The Division-I Redshirt-Freshman Year:

Benefits and Pitfalls for Black Football Players

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by

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Abstract

Although the experiences of Black student-athletes have been an area of research in higher education as of recent, the transition from high school to college for Black student-athletes has received little attention. The transition from high school to college can be a difficult life transition; however, Black Division-I football players at predominantly White institutions (PWI) face unique and compounding challenges related to their racial, academic, and athletic identities. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the transition experiences that Black Division-I football players at a PWI go through, this study illuminates transition experiences related to the redshirt-freshman year and the perceived effects that the redshirt-freshman year can have on this demographic as they transition to a PWI. A qualitative "phenomenological" methodology undergirded by Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory and four S's framework was employed for data collection, and critical race theory (CRT) provided a lens for data analysis to examine participants' experiences with redshirting as it pertains to race and racism. Findings revealed that during their redshirt-freshman year, participants felt isolated from their team, disassociated with their athletic identities, and largely unsupported by coaches and academic support staffs. Other factors that affected their experiences, such as feelings of academic inadequacy and racial microaggressions in academia, were discussed and revealed. Implications for intercollegiate athletics, recruitment processes, and student-athlete development are discussed.

Keywords: redshirt, Black student-athletes, Division-I football, transition, college athletics

Dedication

To my family, friends, and mentors, I couldn't have done this without you.
Thank you for believing in me.

"The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way."

Acknowledgements

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be writing an acknowledgements section to complete a terminal degree, but here I am. It is an honor, one I haven't achieved alone, to reach this milestone. The single most important factor in my ability to achieve such a success is the relentless support that my family, friends, and mentors have given me. It is impossible to accurately capture how special it feels to be believed in, and I will forever be grateful for the people who have poured into me throughout my life, and specifically my journey at The University of Virginia.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In 2019, Division-I college football's 25 most valuable programs combined to earn a total of $1.5 billion in profit (Smith, 2019). Whether from corporate sponsorships, ticket sales, television contracts, apparel deals, merchandise sales, or student fees, the revenue streams that Division-I football programs generate are immense and have gradually increased over time. Without the Black Division-I football player, however, this revenue would not be attainable.

As with all intercollegiate athletics teams, the equation to create and sustain a successful Division-I football program is fairly simple - recruit the most talented players in order to win as many games as possible. Annually, every Division-I football coach in the country dedicates months of their time to recruit these prospective student-athletes, consistently sending mail to their homes, calling and texting prospects and their guardians, and showing up to their residences for in-house visits. Bill King, who has been in sports talk radio since 1987 and covers college football intimately, refers to the recruiting seasons as a time to "shop for groceries" (Caro, 2012). It is apparent how much emphasis intercollegiate athletic programs put on their "grocery shopping": in 2019, Division-I football programs spent upwards of $2.6 million strictly for recruiting operations on average (Estes, 2019). The allocation of collegiate athletic departments' resources solely for recruiting highlights the importance of the equation for a successful football program: better players lead to wins, and winning leads to revenue-generation. A byproduct of the emphasis on recruiting is the increased pressure to win football games. The inescapable pressure to succeed can drive college football programs to offer full scholarships to boys as young as nine years old (Wertz, 2017). Although some coaches promise prospective student-athletes and their families that the well-being, personal, and academic achievement of the

student-athlete is their primary focus in bringing them to their institution, those promises are not guaranteed, especially when football season commences. It is also important to mention that the aforementioned model for Division-I athletic revenue generation (better players = more wins = revenue generation) is impossible without the high school-to-college transition that student-athletes make to their respective colleges. With this in mind, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of who is enrolling at these colleges as Division-I student-athletes, what the transition to college is like for them, and what support systems exist when student-athletes arrive to their new college environment.

The ultra-competitive "arms race" of Division-I, Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) coaches' salaries may lend insight in regard to the positioning of revenue-generating college athletics programs in higher education (Tsitsos & Nixon, 2012). The FBS is the highest level of college football in the United States and is comprised of the "Power 5" conferences: Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big-Ten, Big 12, Pacific 12 (Pac-12), and the Southeastern Conference (SEC). In 2019, the top-10 highest paid head college football coaches' salaries ranged anywhere from $6 million to $9 million per year (USA Today, 2019). Additionally, statistics from a 2017 study show that the average salary of an assistant coach at an FBS school is upwards of $270,000, higher than 95 percent of the average executive-level administrator salaries from the 2018-2019 Administrators in Higher Education Survey conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR), only to be exceeded by the deans of major schools (medicine, dentistry, law, public health, veterinary medicine), chief executive officers, and chief hospital administrators (HigherEd Jobs, 2019; Latinville & Denny, 2019).

Extremely competitive head coaching salaries in Division-I FBS football programs also represent athletic departments' beliefs that paying top salaries to head coaches will assure, or at least improve, success on the field (Tsitsos & Nixon, 2012). Further, salary increases and a demand for success also incentivize coaches to utilize unorthodox methods to ensure the most athletically inclined players commit to their institutions. Fizel and Brown (2014) note the phenomenon of recruiting violations when they mention that the lucrative nature of on-field success provides a strong incentive for coaches to break the rules and/or offer illegal compensation to the most highly touted football recruits. "Combative cheating," a term used by Fizel and Brown (2014, p. 278), refers to competitors who follow cartel rules in order to stay competitive and dampen awards that may be offered to the initial cheater.

Without highly talented football student-athletes, the likelihood of a team winning meaningful games decreases; therefore, the cyclical nature of recruiting high school football players on pretenses that they must perform and succeed athletically, rather than develop academically, personally, or socially, continues. Division-I college football coaches are more likely to be fired when their teams lose compared to a head coach who continues a tradition of winning at their respective university (Holmes, 2011); therefore, we can surmise that college football coaches may prioritize the athletic development and abilities of the student-athletes they recruit to their institution rather than their wholistic development.

The Transition to College

Institutions of higher education have long struggled with the question of how to properly acclimate and support the needs of freshmen college students, especially because of the varied backgrounds, experiences, and skills that they may bring to their new environments (Turner & Thompson, 2014; Turner, 2016). Although students' freshman year in college is a period

characterized by optimism, freedom, and opportunities, colleges struggle to retain a large portion of their students from their first to second year at the same institution. While retention and persistence rates for college students has inched up by two percent over the last decade (NSC Research Center, 2019), the disparity in academic retention and persistence for Black college students compared to their White peers is apparent. Retention rates, the measurement of the percentage of first-time entering students who return to college at any institution for their sophomore year, for White students at four-year, public colleges and universities was 85.9 percent for the 2017 – 2018 academic year; the retention rate for Black students was 78.4 percent (NSC Research Center, 2019). Further, at public four-year institutions and universities, the overall retention rate for White students was 70.8 percent, whereas Black students posted a 63.7 percent retention rate (NSC Research Center, 2019). Additionally, Division-I football players graduate less frequently than student-athletes who play other sports (Curs, Harper, Frey, & Wolak, 2022); more specifically, in a study across four cohorts of college student-athletes at a four-year institution, Harper (2006) found that 47 percent of Black male football players graduated within six years compared to 63 percent of their White teammates. Because of these considerable differences in retention and persistence rates many scholars consider the first year of college an advantageous time for institutions to implement policy and further support incoming freshmen classes.

