent (see table 10) of the total number of the most memorable messages were on the topic of good character. Student-athletes recalled more memorable messages with respect to good character than academics. That was a surprising finding that good character would outweigh academics and equal athletics with respect to most memorable messages recalled. The importance of good character was stressed heavily by numerous sources to help guide the student-athletes in their decision making process and the manner in which they conducted themselves. Family members and coaches were the two leading sources that stressed good character and its significance.

Good character messages proved to be one of the most important findings in regard to this research. Character was found to be one of the most recalled topics in regard to memorable message overall combined for both groups and was equal to athletics which was somewhat surprising. Character was the topic in 36% of the memorable messages. Black student-athletes had character as the highest topic at 38% of their memorable messages recalled, while athletics



were only 30% of the memorable messages. An unforeseen finding was that athletics were the number one topic for White student-athletes at 50% and character was second at 33%.

When looking at the topic of character with regard to the graduation status there is a fascinating finding. Those student-athletes who graduated, listed character as the most recalled message 44% of the time. The non-graduate student-athletes had character at a lower rate of 30% of the most memorable message topic. One can postulate why graduates recalled character at a higher rate than non –graduates. Student-athletes who graduated can be deemed in some sense of being more responsible since they were able to accomplish the task of graduating. The mindset of the graduate and non-graduate is different and that has been discovered when looking at the importance of athletic, academics and graduating.

Character is one of the most important factors for all football student-athletes. Currently college football has had a notable off season because of numerous scandals and off the field issues. Character was at the forefront in almost all the recent noteworthy transgressions in college football. Some of the current issues plaguing college football include: cheating and academic fraud, fighting, taking illegal benefits and monetary compensation, purposely breaking rules, stealing, lying and other criminal activities. In almost all of the cases when the student-athletes get themselves in trouble with the law and NCAA character is a central element. Character or simply doing the right things, would keep the student-athletes and coaches out of trouble and avoid legal ramifications and NCAA sanctions. Good character could have avoided such problems that have resulted in student-athletes losing eligibility, coaches being fired and criminal charges. Judgment is essential to the student-athlete not only being successful on the field but more importantly off the field and in life. Coaches preach character because one bad move or transgression by a student-athlete can lead to sanctions for the athletic program and the

entire university. Collegiate coaches' livelihood is directly tied to the character of their student-athletes. Many collegiate coaches have been fired because of the mistakes made by the student-athletes. Also many athletic departments and universities have suffered harsh consequences due to the actions of student-athletes and their poor choices in relation to character.

Many of the negative problems that are at the center of the college football world could have easily been avoided if the student-athletes displayed better character in their decision making process. Several student-athletes have knowingly broken rules and laws because of their own selfish agenda in countless cases. College football has distinct dynamics in that the actions of an individual can cause severe damage to countless others. In some cases the actions of a single individual has caused records, games, awards and trophies and entire seasons to be vacated. Most student-athletes are educated by compliance departments about what constitutes as an extra benefit. Often self-interest and greed dominated the behaviors of the student-athletes and led them to break rules and regulations. The consequences of the actions of the student-athletes can have harsh repercussions for many institutions and those involved.

The finding of this research show that character can be a central element of what the student-athletes recall. Parents, coaches and administrators need to make a concerted effort to emphasize the importance of character and making good decisions. The more character is stressed on, the more it can help in the decision making process for the student-athletes. The parents are the first line of teaching and should try to instill good morals and values that are enforced and demonstrated by the high school and collegiate coaches as well. If those parties involved with the student-athletes have similar values and beliefs it may make their environment more conducive to making smart choices.

Outside negative influences have proven to be detrimental to student-athletes. Agents, corrupt boosters and unscrupulous individuals can lead student-athletes in a negative direction. Those student-athletes who have been taught the importance of good character are often able to ward off devious people. Student-athletes who do not have a strong foundation in character are often steered down the wrong road which ends up being harmful for all the involved parties. There are many negative temptations that student-athletes must avoid to maintain their eligibility and stay clear of legal troubles.

Another startling result was how athletics was more prevalent in the most memorable messages than academics and how it related to the behaviors and attitudes of the student-athletes. A great number of the student-athletes recollected more messages about athletics. Athletics was also emphasized in regard to what the student-athletes made as a priority and set goals for. The goal of making it to the NFL was deemed as important, especially to the Black student athletes and non-graduates. Almost 40% more of the Blacks student-athletes felt going to the NFL was important as compared to the White student-athletes. Rational Choice Theory helps explain why many Black student-athletes will make the conscious choice to pursue athletic feats such as going to the NFL over more substantive ventures such as academics (Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrel, and Sabo 2005). Although the actual chances of playing in the NFL are exceptionally low it does not stop a great number of Black student-athletes to rationalize the concept of making it. Some of the Black student-athletes expressed that they put more time and energy in going to the NFL because it was their foremost goal and they did not see graduating from college as important. Some correlations can be made from the student-athletes who found graduation as important and those who felt making it to the NFL was important. Both Black and White

student-athletes had more most memorable messages recalled about athletics with gives some insight to the prominence of athletics in society.

Consistent with the findings of some other studies done on memorable messages there were very few negative memorable messages recalled. Nazione, LaPlante, Smith, Cornacchione, Russell and Stohl (2011) did a study on memorable messages for college students and found negative memorable messages to be rare and even those few negative messages served as motivation. One may have assumed there would be more negative memorable messages evoked and especially in relation to athletics. Twelve percent of the academic most memorable messages were negative, which was a small number, especially considering that half of the student-athletes in this study did not graduate. Although the number of athletic negative most memorable messages were slightly higher, they accounted for only 19% of messages recalled. The assumption that there would be a greater number of negative messages was found to be incorrect. The Black and White student-athletes were very similar in that the vast majority of the most memorable messages they recalled in both academics and athletics were positive.