In order to properly delineate the differences between the college freshman student body compared to the first-year student-athlete, I will refer to the general student body freshman as such, and the latter solely as a "first-year student-athlete." My intention in doing so highlights the differences between a college student who is a part of the general student body, who matriculates through college as a freshman, sophomore, junior, and ultimately, a senior,

compared to an incoming first-year student-athlete who may simultaneously identify as a "freshman," and is granted five years of athletic-eligibility-related financial aid to complete their degree(s). Additionally, student-athletes are classified on the basis of their sports eligibility rather than their academic progress (Sanderson & Siegfried, 2015) [see: definitions pg. 139].

Like most freshman college students who transition to college from high school, first-year student-athletes may experience a time of amplified social and emotional disruption. Student-athletes and non-athlete students alike leave familiar surroundings, support systems, and routines back in their hometowns; however, unlike the typical freshman college student, upon their arrival to college first-year student-athletes face a unique set of athletic challenges that their non-athlete counterparts do not. Academically there is a widespread perception in higher education that first-year student-athletes are largely regarded as academically under-qualified in comparison to their non-athlete student peers (Fowler, Sung, & Martyn, 2022), and upon leaving their hometowns a few months earlier than their non-athlete peers, some first-year student-athletes enroll in an accelerated bridge program designed to prepare and challenge incoming student-athletes academically, physically, and mentally (Huml, Bergman, Newell, Hancock, 2019). Further, once the fall semester begins, first-year student-athletes rarely have decision-making power in class scheduling, time management, and academic major choice, which all may hinder their ability to successfully transition to their respective college environments (Gurney, 2009). Moreover, Division-I first-year football players may be the most vulnerable demographic to experience academic and environmental stressors while they transition to college due to the significant number of hours required for practice, training, and athletic preparation. According to a 2013 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) survey of 21,000 student-athletes across all sports and divisions, the majority of them view themselves as more of an athlete than a

student. Division-I, FBS football players reported spending an average of 43 hours a week in football-related activity (Murphy, 2018). Murphy's (2018) data suggest that Division-I, FBS football players balance demanding athletic and academic workloads with a reduced number of hours available to study and create relationships outside of their sport, which other research (McFarlane, 2014) suggests would facilitate positive social integration for Division-I student-athletes. Additionally, due to the significant time that student-athletes spend together, the majority of their social integration occurs within the realm of athletics; thus, first-year student-athletes' ability to be involved in other activities, form relationships with faculty members, and interact with their non-athlete peers at their respective institutions are limited, and can ultimately harm their chances to experience a positive transition to their respective institution (McFarlane, 2014).

The Redshirt Year

Although the term "redshirt" is largely understood in the realm of intercollegiate athletics, the differences between a redshirt-freshman and a true-freshman are important to delineate for this study. Like non-athlete students, first-year student-athletes make the transition to their respective university with freshman academic status (Medley, 2018). While institutions grant the general student body 4-6 years to complete their bachelor's degree, the NCAA grants student-athletes only four years of athletic eligibility. Moreover, a Division-I student-athlete has five years (ten semesters) to complete four years (eight semesters) of athletic competition. The athletic-based rationale for a redshirt-freshman year hinges on a coach's determination that a first-year student-athlete may not contribute to the team's success during their freshman year; thus, the coach has the option to "redshirt" the student-athlete, meaning that they would not be allowed to participate in any official game contests or scrimmages for an entire academic year,

but will be allowed to participate in practices, training sessions, team travel and recreational team activities (Williams, 2019). It is important to note that if a Division-I football player is deemed a "redshirt-freshman," he has the opportunity to stay at his respective university during the six official away contests that his team participates in, pending the coaching staffs' determination that their team would not need, or use, the redshirt-freshman student-athlete for the away contest.

In contrast, if a coach believes that a player can contribute to the team's success in official game contests as a first-year student-athlete, they will have them mentally and physically prepare for and participate in official game contests; therefore, that student-athlete would be athletically considered a "true-freshman." The difference between the true-freshman and the redshirt-freshman ultimately lies in the compounded performance-based stress that comes from having to be prepared to play in official game contests (including traveling to six away contests) in addition to balancing academic, social, and athletic demands.

Recent Policy Changes

The NCAA's mission statement prioritizes the integration of intercollegiate athletics into higher education and the educational experience of student-athletes (NCAA, 2011). As the dominant organization that governs college athletics, the NCAA is able to implement policy undergirded by bylaws which affect each of its member institutions, and subsequently, the student-athletes who attend those institutions. However, as constantly as the landscape of intercollegiate athletics changes, NCAA bylaws and policies undergo change at a slower rate. The NCAA is tasked with simultaneously implementing new rules and changing current policy in order to balance the needs of its member institutions, the needs and well-being of the student-athletes who attend the institutions and stay up to date with the unpredictable landscape of intercollegiate athletics. The rules which govern all NCAA sports are created through a member-

led governance system where new legislation is proposed and voted on to be implemented in the following calendar year. Once any old legislation is altered and new legislation is implemented, the NCAA releases an updated annual policy manual for Division-I, Division-II, and Division-III universities, respectively, to use as a set of guidelines to operate in alignment with the policies for that given year. Constant policy change shows that, although the NCAA has been highly criticized for its rigidity and "cartel-like" regulation patterns (Sanderson & Siegfried, 2018), the NCAA is willing to change, albeit minimally, and prioritize the student-athlete experience.

Although it is unclear whether the prioritization of the educational experience of student-athletes was prioritized when the NCAA created bylaw 12.8.3.1.6 in the 2020-2021 Division-I NCAA policy manual, one could surmise that there may be academic and/or athletic benefits. The bylaw states that football student-athletes who represent a Division-I institution may compete in up to four official game contests in a season without "using" a season of competition/eligibility. In other words, freshmen football players who enter college could play in up to four official game contests and still maintain their redshirt status. This bylaw grants a football student-athlete the opportunity to compete in official game contests his first year, and perhaps if he only plays in four contests, could also earn a "fifth-year" of athletic and academic eligibility, which may benefit not only the student-athlete, but perhaps the team he plays for.

As it pertains to the theme of prioritizing the academic experience of the student-athlete, bylaws 12.02.13.2 and 12.3.1.2 in the 2020-2021 NCAA Division-I policy manual describe the adopted and revised term "academic redshirt" (NCAA, 2020). Essentially, student-athletes who are academic redshirts may not compete during their first year of full-time college enrollment, but will still receive athletic scholarship during that time in addition to participating in team activities (i.e., practice, team meals, study hall) during their first semester (Ingram, 2019). Once

the student-athlete has demonstrated academic success during their transition to college, which the NCAA's sees as completing nine credit hours, the student-athlete will no longer be considered an academic redshirt and will continue to act as an active student-athlete, part of the team and the institution.