Parents and family members were the highest number in regard to sources of sending academic memorable messages. One of the astonishing findings was that the only parents that reportedly emphasized athletics over academics were of seven Black non-graduates. Parents have a significance influence in shaping the behavior, aspirations and achievement of their children (Hawkins, Amato, & King 2007). Parents who stress athletics over academics may be doing a disservice to their children and hindering their ability to make education a top priority. Having parents that emphasize athletics almost gives the child a pass in not taking academics as seriously which may lead to poor academic performance and not graduating. This conclusion was instrumental in understanding the impact and influences that parents have on their children.

Black students were found to put greater emphasis on athletics than academics during the socialization process (Beamon & Bell 2006). Beamon and Bell (2006) also noted that White parents tend to be more involved in the educational process of their children as compared to Black parents. Parents who stress the importance of education tend to have students who perform better academically. Many of the student-athletes who graduated attributed much of their academic success to the motivation, encouragement and memorable messages they received from their parents.

Coaches have a unique perspective because they gave both messages about academics and athletics. Coaching is a distinctive and interesting profession, especially at the collegiate level because there are so many dynamics (Dumond, Lynch, & Platania 2008). The goal of most of those who get into coaching is to teach values, principles and work-ethic to the athletes they work with. On the college level the salaries are so high that the pressure is immense to win which puts great pressure on the coaches and they bestow some of the pressure on the student-athletes (Leeds, Miller, & Stull 2007). In an ideal world coaches want to make the men who play football for them to become better students and people but in reality in order to keep their job they must win. It was somewhat expected that coaches would send messages about the magnitude of athletics but it was a little surprising how much attention they paid towards academics. Coaches sent a lot of messages about good character, which made a huge impact on the student-athletes. Collegiate coaches spend a great amount of time with the student-athletes and have the ability to make a tremendous impact on their lives. Collegiate coaches have the forum to send messages that can help shape the principles and values by which the student-athletes live by. The college coach has the ability to set a culture that encourages the student-athletes to balance academics and athletics while using good character as well. In the pursuit of

making it to the NFL, graduating or both, the collegiate coach has the ability to aid the student-athletes in pursuit of their goals. Another key component is that the college coach has the capacity to help form and influence the goals of the student-athletes.

Teammates play a role in the messages that student-athletes recollect because they spend an immense amount of time together. Teammates often form cliques and will associate with those who have likeminded goals, aspirations and desires. Eighty three percent of teammates focused on athletics, this was a high number, especially because of the minimal amount focused on academics. Only 2% of the student-athletes claimed that their teammate's primary emphasis was on academics. This was a surprising result because both Black and White student-athletes reported that almost none of their teammate's main concern was academics. Nearly all of the messages from teammates were in relation to athletics. This shows how significant athletics is amongst teammates regardless of graduation status and race.

The popularity of collegiate football has changed the structure of youth football and how much concentration is placed on sports at earlier ages (Eitzen/Sage 2009). Some of the student-athletes reported taking football seriously and striving to go the NFL since as early as seven years of age. This mindset of focusing on athletics at such an early age can make it difficult for other sources to relay messages about academics because it may conflict with the aspirations and goals, the student-athlete has had for years. One of the biggest revelations of this study was that 100% of the graduates asserted that graduating from college was very important. That just shows that if the student-athletes value something they are more inclined to work hard in order to attain or achieve that objective. Almost one-fourth of the non-graduates felt that graduating from college was not important. It was alarming that such a number of student-athletes did not place any value in academics. Self-worth theory examines how if a student believes they have nothing

to gain, they will deliberately not work hard and may put forth minimal effort and this concept reflects the actions of some of the non-graduates towards academics (Gaston-Gayles 2004).

Self-worth theory helps explain why some student-athletes do not graduate because they may not have the confidence academically and may have never been good students and thus only associate their academic ability with failure. Self-fulfilling prophecy is another concept that can help explain some of the aspects of the academic performance of particular student-athletes.

Self-fulfilling prophecy states that if someone sends a student a message that they are not a good student, they may internalize that message and thus believe and perform as a poor student academically (Von Hippel, Hawkins, Schooler 2001). It is difficult to gauge what age some of the student-athletes begin to feel that academics are not of much importance. A number of the non-graduates proclaimed that they were not good students and thus did not always have the confidence that they would be able to graduate. Several of them stated that they believed that they were good athletes and their best chance of having a productive career and financial success would be in athletics because they were not capable of excelling in academics.

As those closest to the student-athletes such as family members, teammates/friends, little league and high school begin to treat them in a special manner due to their athletic ability, it starts to become engrained in their psyche. As society starts to categorize those as athletes, the athletes themselves begin to view their athletic role as their primary role. Some of the student-athletes reported being labeled as an athlete as early as six and seven years old. As the notoriety for the athletic exploits grow in popularity, so do their regard and identity as an athlete.

According to Stryker (1968) and identity theory, the role of an athlete becomes the most desirable for the person to associate themselves with and becomes a major part of their persona. In the larger society and in many communities, being a great athlete can be more socially

rewarding than being a great student. Thus, in the hierarchy of identities, being an athlete is what a person will identify generally with and becomes the role and behaviors they will associate themselves with the most, if that is the identity that they find most rewarding. The athlete in turn will work to fulfill the expectations and try to live up to the expectations, society has impressed on them as an athlete. The roles may differ for Black and White student-athletes because society is more inclined to associate Blacks with being athletes instead of scholars (Goldsmith 2003).

In accordance with labeling theory many of the Black student-athletes label themselves as athletes and view other roles such as being a student as secondary (Adler & Adler 1989). There was a sense by some of the memorable messages recalled by the Black student-athletes that athletics was a primary function in their lives. Also when examining what some of the Black student-athletes placed emphasis on, their goals and what was important, it was clear to see many of their responses fit into the stereotypes people have with respect to Black athletes. Some of the Black student-athletes and in particular many of the non-graduates felt being an athlete was their principal role and their actions reflected that notion. Society and some of the sources of the messages delivered by those close to the student-athletes such as family members, teammates and coaches labeled some of the student-athletes as being athletes primarily. In some cases they encouraged them to place their focus and attention on sports even at the expense of other areas. The label of being an athlete is placed on many of the young student-athletes long before they take one step on a college campus.