Further, the NCAA's nine-hour rule, another policy that keeps the mission of education central to the student-athlete experience, lists specific requirements for football players in bylaw 14.4.3.1.6; in short, a Division-I football student-athlete who does not complete at least nine semester hours during the fall term should not be eligible to compete in the first four official game contests in the following season (NCAA, 2020). The fabric that intertwines bylaws 12.8.3.1.6 (four-game redshirt), 12.02.13.2 and 12.3.1.2 (academic redshirt), and 14.4.3.1.6 (nine-hour rule) show that the academic success and overall student-athlete experience is a pertinent topic for the NCAA. There is no greater self-proclaimed advocate for the student-athlete experience than the NCAA itself, where central to their mission statement is the goal of enriching the student-athlete experience and maintaining the educational experience of student-athletes (NCAA, 2011).

In 2015, Jim Delany, the former commissioner of the Big-Ten conference and long-time proponent of freshmen ineligibility, suggested that college athletics thought leaders should consider a "year of readiness" for freshmen across all Division-I athletics (Hinnen, 2015). Before he sparked the national conversation, and due to the implications that a proposed "year of readiness" would have on college athletics, Delany consulted with leaders affiliated with every Big-Ten institution. Additionally, John Swofford, former commissioner of the ACC, also voiced his support for a year of readiness for freshmen student-athletes during their transition to college, suggesting that due to the ever-changing intercollegiate athletics model and landscape,

everybody is trying to reform the student-athlete experience, and in order to properly balance academics and athletics, an array of policies and reforms should be considered (Hinnen, 2015). The statement, released by the Big-Ten conference and its affiliates, unanimously decided that prior to any reform or policy change, the NCAA's thought leaders should be prepared for meaningful discussions at the 2016 National Convention regarding a year of readiness and student-athlete welfare issues. Since the Big-Ten released that statement, Jim Delany retired in 2020, John Swofford retired in 2021, and little traction for a "year of readiness" has taken hold.

Recent policy reform and conversations amongst leaders within intercollegiate athletics suggests that the "redshirt" conversation is, at the very least, happening at the highest levels within the NCAA; however, the effects that the redshirt-freshman year has on student-athletes' college experience has seldom been researched. The NCAA's mission statement suggests that their goal as an organization is to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education and ensure that the student-athlete's educational experience is paramount (NCAA, 2011). Higher education scholar-practitioners and stakeholders in intercollegiate athletics have a responsibility to ensure that every student who takes part in the college student-athlete experience is protected and understood. Research on the transition experiences for Black Division-I football players as it pertains to the redshirt-freshman year, and the effects of the redshirt-freshman year on Black Division-I freshman football players during their transition to college will fill a gap in literature and provide deeper insight to NCAA policy makers and thought leaders on the phenomenon.

Environment

Elite public, private, and state flagship universities are disproportionally represented amongst US colleges whose students, faculty, and staff are researching their institution's histories of involvement with slavery (Harris, 2020). At southern colleges, which make up more

than half of the 70 institutions that have begun regularly addressing their history with the enslavement of people of African descent, regrettable histories, and toxic cultures embedded in the foundation of a university can present challenges for non-White students (Harris, 2020). Benton (2001) reaffirms this notion and suggests that, especially at institutions where the ratio of White/Black students leans heavily toward the former, it is critical to understand that Black students may enroll at a PWI and interpret the environment as invalidating or hostile. Efforts by United States colleges to recognize, acknowledge, and apologize for their institutions' involvement in proslavery ideologies, discrimination, and racism have become regular practice in the 21st century. The most popular actions, the memorialization of indentured servants and slaves and/or a formal apology, have become the primary strategy for institutions and their leaders to address their history with slavery and to mend relations with faculty, staff, student body, and community members (Harris, 2020; Wilder, 2013).

The acknowledgement of an institution's relationship to slavery and racism is an important first step for institutions to take in order for all members of the student body to feel safe and included. For instance, the PWI where I conducted my research is located in the southeastern United States and has historical connections to the enslavement of African Americans. In acknowledging the racist ideologies on which the university was founded, the leaders of the university have offered apologies, public statements, and invested in memorials throughout the campus. Although public apologies and memorials dedicated to the enslaved people who built an institution may offer a representation that the administration denounces a university's history with racist ideologies, that commemoration does not address the lopsided faculty, staff, and student body demographics that exist at PWIs, especially in the southern United States.

At the institution where I conducted my research, those who identify as African American/Black make up the minority of the student-body, faculty, and administrative positions, whereas that same demographic makes up the majority of the football and men's basketball rosters. Benton (2001) suggests that demographics which heavily favor the non-Black population may lead to Black students not feeling comfortable on their own campuses. Additionally, Black students have also reported feelings of alienation, marginalization, isolation, and a lack of support by their peers and faculty members at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2008). The racial composition of the faculty has been noted as a characteristic which has the potential to enhance Black students' (including student-athletes) sense of belonging (Cooper & Dougherty, 2015).

Athletically, the institution where I conducted my research is a Division-I, FBS university. Of the 130 Division-I, FBS schools, only 65 schools, predominantly public flagships and AAU institutions, make up the Power Five conferences, a group of institutions across the five major athletic conferences that possess the largest budgets in collegiate athletics (Cramer, 2016). As an FBS and Power Five affiliate, the athletic and academic pressures to succeed for student-athletes are compounded with the expectations to properly acclimate to new social and academic environments.

With the unique historical, academic, social, and athletic context of the institution where I conducted my research, further examination into the experiences of Black Division-I football players as they redshirt during their first year of college at a PWI will highlight important themes and experiences of an oppressed and exploited demographic (Nocera & Strauss, 2018) within intercollegiate athletics.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players related to their redshirt-freshman year, and to explore the perceived effects the redshirt-freshman year has on Black Division-I football players at a PWI from a qualitative, phenomenological research perspective. By applying Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) transition theory, Schlossberg's (2011) four S's system for coping with transition through the lens of critical race theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), this study highlights the perceived effects that a redshirt-freshman year has on Black Division-I football players as they transition to a PWI. The transition experience from high school to college, as evaluated by Schlossberg's (1995) four S's methodology (i.e., self, situation, supports, strategies), suggests that the challenges Black Division-I football players may face as they arrive to a PWI will vary based on each individual's life experiences before, and during their transitions (Schlossberg, 2011).

Critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) challenges mainstream notions of racism and racial power in American society (Donnor, 2005), and in this case, institutions of higher education. Cooper and Cooper (2015) introduced critical race methodology in higher education as a tool that includes, empowers, and allows researchers to gain further understanding of the experience of people of color in the U.S. higher education system. Research (Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Harper et al., 2009: Harper et al. 2015; Williams, 2019) acknowledges that racism is deeply embedded in American society and majority narratives silence the truths of minorities. For this study, CRT will serve as a lens for data analysis for focusing on the experiences and voices of a marginalized population in an environment where people of color's voices are largely silenced and disregarded (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Moreover, CRT will also be utilized to

gain a deeper understanding of the exploitation and devaluation of Black Division-I football players on PWI campuses as it pertains to race and racism.