On most Division One college campuses being a football player brings more prestige and notoriety than being an outstanding scholar. While some student-athletes have shown the ability to excel in multiple roles and can be a good athlete as well as a student, others have not. Those who are both good athletes and students recollected messages from sources in their lives who



expressed how important it was to have a balance and understand the different functions and responsibilities they have. The memorable messages played a key role in helping those student-athletes who were able to graduate while still performing their athletic duties and requirements. A small number of the student-athletes were able to graduate and play in the NFL and maximized their opportunities.

Unfortunately some of the student-athletes did not graduate and were not able to reach the NFL. These student-athletes did not capitalize on the opportunity to graduate and thus put themselves in an undesirable situation. Many of the non-graduates expressed regret in not taking their academics seriously and leaving the institution without graduating. Some of the non-graduates spoke openly about their lack of opportunity and ability to find a suitable occupation that is financially rewarding. Both Black and White non-graduates held similar sentiments about their current career situations. There was a sense of frustration about not being afforded some of the professional opportunities they desired because of the lack of a college degree. Not graduating has hindered their ability to achieve some of the things they would have liked. Both the Black and White non-graduates mentioned how they should have focused more on academics while they were in college and they now truly understand the significance of a college degree.

This study has shown that memorable messages can have a major influence in the lives of student-athletes. Some of the student-athletes attested that the memorable messages they received were instrumental in assisting them in achieving their goals and affecting their behaviors. Good character was a theme in a number of the messages and shows how much value those close to the student-athletes placed in having good character, and doing things in an appropriate manner. Those close to the student-athletes wanted them to learn to mature and be responsible when making decisions and living by the principles and morals those close to them

worked to embed in their psyche and mindset. Graduation is a goal that is attainable for any college student if they work hard and place the proper emphasis and work ethic towards graduating.

One of the biggest revelations in this study was the correlation between memorable messages and values. All of the student-athletes who graduated felt that graduation was important and much of that is due to the memorable messages they received. Those associated with student-athletes such as family members, teammates, coaches, mentors and others need to understand the significance of memorable messages and the impact they can have in aiding student-athletes in achieving their goals and aspirations.

### **Recommendations**

The summer of 2011 proved to be one of the most tumultuous off seasons in the history of college football. Multiple scandals and transgressions have come to the forefront and received a great deal of media attention. While most of the current issues that plague college football involved breaking rules, criminal activity and financial matters, the one issue that has not received much attention is that of graduation. The graduation rate for many institutions and the gap between Black and White student-athletes continue to be problem and not serve in the best interest of all student-athletes.

More in-depth training needs to be done with parents at the high school level. Parents are instrumental in the education process for their children. The parents can have a greater influence if they put more emphasis on academics. Training can help the parents set a better foundation on the importance of education and making it a priority. This training can be essential for those parents who have not attended college in understanding the higher education process. Educational training for the parents can allow for them to have more knowledge in helping their

children get on the right path in selecting potential majors and careers options. Training for parents can not only be useful for improving graduation but also in the overall general interest in education. Teaching the parents about the educational process in high school will allow for them to have a more vested interest in their children's educational outcomes.

Allowing the parents to be more knowledgeable about the higher education process can be beneficial on many levels. The training of the parents could help them put a great emphasis on education in high school and even on the elementary and middle school levels. Greater focus and attention paid to education by the parents could lead to better grades for the student-athletes on all levels. The parents could become more confident about the education system and thus be more of an asset to their children in high school and during the collegiate recruitment process. Having the parents more involved in the recruitment process can assist the student-athletes in selecting an institution that will meet their educational needs and be the best fit for them academically. By having the parents more involved with education, it can aid in improving the focus and interest of the student-athletes on education which can lead to greater academic results and higher graduation rates.

Collegiate coaches and administrators need to do a better job of placing more emphasis on education and performing well academically. It has become quite evident that winning is the most important duty for many collegiate football coaches and especially at the high major Division 1 institutions. The quest to win needs to be balanced with aiding the student-athletes in striving for academic success. The NCAA, collegiate administrators and others with influence need to hold coaches more accountable for the academic performance of their student-athletes. The Ivy League appears to be the only collegiate conference whose core values and philosophy match their actions. Ivy League institutions do not give athletic scholarships and do not allow

their teams to play in bowl games no matter what their records are. Ivy League institutions have rigorous academic curricula and thus do not find it beneficial for student-athletes to miss class time in December which is the last part of the semester and also the same time when most bowl games and collegiate playoffs take place. The Ivy League also has extraordinarily high admission standards, which keeps in line with their philosophy and goal of graduating student-athletes.

Although the Ivy League model would not be practical for all institutions, it does show that keeping your core values in place can work. Many institutions allow for special admittance for football student-athletes which places the person at a disadvantage in many cases. Enrolling students who are not academically qualified or motivated can lead to another realm of problems. When institutions accept student-athletes who do not desire or have the intention of graduating they make a mockery of higher education. Many institutions must take a hard look at what they are doing and ask themselves, are they an educational institution of higher learning or a football factory? Institutions must not continue to enroll football student-athletes whose academic records and behavior suggest that school and graduation are not important to them. In a win at all cost society, the student-athlete has been damaged because they have received messages regarding propaganda of playing professional football. A lot of institutions will recruit high school student-athletes and give them messages about how going to the NFL is a realistic venture if they select the right school. This false reality sends a clear message to the student that football is more important than education.

Institutions must stop accepting student-athletes solely based on their athletic ability. These practices are a form of exploitation in the pursuit of winning games and generating revenue; institutions are hurting young men using these measures. The professionals who are

entrusted with making the decisions on behalf of the institution need to place more value on the well-being of the student-athletes and doing what is right and not always what is profitable. The billion dollar revenue producing machine that is college football needs to thoroughly understand and more importantly care about what they are doing to the student-athletes.

Those student-athletes who do not graduate or play professional football are forced to deal with the harsh realities of society. As the economic problems of the country continue to be exacerbated along with a scarce job market, the prospect of those entering the job market without a degree is dreadful. Who is responsible to care about what happens to the student-athlete who does not graduate? Is it the million dollar coach, college president, or administration with multiple agendas? Coaches have the power and ability to make academics a priority. They can discipline those who do not put forth the maximum effort towards academics. Coaches also have the ability to penalize and take away what is often the most important thing to the football student-athletes which is playing time. Collegiate coaches can send the message to student-athletes whose only goal is to make it the NFL; that they will not play if they do not take care of their academic responsibilities. The question then becomes, does the administration support the coach that sacrifices winning in order to teach lessons and do the right thing? The administration then must evaluate, do they pay their football coaches to win or to graduate student-athletes? Then they must decide where the balance is, between winning and graduation if there is indeed one. If winning is the ultimate goal, then what costs and measures do coaches take to make sure they win and protect their livelihood? For the coach, if winning is the ultimate goal, then that is a task most easily achieved by having the best athletes, regardless of their academic ability.

Institutions must hire coaches who have similar beliefs, values, agendas and goals as of the school. Some coaches have proven that they can win at a high level while also graduating

their student-athletes at a high rate. The institution and coach must understand what motivates the student-athletes academically and provide an environment that fosters and rewards academic achievement. More acknowledgement and accolades need to be placed upon the student-athletes who perform well academically. By sending positive messages in regard to excellent academic achievements, they may motivate and inspire other football student-athletes to strive for better results in the classroom. The administration also needs to recognize and reward coaches whose teams do well academically and attain high graduation rates.

In order for institutions of high learning to maximize the academic and athletic ability of the student-athletes, they must understand the social differences between Black and White student-athletes. Many administrators and coaches want to treat everyone in the same manner because they are on the same team. The problem is that everyone is different and come from various economic, cultural and social backgrounds and experiences. When you treat everyone in the same manner, you may be doing a disservice to some by not understanding their perspective. Some student-athletes may come from a background where education was not essential. This is where the administration and coaches need to explore methods and techniques that will help educate those student-athletes on the importance and benefits of education and reward good academic achievement.

More in-depth diversity training may help coaches and administrators understand that they can treat someone differently but also fairly at the same time. Black and White football student-athletes are dissimilar in many aspects, so understanding that and educating coaches and administrators on methods on how to best serve both parties would be beneficial. Those responsible for helping student-athletes at the institution need to educate themselves on the similarities and differences between Black and White student-athletes. Diversity training could

help both Black and White student-athletes achieve a higher standard of goals in academics and athletics. The institution has a responsibility to aid student-athletes in working towards graduation and should exhaust all their resources in helping raise the graduation rates for Black and White football student-athletes.

### **Conclusion**

This study has shown that memorable messages are a valuable tool in understanding the mindset of football student-athletes. Memorable messages are significant in comprehending the ideology that student-athletes have in regard to academics and athletics. Some of the student-athletes recalled memorable messages that were over a decade old. For a message to have such long lasting influence gives an indication of how important memorable messages given to student-athletes can be and the impact they can have. Many of the messages that were given by coaches, parents, teammates and others proved to have a substantial influence on the actions and behaviors of the student-athletes.

One of the essential finding of this study was how important going to the NFL was and especially for Black student-athletes and non-graduates. Playing professional football is a dream for many young athletes and the dream becomes closer to reality for those who are able to play football at the Division 1 level. The odds of becoming a Division 1 football player are slim so that who are talented enough to play at that level are elite athletes. Playing on the highest collegiate level allows many Division 1 athletes to believe that playing in the NFL is a realistic option. Some football programs have produced numerous NFL prospects which formulate the dream of playing in the NFL as even more tantalizing, for student-athletes from these institutions. Playing in the NFL is an immense recruiting tool that many institutions use in order to entice the elite prospective student-athletes.

One overarching theory that encompasses many of the concepts of this study is the rationality proposition. The rationality proposition by Homans basically states that individuals calculate the likelihood that they are able to attain a particular reward (Ritzer 2008). The rewards are attached to the actions of an individual and what they perceive as their chances of success. “There is an interaction between the value of the reward and the likelihood of attainment. The most desirable rewards are those that are both very valuable and highly attainable” (Homans cited in Ritzer 2008:421). Playing in the NFL is an aspiration for so many Division 1 football student-athletes because it would allow them to play the game of football at the highest level and it is also very lucrative. The financial reward of participating in the NFL is worth the risk for many student-athletes who deem it as their ultimate goal. The NFL is a unique occupation in that it allows one to play a game and be paid millions of dollars for doing so in many cases.

Memorable messages are associated with the rationality proposition in that the conscious choices student-athletes make to devote their efforts towards football often come from the memorable messages they receive and what they value. This study has shown that the actions of the student-athletes are related to their memorable messages which are tied directly to their values. Over the course of time many of the student-athletes learned to value the memorable messages they received. Some of the student-athletes perceived that they could be successful in making it to the NFL. This study is distinctive in that almost half of the participants played in the NFL at one point. Having such a high number of NFL participants makes this research more credible in understanding the mindset of football student-athletes and the aspirations for playing professional football.



To go a step further than the rationality proposition in which individuals base their actions on the likelihood of success. The actual success needs to be evaluated because making it to the NFL is just one aspect. Having a long successful career in the NFL is extremely rare and the average years played in the NFL for individuals from this study played was 2.85 years. (See table 8). The actual financial and personal rewards of playing in the NFL greatly vary because of such a short career span. An inquiry needs to be done on the effects of devoting a lifetime of attention, energy and focus into a career that typically last less than three years.