Schlossberg (1995) posits that the experience of each individual undergoing life-transition is different. For Black Division-I football players transitioning to a PWI, research (Cooper & Dougherty, 2015; Steinfeldt, Reed, & Steinfeldt, 2010) shows that their experiences will likely be impacted by the permanence of racism and perceptions of race. To further examine the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players during their redshirt-freshman year and illuminate the perceived effects that a redshirt-freshman year has on their transition to a PWI, this study was undergirded by two research questions, offered in the following section.

Research Questions

This study aimed to illuminate the voices of the participants by utilizing Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) transition theory to gain a deeper understanding of the transition experiences that Black Division-I football players have with redshirting, and the perceived effects that the redshirt-freshman year have on Black Division-I football players as they transition to a PWI. The following research questions guided this study.

RQ1: What are the perceived academic and athletic transition experiences of Black Division-I football players with redshirting?

RQ2: What are the perceived academic and athletic effects of the redshirt-freshman year experienced by Black Division-I football players?

Theoretical Framework

It is necessary to explore the transition process of the Black Division-I football student-athlete through their first year in college to better understand the redshirt process and the perceived effects that redshirting has on the Black male student-athlete. Schlossberg's (2011)

transition theory shapes this study, as it was developed to study adult development through life transitions. Schlossberg (2011) states that everyone experiences life transitions, and rather than the transition itself being the critical component of a person's experience, the impacts on the person during and after the transition are key components to further understanding how transitions can alter one's roles, relationships, routines, and life assumptions. Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory provides a strong foundation to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black Division-I football players with redshirting, and the perceived effects that the redshirt-freshman year have on them as they transition to a PWI.

Transition Theory

Schlossberg's transition theory was initially developed to study adult development through life transitions (Schlossberg, 2011). According to Schlossberg (2011), transition experiences can be analyzed by the surrounding factors that affect a person experiencing transition, such as anticipation of the transition, preparation for the transition, individual life experiences, and available support throughout the transition. The different types of transitions that someone can experience are "anticipated" or "expected" transitions, such as graduating from high school; "unanticipated" transitions, or the disruptive events that occur unexpectedly, such as a car accident; or "nonevent" transitions, defined as the expected events that fail to occur, such as not receiving an expected promotion (Schlossberg, 2011). The more a transition alters routine, surroundings, and familiarity, the more significant the impact on the individual (Schlossberg, 1981). Additionally, the individual's perception of the transition may be just as important as the transition itself (Schlossberg, 1981). Because significant life-transitions are characterized by altered familiarity in relationships, beliefs, or roles, the individual experiencing a significant life transition may experience some form of marginality (Schlossberg, 1989). In relation to a life-

transition, marginality may elicit feelings about not mattering within an environment (Schlossberg, 1989). Further, the concept of marginality during transitions can be useful to understand someone who is never quite willing to separate themselves from the relationships, beliefs, or roles from their past; thus, the marginalized person is unable to accept the new society or environment to which they transition (Schlossberg, 1989). Further, no two individuals experience a given transition the same way; therefore, it is important to note that demographics and previous life-experiences can influence an individual's life-transitions (Schlossberg, 1981; Williams, 2019).

To gain a further understanding of an individual's development through life-transitions, Schlossberg offers the four S's system (2011). The four S's include (1) the self, (2) the situation, (3) the supports, and (4) the strategies. These established variables of life-transitions can be analyzed to understand whether someone is more likely to experience a positive life-transition (Schlossberg, 2011).

Most research that utilizes Schlossberg's (1995) four S's system for coping with transition is applied in education settings (Browne, Webb, & Bullock, 2018; Fuller, 2014; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; McCoy, 2014). Additionally, the four S's have been applied to further understand career transitions (Bundy, 2004), veteran transitions (Griffin, & Gilbert, 2015; Recinos, 2016; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011), and professional athlete transition out of sport (Flowers, Luzynski, & Zamani-Gallaher, 2014; Gordon & Lavallee, 2011). Additionally, Williams' (2019) research focuses on the transition experiences of Division-I, Black male basketball student-athletes as they transferred laterally from initial to receiving institutions to more thoroughly understand the issues of the mandatory graduate-transfer redshirt policy and the perceived benefits or shortcomings that are related to the mandatory redshirting experience. That study not

only found transition theory to be a useful framework to examine transition experiences of Black male Division-I student-athletes, but also concluded that the NCAA's mandatory redshirt policy had significant impacts on the Black male Division-I basketball players that Williams (2019) interviewed. Further, Williams' (2019) research supports the need for further evaluation of the transition experiences for Black student-athletes in different sports and other demographics of student-athletes as they transition to college, and specifically to PWIs.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is highlighted by being one of only two explorations into Black Division-I athletes' experiences with redshirting. The other (Williams, 2019) illuminated the perspectives of Black Division-I men's basketball players during the mandatory graduate-transfer redshirting process. This will be the first known study to highlight the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players in relation to redshirting, and the perceived effects that come from a redshirt-freshman year during their transition to a PWI. Results of this study will have immediate implications for the rules and guidelines for the NCAA and athletic departments and could influence the way athletic departments and universities implement support programs for minoritized students and student-athletes. The information and themes derived from this study will help athletic support staff (e.g., coaches, athletic trainers, academic advisors) and assist in more inclusive programs and care for this demographic of student-athletes. Lastly, the unique institutional structure, academic culture, social context, and the consequential history of slavery at the institution where I conducted my research adds significant implications for higher education practicitioners and stakeholders in intercollegiate athletics as they pertain to race and racism.

Limitations and Delimitations

Like all studies, this study is not without limitations (Simon & Goes, 2013). The following section outlines both the limitations and delimitations of this study. Limitations are occurrences in a study that are out of the control of the researcher; whereas delimitations of a study are incidences that arise from conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions made by the researcher during the development of the study plan (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Limitations

Limitations in qualitative studies are related to validity and reliability (Simon & Goes, 2013). Limitations in this study are related to the generalizability, transferability, sample population, and researcher-bias. Because this study is conducted qualitatively, the results are not generalizable to all Black Division-I football players who redshirt during their transition to college. Additionally, transferability, the ability to transfer research findings or methods from one group to another, is particularly difficult in qualitative research, as every setting, individual, and experience may be unique from the last (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Lastly, research-bias, commonly understood as any influence that may distort a study, is present in this study, as I am a White, male, former NCAA Division-I football player who experienced a redshirt-freshman year as I arrived to college at a PWI (Galdas, 2017).