It is no coincidence that more non-graduates in this study played in the NFL compared to graduates. (See table 8). The non-graduates had 14 participants who were able to compete in the NFL compared with only 6 of the graduates. This is consistent with some of the finding because the non-graduates received more memorable messages pertaining to athletics than the graduates did. (See table 16). Memorable messages are closely associated with values and principles. 100% of non-graduates (see Table 23) felt making it the NFL was important which means they valued having the opportunity to play in the NFL. This is consistent with the rationality proposition in that values are tied to the probability of success. The graduates did not deem making it the NFL in equal value and thus 38% of the non-graduates felt making it to the NFL was not important. This is an example of when an individual values something they will put more time and effort into becoming successful at that task whether it was making it to the NFL or graduating from college.

Several of the student-athletes mentioned memorable messages that motivated them on a daily basis. There are numerous avenues by which one can give a memorable message. The memorable messages varied from quotes, famous saying, lectures, examples, speeches and scriptures. A number of the messages aided the student-athletes to work hard in both academics

and athletics. Most of the messages were positive and pushed the student-athletes to strive to work hard in order to achieve their goals.

Understanding the impact of memorable messages can allow those close to the student-athletes to carefully choose how they articulate the importance of academics and athletics. The results of this study have shown that emphasizing athletics over academics can have detrimental effects. Those who are in a position that can inspire student-athletes need to stress how meaningful education is. Using memorable messages to express academic importance at an early age can lead to a good foundation for scholarly activities. Academics need to take precedence over athletics at an early age so that student-athletes value education and set their priorities and goals accordingly.

Those responsible for guiding student-athletes need to give positive memorable messages that are in the best interest of the individual. Memorable messages are so influential that in some cases they proved to be the difference in someone graduating or not graduating. This research should help educate people about the influence of the words they use to speak with student-athletes. The messages should be consistent from elementary school to college about academics and how beneficial doing well in school can be. Parents, coaches and teammates need to be careful in how much emphasis they place on athletics because athletics should not have priority over academics and there should be a healthy balance.

Football is a great sport that can teach many valuable life lessons. However, student-athletes must be taught how to balance their time and effort between academics and athletics. Football can be extremely beneficial and help give many student-athletes who may not otherwise be afforded the opportunity to attend institutions of higher learning. One of the central findings of this research is that it is in the best interest of the student-athletes if they can maximize the

opportunities that have been given as a student and graduate. As this study has shown positive memorable messages in regard to the value of education can be extremely instrumental in helping guide student-athletes towards academic success and graduation.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study is that only one institution is represented in regards to the student-athlete sample. It would be ideal to interview student-athletes from multiple institutions to gather different perspectives. Various institutions have different cultures and academics environments, which thus makes student-athlete's experiences different.

Another limitation may be making sure that the data can be interpreted in a general manner. When studying graduation rates, there are so many background variables and circumstances that affect student-athletes academic success. Factors such as the academic preparation in high school, social economic status, and family structure make each student-athlete experience different and can account in some ways for their success or lack thereof in academics.

Assessing exactly how much impact the memorable messages had in some instances can be difficult. Other factors motivated the student-athletes to strive towards graduation and some towards trying to make it to the NFL. Some of the participants stated that education was always a main focus and priority of their parents, so getting good grades was always embedded in them. Other participants said memorable messages were a big factor in what they were able to achieve academically and athletically. Also the sources of the memorable messages differed due to the relationship dynamics of those people associated with the participant. In some instances it was hard to gauge the effectiveness of the memorable messages, and why that actual message was recalled. Further in depth research would be required to analyze why certain messages were

recalled and why did those messages differ so much from other messages. In some cases the actual memorable message was not used for years and in other cases the message took more significant meaning over time. A study could be done on what the memorable messages meant initially and why did it have a long lasting effect. Additionally, it would be good to follow-up on the relationship of the source of the message and how much of that was a factor in why the message was recalled. Results from this study may help institutions better serve the academic needs of their student-athletes and could in effect produce better graduation rates.

## **APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

#### Race and Background

1. What was your family make-up growing up?
2. What is the educational background of your parents/guardians?
3. List your family members who participated in your upbringing?
4. List the most influential people in your life?
5. Which socioeconomic status best describes how you grew up?
6. Describe your high school and its academic reputation?
7. Describe your high school and its athletic reputation?
8. Describe your relationship with your high school football coach and what things did he emphasize?

#### Academics

1. When did academics become significant in your life?
2. How important was your GPA in college and how much did you focus on it?
3. If having to choose which one had more emphasis in your life academics or football?
4. What did you spend more time on while in college academics or athletics?
5. How important was graduating from college?
6. What was your biggest academic achievement while in college?

#### Athletics

1. When did football become significant in your life?
2. During the recruiting process which was more imperative when selecting a school, academics or athletics?
3. Was making it to the NFL imperative?
4. What did your coaches emphasize while in college?
5. Which was emphasized more by the following people – academic or athletics?
  - a. Parents
  - b. Coaches
  - c. Teammates
  - d. Other people
6. What was your biggest athletic achievement while in college?

**The first part of this interview will ask you about the specific message and when you received it, the second part asks about times you have remembered this message during your time as a collegiate student-athlete, and the final part asks about when you have shared the message.**

---

Take a few minutes to think about a memorable message that you have received that you recall to help you while you were in college.

Please tell me the message word-for-word.

How certain are you that you recalled the exact wording of the message?

Very certain    Moderately certain    Uncertain

**The following questions are about the first time you heard the message.**

How was this message communicated to you the first time you heard it?

Who told you this message the first time you heard it?

Where were you when you heard this message for the first time?

What were your thoughts upon hearing this message for the first time?

What were your emotions upon hearing this message for the first time?

Did hearing this message for the first time change your attitude in some way?

If so, how?

Did hearing this message for the first time change your behavior in some way?

If so, how?

What do you think was the purpose of the message sender in relaying this message?

Why do you think this message became memorable to you?

**The following section is about the times as a collegiate student-athletes that you remembered this message.**

Take a few minutes to think about situations in college (while you were a student-athlete) during which you recalled this memorable message. (repeat the message verbatim to them) Remember, these situations could have centered around relational issues you've had since coming to college, big decisions you've had to make, challenges you've had to overcome, or even day to day choices. Please describe the **most memorable** situation during college in which you recalled such a message.

What emotions did you feel when you recalled this message during this college situation?

What were your thoughts when you recalled this message during this college situation?

Did you take any actions when you recalled this message during this college situation?

If so, what actions did you take?

Did recalling the message in this college situation change your attitude toward something in some way?

If so, how did it change your attitude?

Are there other situations during college in which you remembered this message?

*Probe for up to 3 situations.*

**This final section will ask you about sharing this message with others**

Have you ever shared this message with others?

Whom did you share it with?

Please describe the most memorable situation in which you shared this message.

What was your purpose in sharing this message?

### **Demographics**

What is your age?

How many years did you play collegiate football?

What is the highest level at which you played football?

How many years did you participate at this level?



## REFERENCES

## REFERENCES

- Adler, Patricia A., Adler, Peter. 1989. "The Gloried Self: The Aggrandizement and the Constriction of Self " *Social Psychology Quarterly* 52:299-310.
- Adler, Patricia A., Adler, Peter 1991. *Backboards and Blackboards: College Athletes and Role Engulfment* New York Columbia University Press
- Alon, Sigal., Tienda, Marta 2007. "Diversity, Opportunity, and the Shifting Meritocracy in Higher Education " *American Sociological Review* 72:487-511.
- Anderson, Kareem S. . 1990. "The Effect of Athletic Participation on the Academic Aspirations and Achievement of African American Males in New York City High School." *The Journal of Negro Education* 59:507-516.
- Atencio, Matthew., Wright, Jan 2008. "'We Be Killin' Them: Hierarchies of Black Masculinity in Urban Basketball Spaces." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25:262-280.
- Bairner, Alan. 2007. "Back to Basics: Class, Social Theory, and Sport " *Sociology of Sport Journal* 24:20-36.
- Barge, J Kevin., Schluter, David W. 2004. "Memorale Messages and Newcomer Socialization" *Western Journal of Communication* 68:233-256
- Beamon, Krystal and Patricia A. Bell. 2006. "'Academics versus athletics: An examination of the effects of background and socialization on African American male student athletes.'" *The Social Science Journal* 43:393-403.
- Beaudion, Christopher; Thorson, Esther. 2006. "The Social Capital of Blacks and Whites: Differing Effects of the Mass Media in the United States." *Human Communication Research* 32:157-177.
- Berry, Bonnie., Smith, Earl 2000. "Race, sport, and crime: the misrepresentation of African Americans in the team sports and crime." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17:171-197.
- Black, Sandra E., Sufi, Amir., . 2002. "Who Goes to College? Differential Enrollment by Race and Family Background " in *Social Science Research Network* Los Angeles University of California-Los Angeles
- Birner, J., & Ege, R. 1999. "Two Views on Social Stability: An Unsettled Question." *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 58.4:749-773.
- Bloom, Miller., Willard, Michael 2002. *Sports Matters: Race, Recreation, and Culture* New York: New York University Press

- Broh, Beckett, A. . 2002. "Linking Extracurricular Programming to Academic Achievement: Who Benefits and Why?" *Sociology of Education* 75:69-91.
- Brown, Kendrick T., Brown, Tony N., Jackson, James S. 2003. "Teammates On and Off the Field? Contact with Black Teammates and the Racial Attitudes on White Student-Athletes " *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 33:1379-1403.
- Brown, Tony., Jackson, James S., Brown, Kendrick T., Sellers, Robert M., Keiper, Shelly., Manuel, Warde J., . 2003. ""There's No Race On The Playing Field"." *Journal of Sports & Social Issues* 27:162-183.
- Butterfield, Fox. 2002. "Father in Killing at Hockey Rink Is Given Sentence of 6 to 10 Years " Pp. 11 in *New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/26/us/father-in-killing-at-hockey-rink-is-given-sentence-of-6-to-10-years.html>.
- Chavous, Tabbye M., Bernat, Debra Hilken., Schmeelk-Cone, Karen., Caldwell, Cleopatra H., Kohn-Wood, Laura., Zimmeran, Marc A. . 2003. "Racial Identity and Academic Attainment Among African American Adolescents " *Child Development* 74:1076-1090.
- Coakely, Jay. 1992. "Burnout Among Adolescent Athletes: A Personal Failure or Social Problem?" *Sociology of Sport Journal*:271-285.
- Crosnoe, Robert, and Aletha C. Huston. . 2007. ""Socioeconomic Status, Schooling, and the Development Trajectories of Adolescents."" *Developmental Psychology* 43:1097-1110.
- Cureton, Steven R. . 2003. "Race-Specific College Student Experiences On A Predominantly White Campus." *Journal of Black Studies* 33:295-311.
- Dotterer, Aryn M., McHale, Susan M., Crouter Ann C. . 2009 "Sociocultural Factors and School Engagement Among African American Youth: The Roles of Racial Discrimination, Racial Socialization, and Ethnic Identity " *Applied Developmental Science* 13:61-73
- Downey, Douglas B., von Hippel, Paul T., Hughes, Melanie 2008. "Are "Failing" Schools Really Failing? Using Seasonal Comparison to Evaluate School Effectiveness." *Sociology of Education* 81:242-270.
- Edwards, Harry 1999. "Black Athletes: minority access to sports programs " *Current* 15-22.
- Eitle, Tamely McNulty and David J. Eitle. 2002. ""Race, Cultural Capital, and the Educational Effects of Participation in Sports."" *Sociology of Education* 75:123-146.
- Ellis, Jennifer Butler., Smith, Sandi W. 2004. "Memorable Messages as Guides to Self-Assessment of Behavior: A Replication and Extension Dairy Study." *Communication Monographs* 71:97-119.