Delimitations

The first delimiting step that a researcher takes is the choice of problem. Due to the reality that there were other problems in the same field that I could have chosen but purposefully screened off in order for this study to accomplish this research's purpose (Simon & Goes, 2013), the choice of problem is a delimiting factor. The purpose of this study is specific to Black Division-I football players at a four-year PWI who experienced a redshirt-freshman year. This

study will not incorporate the first-hand experiences of redshirt-freshman in their first year of college; rather, the research will focus on sophomore, junior, senior, and redshirt-senior student-athletes as they reflect on their experience with redshirting during their first year in college. Research (Henderson, 2013) shows that student-athletes may not be able to accurately reflect on their experiences while they are in moments of transition; therefore, I interviewed participants who reflected on their transition experiences as it pertains to redshirting, and granted participants a better opportunity to accurately consider their perceptions of their redshirt-freshman experiences during their transition to college.

The decision to focus solely on the experiences of Black Division-I football players and their experiences with redshirting at a PWI is related to how exploited this demographic is in the context of higher education. Although the demographics of Power Five football rosters are made up of 46 percent Black and 37 percent White student-athletes (NCAA, 2019) (17 percent of Power Five football student-athletes identify as “other”), the educational experiences of Black Division-I football players at predominantly White institutions is significantly under researched.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

On August 23, 2020, 29-year-old Jacob Blake, a Black man, was leaning into his SUV as a police officer fired seven bullets at him from point blank range, killing Mr. Blake in front of his three children. In wake of that incident, Doc Rivers, the head coach for the Los Angeles Clippers at the time, delivered a profound statement from the confines of the National Basketball Association (NBA) COVID-19 "bubble" during the Clippers playoff run: "It's amazing why we keep loving this country and this country does not love us back" (Greif, 2020). This sentiment largely undergirds the history and experiences of Black men and women in the United States. When Black Americans may feel that progress is being made, reminders, stark or subtle, repeatedly suggest that the priorities of the United States are not aligned with wholeheartedly uplifting the Black race. Rather, consistent instances of injustice, unfairness, and oppression stain the Black experience in America today. Research would support the notion that the Black male experience in higher education also mirrors the Black experience in America as a whole. More specifically, exploitation of the Black Division-I football player, especially at predominantly White institutions (PWI), suggests that the emphasis of the NCAA and Power Five conferences is not on the well-being of the athlete, but rather on the generation of massive revenue.

In order to properly frame this study around the underrepresented perspectives of Black Division-I football players as they transition to a predominantly White institution during their redshirt-freshman year, the following literature review is divided into four sections: a) a contemporary look at the Black male experience in higher education; b) the challenges of being a

Black male student-athlete in higher education today; c) the first-year transition to college for the general student body, in addition to the student-athlete population in higher education; and d) the history, purposes, and changes to redshirting policy in the NCAA.

Black Males in Higher Education

The experience of Black male students in higher education is largely plagued by distress, subordination, oppression, and educational inferiority (Harper, 2009). While young Black men are shuffled through the educational enterprise as they transition to their new college surroundings, it is important to note that Black males experience the highest level of underachievement in higher education compared to their non-Black peers (Brooms, 2018). Further, national data (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) show that 34 percent of Black males graduate from four-year higher education institutions over a six-year period, which stands as the lowest degree attainment rate for all races and genders. Additionally, Black male college students may experience stereotyping and racial microaggressions on their campuses, in their social circles, and in public spaces around their university (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Although the college experience can be challenging for all students who enroll at institutions of higher education, the experience of the Black male in higher education is marked by challenges that other races and genders may not face. The compounded challenges that this demographic faces can create an unusually challenging transition to, and through college, especially in regard to their academic and social experiences.

Academic Success

In the current labor market, holding a bachelor's degree has become a growing necessity for the realization of upward social mobility – a core tenet of the American dream (Klor de Alva, 2019). Those who hold a bachelor's degree in the United States can expect lifetime earnings

upwards of 74 percent higher than their peers who hold only a high school diploma, and 31 percent more than workers who hold an associate degree (Klor de Alva, 2019). Although Black males have made significant progress in enrolling in higher education over the past decade, this group continues to experience lower graduation rates compared to their ethnic peers (Daugherty-Brown, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Washington, 2019). Additionally, upon their arrival to college, researchers (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009) have found that Black undergraduate men are less prepared for the rigors of college-level academic work (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012) and attain undergraduate degrees at the lowest rates of any race or gender (34 in 2010) (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

The popular narrative that Black males are at a preparation, accessibility, and achievement deficit in higher education persists (Washington, 2019). However, Harper's (2012) research highlights the notion that if certain persons, policies, programs, and resources are in place for Black males in higher education, degree attainment and successful social acclimatization are ultimately possible. This pivotal research runs counter to the exhaustive body of literature that highlights a lack of success for Black males in higher education. To gain further insight about how Black males can maximize their experiences in college, Harper and Kuykendall (2012) conducted 219 interviews with Black college-aged men with an emphasis on students' pre-college experiences and the role that family, peers, and friends played in their aspiration to attain a higher education. It should be noted that administrators (provosts, deans of students, directors of multicultural affairs, etc.) from each of the 42 colleges that participated in the study specifically identified stellar social and academic performers. These were individuals who had earned cumulative grade point averages (GPA) above 3.0, established records of leadership and engagement in student organizations, and who had earned numerous merit-based

scholarships and honors in recognition of their college achievements. It was also the case that a diverse cohort was represented in the sample, such as a diversity of family structures (single parent, two parent, other care giver), socioeconomic statuses, mother/father's highest education, and undergraduate majors (Harper, 2012).

Studies that focus on solely the deficits of Black males' success in higher education can be harmful and contribute to negative stereotypes that already exist. Harper's (2012) study provides a counternarrative to the stereotypically poor experiences of Black males in higher education. Specifically, this research underscores that with proper support, policies, and persons in place for Black male's degree attainment and successful social acclimatization are possible.

Social Acclimatization

In addition to academic challenges that Black male undergraduates face during their experience in higher education, research (Brooms, 2018; Harper, 2013; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014) also notes challenges related to Black males' social acclimatization as they arrive to college, including social isolation, social integration, and lack of institutional agents. Participating in campus activities during their college experiences has a positive impact on Black male student involvement and academic success (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2016); however, Black undergraduate males may also face unwelcoming and hostile campus climates as well as racial microaggressions, racism, inequalities, and various forms of discrimination during their educational experience (Clark & Brooms, 2018). Positive social acclimatization is integral for Black males during their college experience because enhancing the climate that Black males experience during college can have a significant impact on how their experience is shaped (Strayhorn, 2012; Wood & Palmer, 2015) and, ultimately, whether they persist (Clark & Brooms, 2018). For instance, Clark and Brooms' (2018) research confirm that Black males' engagement

and leadership on campus influence their peer bonding, identity, and personal development. Further, the connections that Black males make with their peers can enhance their sense of belonging, increase their sociocultural capital, and reinforce their efforts toward academic and social success (Brooms, 2017; Clark & Brooms, 2018).

Campus Climate

Especially for Black male students who enroll at PWIs, the visceral feeling of racism on college campuses is omnipresent (Linley, 2018). The trickle-down effect of structural and systemic oppression that is embedded in the cultural norms of institutions within higher education suggests that most college campuses may not feel welcoming for Black undergraduate males (Jenkins, 2006). Because structural racism and various forms of mistreatment mire their educational experiences on college campuses, when Black men are able to establish meaningful relationships to mentors and peers it contributes to a sense of belonging and ultimate success at PWIs (Brooms, 2017; Strayhorn, 2012).

The underlying characteristic of developing meaningful relationships and an affirmed sense of belonging on campus are two integral aspects of Black Male Initiative programs (BMI). BMIs and other Black male student involvement programs emphasize the positive impact that campus activities can have on college experiences, and simultaneously highlight how essential campus engagement is to a sense of belonging (Clark & Brooms, 2018). In a 2018 study of 23 Black men and their experiences in an institutional Black Male Initiative (BMI) program, Clark and Brooms (2018) found that a sense of community and social engagement had buffering effects on potentially overwhelming ideas and feelings of social isolation, loneliness, and incidents of racism for Black male students. BMIs function to “foster academic and social

integration, student engagement, sense of belonging, and create a welcoming and affirming campus environment for Black men" (Clark & Brooms, 2018, p. 392).

The way that Black males experience BMIs and other organizations that aim to help them achieve retention, a sense of belonging, and persistence in college depends on a plethora of internal and external factors. However, a growing research base (Brooms, 2018; Brooms, 2019; Fullard, 2019) suggests that programs that facilitate a sense of belonging and allow Black males to develop meaningful relationships can positively influence their experience in college. Moreover, gaining a deeper understanding of programs and policies that could add value to the Black male experience in college, and specifically the Black Division-I football player's experience at a PWI, is integral to ensure that all populations can have a positive experience as they arrive to their respective campuses.

Contextual Influence

Campus climate has long been identified as a major detriment to Black student success at predominantly White institutions (Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). Like other students of color, Black male collegians experience psychological stress and may have a difficult adjustment experience on a predominantly White campus (Harper, 2009). Retention for undergraduates is directly correlated to active engagement in educationally purposeful activities both inside and outside of the classroom; however, Black males are deterred from doing so, especially on predominantly White campuses, and have subsequently been labeled as one of the most disengaged populations on college and university campuses (Harper, 2009). On predominantly White campuses, Strayhorn (2008) notes that Black males' sense of belonging hinges on their interacting with peers from different racial/ethnic groups. With that in mind, Black male undergraduates' individual belongingness is threatened by the constant reinforcement of racist

stereotypes, racial microaggressions, and culturally embedded oppression on predominantly White campuses (Harper, 2009).

Strayhorn and DeVita's (2010) study on the influence of institutional contexts on Black male collegians sought to gain a deeper understanding regarding institutional type and the effects on Black male students' experiences of good practices in undergraduate education. Their study fills an important gap in the literature which surrounds the Black male undergraduate experience, because they delineate specific factors that influence the college experiences of Black men, rather than simply writing on the underachieving demographic. Specifically, the particular type of institution (i.e., master's institution) may be better at creating an environment which facilitates student-to-student interactions with Black male collegians (Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). Strayhorn and DeVita also noted that while the institutional type is important, it rarely plays a role in impacting a student's learning and development; rather, the institutional type acts as a proxy for the ethos that the institution embraces. For example, Black male undergraduates may apply and enroll to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) at higher rates than PWIs; however, if HBCUs fail to provide new strategies, such as research opportunities, faculty-student mentoring programs, and programs specifically designed for Black men (e.g., Student African American Brotherhood [SAAB]), then there is still risk for a negative college experience.

Ultimately, the type of institution can have an influence on Black male collegians' experiences in that the demographic (i.e., race, socioeconomic status, gender, major), may be affected by who is applying to the college and an insufficient sense of belonging at an institution may negatively influence student engagement and one's inclination to persist (Harper, 2006). However, it should also be noted that the culture, programs, and supports that are built to

specifically enhance the Black male undergraduate experience at a university also influence Black male undergraduate student engagement, educational gains, intellectual development, adjustment to college, psychosocial development, and persistence (Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010).

The Black Division-I Male Student-Athlete in Higher Education

Throughout the history of the United States, the Black race has been looked at as an exploitable and expendable population. Since the inception of America, the "Black body" has been related to and characterized by its physical qualities. Specifically, in intercollegiate athletics, the Black body continues to be characterized by its physical qualities and a "what have you done for me lately" mentality. In 1995, Hawkins noted the striking parallels between the Black body in colonial age America, and how Black bodies are exploited in professional and intercollegiate athletics. Hawkins (1995) describes characteristics of slavery and how manual labor represented the model of a developed Black physique that operated under White orders. Hawkins (1995) also noted that the physicality of the Black body in intercollegiate athletics is a natural resource that is exploited, and the emphasis of Blacks as being physically superior is reinforced and perpetuated, further subjecting Black Americans to their own economic exploitation, and reinforcing a vicious cycle that makes it harder for Black collegians to benefit from a quality education during their time as a student-athlete.

Hawkins's (1995) sentiment still holds true for present day professional and intercollegiate athletics. Harper (2012) notes the overrepresentation of Black male student-athletes in revenue-generating intercollegiate sports teams in 2009, as only 3.6 percent of Black males made up the undergraduate population yet represented 55.3 percent of football and basketball players at public Division-I institutions. Since the most recent demographic statistics were published in the NCAA Database in 2020, of the 65 teams that make up the Power Five

conferences, 80 percent of head football coaches are White, and 46 percent of the football teams' rosters are made up of Black men (NCAA Demographics Database, 2020). Additionally, as of 2019, the fifteen highest-grossing football programs amongst the Power Five conferences generated anywhere from $84 million (University of Washington) to $156 million (University of Texas) (Barnett, 2020). These numbers further suggest that the colonialism and exploitation that Hawkins (1995) referred to 25-years ago still exists today; it just looks different.

It should be mentioned that the influx of Black male student-athletes at predominantly White institutions has been referred to as a form of "racial progress," but Lanter and Hawkins (2013) advise that scholars and practitioners in higher education should use this term with caution. The presence of Black male athletes performing at predominantly White institutions, although progressive, reinforces ideologies and historical practices where the Black body is leveraged as a means of production and capitalistic gain (Lanter & Hawkins, 2013). Especially at predominantly White institutions, where a top-25 ranking may make it easier to forget the efforts of racist segregationists and southern conservatives who refused to allow Blacks to attend their institutions, using the term "racial progress" is hardly accurate. Rather, we are witnessing history repeat itself in the 21st century, as Black males make up the majority of the athletic labor force that hauls in hundreds of millions of dollars per year for a largely White ownership, the NCAA, and its affiliated conferences and institutions. The challenges that Black male students face as they transition to their college environment are many; additionally, a myriad of challenges, pressure, and scrutiny surface when the Black male student also participates in Division-I athletics during their tenure in college.