- Eitzen, D Stanley., Hufnagel, Rick., Purdy, Dean A. 1982. "Are Athletes Also Students? The Educational Attainment of College Athletes " *Social Problems* 29:439-448.
- Eitzen, D Stanley. 1999. *Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport*. Lanham, MD Rowman & Littlefield Publishers
- Eitzen, D Stanley. 2005 "Upward Mobility Through Sport." *Down to Earth Sociology* 13.
- Eitzen, D Stanley., Sage, George H. 2009. *Sociology of North American Sport* Paradigm Publishers
- Fielitz, Lynn R. . 2000. "Using the Internet for Athletic Recruiting " *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, & Dance* 71:13-15.
- Fine, Gary Alan. 1987. *With The Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture* Chicago University of Chicago Press
- Fletcher, Robert 2008 "Lving on the Edge: The Appeal of Risk Sports for the Professional Middle Class." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25:310-330.
- Gaston-Gayles, Joy L. . 2004. "Examining Academic and Athletic Motivation Among Student Athletes at a Division I University " *Journal of College Student Development* 45.1:75-83.
- Gems, Gerald R. 1998. "The construction, negotiation, and transformation of racial identity in America football: a study of Native and African Americans " *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 22:131-150.
- Goldsmith, Pat Antonio 2003. "Race Relations and Racial Patterns in School Sports Participation." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 20:147-171.
- Grasmuck, Sherri. 2003. "Something About Baseball: Gentrification, "Race Sponsorship," and Neighborhood Boys' Baseball " *Sociology of Sport Journal* 20:307-330.
- Green, Tonika Duren., Bischoff, Lisa., Coleman, Christy L. 2007. "The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth? African American Students and University Research Participation " *Journal of Black Studies* 37:655-676.
- Halone, Kelby K. . 2008. "The Struction of Racialized Sport Organizing " *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 32:22-42.
- Harrison Jr. Louis., Harrison, C.Keith., . 2002. "African American Racial Identity: Theory and Application to Education, Race and Sport in America " *Perspectives* 35-46.
- Harrison, Lisa., Lynch, Amanda B. . 2005. "Social Role Theory and the Perceived Gender Role Orientation of Athletes " *Sex Roles* 52:227-236.

- Hawkins, Billy. 1999. "Black Students Athletes at Predominantly White National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1 Institutions and the Pattern of Oscillating Migrant Laborers" *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 23.1:1-14.
- Hawkins, Daniel N., Amato, Paul R., King, Valarie 2007. "Nonresident Father Involvement and Adolescent Well-Being: Father Effects or Child Effects? ." *American Sociological Review* 72:990-1010.
- Hodge, Samuel R., Harrison Jr. Louis, Burden Jr. Joe W., Dixon, Adrienne D. . 2008. "Brown in Black and White - Then and Now: A Question of Educating or Sporting African American Males in America." *American Behavioral Scientist* 51:928-952.
- Jordan, Will J. 1999. "Black High School Students' Participation in School-sponsored Sports Activities: Effects on School Engagement and Achievement." *Journal of Negro Education* 68:54-71.
- Kassing, Jeffery W., Pappas, Micah E. 2007. "Champions are Built in the Off Season": An Exploration of High School Coaches' Memorable Messages." *Human Communication* 10: 537-546
- Kelly, Sean 2009. "The Black-White Gap in Mathematics Course Taking " *Sociology of Education* 82:47-69.
- Knapp, M.L., Stohl, C., & Reardon, K.K. 1981. "Memorable Messages." *Journal of Communication* 31: 27-41
- Langelett, George. 2003. "The Relationship between Recruiting and Team Performance in Division 1A College Football." *Journal of Sports Economics* 4:240-255.
- Langmia, Kehbuma., Durham, Eric 2007. "Bridging the Gap: African and African American Communication in Historically Black Colleges and Universities " *Journal of Black Studies* 37:805-826.
- Lapchick, Richard. 2009. "2009 The Racial and Gender Report Card" DeVos Sport Business Management – University of Central Florida: 1-114  
[http://web.bus.ucf.edu/documents/sport/2009\\_RGRC.pdf](http://web.bus.ucf.edu/documents/sport/2009_RGRC.pdf)
- Lapchick, Richard. 2009. "Keeping Score When It Counts: Assessing the 2009-10 Bowl-bound College Football Teams –Academic Performance Improves but Race Still Matters" – Devos Sport Business Management – University of Central Florida: 1-5  
[http://web.bus.ucf.edu/documents/sport/200910\\_bowlaprgsr\\_study.pdf](http://web.bus.ucf.edu/documents/sport/200910_bowlaprgsr_study.pdf)
- Leeds, Michael A., Miller, Cristen, and Judith Stull. 2007. "Interscholastic Athletes and Investment in Human Capital." *Social Science Quarterly* 88:729-744.

- Majors, R. 1998. "Cool pose: Black masculinity and sports " Pp. 271 in *African American in Sport* edited by G. A. Sailes. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers
- Martin, Brandon E., Frank Harris III. 2006. "Examining Productive Conceptions of Masculinities: Lessons Learned from Academically Driven African American Male Student-Athletes." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 14:359-378.
- Melendez, Mickey C. 2008. "Black Football Players on a Predominantly White College Campus: Psychosocial and Emotional Realities of the Black College Athlete Experience " *Journal of Black Psychology* 34:423-451.
- Messner, Michael. . 1990. "Boyhood, Organized Sports, And The Construction of Masculinities." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18:416-444.
- Miller, Kathleen., Farrell, Michael P., Barnes, Grace M., Melnick, Merrill J., Sabo, Don. 2005. "Gender/Racial Differences in Jock Identity, Dating, and Adolescent Sexual Risk " *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 34:123-136.
- Miller, Kathleen E., Melnick, Merrill J., Barnes, Grace M., Farrell, Michael P., Sabo, Don. 2005. "Untangling the Links among Athletic Involvement, Gender, Race, and Adolescent Academic Outcomes " *Sociology of Sport Journal* 22:178-193.
- Miller, Patrick., Wiggins, David K 2004. *Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Morman, M.T. 2007. "Memorable Messages of Fraternity Hazing" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 93<sup>rd</sup> Annual Convention, Chicago, IL Online <PDF>. 2009-05-23 from [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p189708\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p189708_index.html)
- Morgan, William J. 2002. "Social Criticism as Moral Criticism: A Habermasian Take on Sports " *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26:281-299.
- Moser, C.A. 1952. "Quota Sampling" *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* Vol. 115, No.3: 411-423
- Nazione, S., LaPlante, C., Smith, S., Cornacchione, J., Russell, J., & Stohl, C. 2011. "Memorable Messages for Navigating College Life." *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. 39:123-143
- Nixon II, Howard L. 1991. "Sport Sociology That Matters: Imperatives and Challenges for the 1990s." *Sociology of Sport Journal*:281-294.