Revenue-Generating Division-I Sports

Athletics are key social institutions in American society that have implications on the economy, politics, education, and other important spheres of everyday life. Especially at institutions of higher education, where, as a means of upward mobility, institutions' missions should reflect the prioritization of preparing their students for a future beyond their campuses. For Black male student-athletes, the reality of their futures beyond their respective college campus being prioritized is slim. Beamon (2008) suggests two opposing perspectives that are employed regarding sports' role in the educational development of Black male student-athletes: a) athletics serves as the vehicle which provides educational opportunities to Blacks from underprivileged backgrounds that may otherwise not be available, and b) major Division-I revenue-generating sports have exploited the majority of Black male athletes.

When Yale and Harvard met in the first intercollegiate athletic contest in 1852, a rowing regatta, no one would have guessed that universities would increasingly leverage the commercialization of their athletics programs to generate massive revenue, increase visibility, and recruit students for years to come. The terms "non-revenue-generating" and "revenue-generating" sports in collegiate athletics have been coined as a means to decipher what programs account for the majority of their respective athletic department's budget. Not to say that non-revenue-generating sports don't sell tickets or merchandise, but the platform that revenue-generating sports has in the realm of athletics has become increasingly vast. Harper (2006) suggests that revenue-generating sports, namely football and men's basketball, serve as the primary contributors to athletic departments' budgets because these two sports garner the most media attention (which subsequently generates the largest television contracts and sponsorships),

attracts the most fans (who pay for tickets and often donate to the institution's athletic department), and yields revenue from merchandise sales.

In present-day, Power Five, revenue-generating athletics has drawn comparisons to professional athletics, and as the platform for Power Five football and men's basketball teams grow, the distinctions between these amateur revenue-generating sports and professional sports have become increasingly blurred. In the past 10 years, as Power Five conferences have reshaped their strategy to televise games through lucrative TV contracts, TV networks such as ESPN, FOX, and CBS have orchestrated a combined $1.4B contract with the NCAA to televise an allotted number of games. The aforementioned $1.4B contract does not include the additional 12-year, $5.6B contract that ESPN has to televise the College Football Playoff (Ozanian, 2020).

Exploitation. Beamon's (2006) research conducted on Black males who were former Division-I student-athletes aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which they felt their universities emphasized their education as opposed to their athletic performance. Of the athletes he interviewed, feelings of being "used," "used up," "used and abused," and "used goods" were consistent, especially for those athletes who were competing in revenue-generating sports at Division-I institutions. While athletics have opened doors both educationally and economically for a myriad of African Americans, 90 percent of the participants from Beamon's (2006) study noted that universities were reaping far greater benefits than the student-athletes themselves.

Due to the revenue generation that Division-I football and men's basketball brings to the NCAA and its member institutions, scholars (Southall, Eckard, Nagel, & Randall, 2015) use the term "profit-athletes" to describe the Black, male, revenue-generating student-athlete population. It is important to note that every single one of the 65 Power Five institutions' student populations

is predominantly White. Additionally, in 2015 the Black male student population at the majority of PWIs was less than 10 percent, whereas their football and men's basketball rosters are overwhelmingly comprised of Black athletes (Southall et al., 2015). Further, of the 65 Power Five institutions, Black men made up 2.4 percent of the total undergraduate population, 55 percent of the football rosters, and 56 percent of the basketball rosters (Hill, 2019).

Metaphors to accurately depict the relationship between the Black, male, revenue-generating athlete at PWIs have been compared to neocolonial models (Hawkins, 2010) and company town metaphors (Southall & Weilder, 2014). Both metaphors detail the manner in which these "profit-athletes" have to migrate to PWI "work sites" in order to exchange their athletic labor for short-lived sport opportunities (Southall et al., 2015). Either way, the exploitation of this demographic is clear and draws stark similarities to colonialism, slavery, and indentured servitude in America: Black labor, White ownership and profit.

First-Year Transition to College

First-year students who are transitioning from high school to college can be particularly vulnerable to stress and adversity (Dvořáková, Kishida, Li, Elavsky, Broderick, Agrusti, & Greenberg, 2017). The importance of understanding the first-year transition of these students is integral to gaining deeper knowledge of how Black Division-I football players are experiencing their redshirt year during their transition to college. Freshman college students, without the additional stressors of being a Black male student-athlete on a predominantly White campus, still have high rates of mental health concerns, sleep issues, and excessive drinking habits (Dvořáková et al., 2017). Additionally, the abrupt change in social environments and a drop in institutional supports lead to freshmen who report higher levels of chronic stress (Dvořáková et al., 2017). Understanding the complexity of challenges that are associated with the transition

from high school to college for freshman students is critical to further understanding the compounded challenges that Black freshman male student-athletes experience at PWIs during their transition to college.

General Student Body

There is a myriad of challenges that first-year students experience during their transition to college. Mental health struggles, depression in particular, are especially pertinent among college students. Studies report that 75 percent to 80 percent of college students are moderately stressed and 10 percent to 12 percent experience severe levels of stress (Pierceall & Keim, 2007). Significant life changes or transitions may trigger an attachment insecurity in freshmen college students as they move away from familiar surroundings, support, and institutions (Wei, Russell, Zakalik, 2005). Although the first year of college is generally regarded as a positive experience for incoming freshmen students, most freshmen college students experience some form of acute loneliness, isolation, and depression (Wei et al., 2005).

In a longitudinal study to measure whether social self-efficacy and self-disclosure serve as mediators between feelings of loneliness and attachment, Wei et al. (2005) found that social self-efficacy moderately mediated the association between attachment anxiety and subsequent depression during the transition to college. In this context, researchers (Wei et al., 2005) refer to social self-efficacy as an individual's belief that they are capable of initiating social contact and developing new friendships, relationships, and institutions within their new environment. Wei et al.'s (2005) research is integral to the body of literature that exists on the mental challenges that college freshmen experience during their transition to college, because they don't simply add to what we already know about this experience; rather, they address the phenomenon and examine

interpersonal beliefs and skills that may offer mediation between a difficult life transition and feelings of loneliness or depression.

In addition to the mental challenges that are associated with the transition to college for freshmen students, Wengreen and Moncur (2009) also addressed physical challenges that arise during the transition from high school to college. While mental obstacles can change the ways in which individuals perceive their physical environments, and for anyone who experiences a difficult life transition, it is common to revert to comfortable habits which may further perpetuate the cycle of unhealthy behaviors, both mentally and physically. In Wengreen and Moncur's (2009) observational study of 159 students to examine changes in weight, diet, and health-related behaviors during the transition from high school to college, researchers concluded that the transition to college life is a critical period of risk for weight gain. They suggest obesity-prevention strategies should be implemented to prevent the target population from falling into unhealthy habits. Similar to programs, initiatives, and groups that educate and support a targeted population through difficult transitions or experiences during their time in college, Wengreen and Moncur (2009) suggest that targeted information about physical activity and a balanced healthy diet delivered to students during freshmen orientation sessions, in residence halls, and through education in dining facilities may prove to raise awareness and subsequently have a positive impact on transition to college for freshmen students.