- Ogden, David., Rose, Randall A. 2005. "Using Gidden's Structuration Theory to Examine the Waning Participation of African Americans in Baseball." *Journal of Black Studies* 35:225-245.
- Ogden, David C; Hilt, Michael I. 2003. "Collective Identity and Basketball: An Explanation for the Decreasing Number of African-Americans On America's Baseball Diamonds " *Journal of Leisure Research* 35:213-227.
- Phillipp, Steven F., Brezine, Sherie 2002 "Differences Among African Americans and Euro-Americans in Reason for Sports Participation " *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 95:184-186.
- Phillipp, Steven F., Brezine, Sherie. 2003. "Race and Perception of Acceptance in Nontraditional Sports " *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 96:463-466.
- Rishe, Patrick James 2003. "A Reexamination of How Athletic Success Impacts Graduation Rates - Comparing Student-Athletes to All Other Undergraduates." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 62:407-427.
- Ritzer, George. 2008. *Sociological Theory: Seventh Edition*. New York, N.Y. McGraw-Hill
- Roach, Ronald 2002. "What ever happened to the conscientious Black athlete? And is the Black community expecting too much from today's sports stars?" *Black Issues in Higher Education* 19 i.4 20 – 25.
- Ross, Charles K. . 2004. *Race and Sport: The Struggle for Equality On and Off Field* Jackson, MS University Press of Mississippi
- Rutten, Esther A., Stams, Geert Jan J.M., Biesta, Gert J.J., Schuengel, Carlo., Dirks, Evelien., Jan B. Hoeksma. 2007. "The Contribution of Organized Youth Sports to Antisocial and Prosocial Behavior in Adolescent Athletes." *J Youth Adolescence* 255-264.
- Seaton, Eleanor K., Scottham, Krista Maywalt., Robert M. Sellers. 2006. "The Status Model of Racial Identity Development in African American Adolescents: Evidence of Structure, Trajectories, and Well Being." *Child Development* 77:1416-1426.
- Sellers, Robert., Kuperminc, Gabriel P., . 1997. "Goal Discrepancy in African American Male Student-Athletes' Unrealistic Expectations for Careers in Professional Sports." *Journal of Black Psychology* 23:6-23.
- Sellers, Robert., Caldwell, Cleopatra., Schmeelk-Cone, Karen H., Zimmerman, Marc A., . 2003. "Racial Identity, Racial Discrimination , Percieved Stress, and Psychological Distress among African American Young Adults." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 43:302-317.

- Small, Mario L., Winship, Christopher 2006. "Black students' graduation from elite colleges: Institutional characteristics and between-institution differences." *Social Science Research* 36:1257-1275.
- Smith, Earl 2007. *Race, Sport, and the American Dream*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press
- Smith, S.W. & Ellis, J.B. 2001. "Memorable Messages as Guides to Self-Assessment of Behavior: An Initial Investigation. *Communication Monographs* 68:154-168
- Spigner, Clarence 1993. "African-American student-athletes: academic support or institutionalized racism? ." *Education* 114:144-151.
- Stone, J., Lynch, CI., Sjomeling, Darley, JM., . 1999. "Stereotype threat effects on Black and White athletic performance " *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77:1213-1227.
- Synder, Peter L. . 1996. "Comparative Levels of Expressed Academic Motivation Among Anglo and African American University Student-Athletes " *Journal of Black Studies* 26:651-667.
- Tracy, Allison J., Sumru Erkut. 2002. "Gender and Race Patterns in the Pathways from Sports Participation to Self-Esteem." *Sociological Perspectives* 45:445-466.
- Turner, Jonathan H. 2003. "Self and Identity Theory." *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. 22:368-383
- Upthegrove, Tanya R., Roscigno, Vincent J., Charles, Camille Zubrinsky. 1999. "Big Money Collegiate Sports: Racial Concentration, Contradictory Pressure, and Academic Performance." *Social Science Quarterly* 80:718-737.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010, Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010, Report P60, n. 238, Table B-2, pp. 68-73.
- Von Hippel, William., Hawkins, Chris., Schooler, Jonathan W. . 2001. "Stereotype Distinctiveness: How counterstereotypic behavior shapes the self-concept." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81:193-205
- Ward Jr, Russell E. . 2008. "Athletic Expenditures and the Academic Mission of American Schools: A Group-Level Analysis " *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25:560-578.
- West, Cornel. 2001. *Race Matters*. Boston, MA. Beacon Press
- Wiggins, David K. 1997. *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America*. Syracuse, NY Syracuse University Press.



- Wiggins, David K., Miller, Patrick B. 2003. *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press
- Winship, Christopher; Small, Mario L. . 2007. "Black students' graduation from elite colleges: Institutional characteristics and between-institution differences " *Social Science Research* 36:1257-1275.
- Wooles, Taniesha A., Costes-Kurtz, Beth., Rowley, Stephanie J. . 2005. "The Development of Stereotypes About Rich and Poor: Age, Race, and Family Income Differences in Beliefs " *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 34:437-445.
- Zirin, Dave 2008. *A People's History of Sports in the United States: 250 Years of Politics, Protest, People and Pay* New York New Press
- Zweigenhaft, Richard L., Domhoff, G. William. 2003. *Blacks in the White Elite: Will Progress Continue?* Rowan & Littlefield Publishers
- Zweigenhaft, Richard L., Domhoff, G. William. 1991. *Blacks in the White Establishment? A Study of Race and Class in America*. Yale University Press