Black Students

The body of literature that suggests the transition from high school to college for the general student body is a time characterized by tumultuous challenges is vast; however, challenges are compounded when racial and social stereotypes inhibit a student's ability to properly integrate to their surroundings and build support networks. Being Black in college,

especially at a predominantly White institution, presents unique challenges that non-Black students do not face. On predominantly White campuses, the underrepresentation, cultural incongruence, academic hurdles, and racism that Black students experience all play integral roles in the reasons the transition from high school to college for Black students is especially challenging (Harper, 2015). In addition to that body of literature, scholars (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2015; Palmer et al., 2014; Wilkins, 2014) have studied how race plays an integral role in academic and social integration for educational success and personal well-being. Wilkins's (2014) examination of Black and White first-generation college students' experiences during their transition to college further supports the notion that the way students become integrated into their surroundings is critical for building support networks, maneuver through disruptions during their educational experience, and acquire social and cultural capital needed for persistence and post-collegiate social mobility. Additionally, Black students who transition from high school to college must actively combat prevalent social and racial stereotypes regarding their academic abilities and their racial group affiliations (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007).

In an investigation of how Black undergraduate men respond to and resist the internalization of racist stereotypes at PWIs, Harper (2015) found that his sample of Black male achievers were frequently confronted with stereotypes but were able to resist them through leadership roles, student organization engagement, and confrontation skills. The underlying theme of Harper's (2015) research shows that there are pertinent hurdles that Black students must consciously counteract in order to succeed socially and academically at PWIs. This theme

undergirds Strayhorn's (2009) findings, as Black students described feeling the burden of having to "blend in" at PWIs, a theme described by having their aptitude and belongingness challenged. Strayhorn's (2009) research also runs congruent with Fries-Britt and Turner's (2001)

study, where researchers found that their participants faced negative comments and stereotypes from White peers and instructors about the Black community and were forced to validate their intellectual competence. The assumption that Black students were admitted to the institutions because of affirmative action is a key finding from Fries-Britt and Turner's (2001) research, as this further suggests that the tremendous pressure Black students feel to prove their intellectual competence is valid.

Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) also describe a "proving process," in which successful Black students who experienced peers that reciprocated negative racial stereotypes repeatedly found themselves having to establish their worth academically and outside of the classroom (p. 512). Having to disprove pervasive stereotypes about Black students, especially Black men, is a common theme for Black undergraduate students during their experience in college and especially on predominantly White campuses. Bonner (2001) interviewed a high-achieving Black male at a PWI who reported that he felt pressure to be "ten times as smart as everyone else" (p.11). The transition for first-year college students can be exhausting for the general student body. Compounded with racial stereotypes, a never-ending proving process, and the heightened pressure to properly integrate into a new social and academic environment, being Black during the transition to college compounds the challenges of the general student body with numerous challenges that are unique to the Black student body.

Student-Athletes

Students who choose to participate in intercollegiate athletics will also experience additional challenges related to their commitment to sport. Although research (Otto, Martinez, & Barnhill, 2019) suggests that there are some positive links between athletic participation an academic adjustment for freshmen student-athletes, such as satisfaction, student involvement,

and emotional adjustment. However, athletic participation also has the ability to hinder the adjustment to college for student-athletes for a variety of reasons. Increased time demands, performing in a new environment, balancing athletic and academic commitments, and balancing the dual role of being an athlete and a student are all challenges that freshmen student-athletes face during their transition to college (Comeaux, 2010; Hardin & Pate, 2013; Melendez, 2008). Research by Giacobbi et al. (2004) examined the transition of Division-I freshmen student-athletes and concluded that freshmen student-athletes not only face the stress and challenges associated with meeting athletic demands, but they also balance strenuous academic and social challenges. Similar to the challenges of transitioning into athletic retirement, where athletes typically endure a transitional period of six months to a year to properly adjust to life beyond their sport (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993), student-athletes transitioning from high school to college face a similar timeline to properly acclimate to their new surroundings (Hardin & Pate, 2013).

Similar to Giacobbi et al.'s (2004) findings, researchers (Papanikolaou, Nikolaidis, Patsiaouras & Alexopoulos, 2003) sought to learn more about the high stress that was a common characteristic amongst first-year student-athletes during their transition to college. Specifically, Papanikolaou et al. (2003) found that within the athletic realm, stress during the transition to college stems from the loss of star status, a change in coaching, and the idea of being expendable; whereas the stressors in the academic realm have to do with feelings of being underprepared, lower self-esteem, and a lack of autonomy in decision making (e.g. scheduling classes). The stressors in the academic realm may stem from special admissions of student-athletes through NCAA Bylaw 14-I-6-I-I (NCAA Academic and Membership Affairs Staff, 2012). Some student-athletes enrolled by special admission may require additional preparation and support in order to adjust to the college transition and social and academic demands, as

universities may lower their admissions standards to allow student-athletes to enroll, even though they may not meet standard academic requirements. Subsequently, student-athletes are often under-prepared academically in comparison to the general student population (Hardin & Pate, 2013). Although the lowered admissions standards allow a larger population to have access to higher education, the challenges of the transition from high school to college for student-athletes are amplified due to their lack of academic preparation.

Hardin and Pate's (2013) research on the academic transition of Division-I freshmen football student-athletes presented three themes that student-athletes felt were at the forefront of their first-year experience: a) time management; b) prioritization; and c) guidance (p. 229). Although time management may seem an obvious concern, the challenge is more complex for Division-I football players. To offset the rise in time demands on student-athletes, the NCAA implemented a "20-hour rule" (i.e., football programs may only conduct practices and football-related activities for a maximum of 20 hours per week and no more than four hours per day in-season) in order to allow student-athletes to focus both on their academic and social demands rather than just their athletic commitments (Singer, 2008). However, the "20-hour rule," albeit well-intended, is popularly disregarded and difficult to enforce. As a result, it is common practice for coaching staffs to violate the NCAA's rule (Singer, 2008). Subsequently, student-athletes are put into a position where they must choose between their devotion to their football program or their academic commitments.

The challenges that student-athletes, especially Division-I football players, face during their transition from high school to college involve an increased pressure to succeed academically, to manage their time effectively, to perform in sport at the highest levels, and to acclimate to their surroundings while balancing dual roles as a student and athlete. The

challenges of the transition to college for the general student body are compounded for the Black college student. For Black Division-I football players the transition to PWIs is all the more profound.

Redshirt

The term "redshirting," most commonly used to describe the practice of delaying a child's entry into kindergarten for a year while they mature, has become increasingly popular throughout the American K-12 education system (Bassok & Reardon, 2013). The theory behind a parent delaying their five-year-old one year before they enter kindergarten is grounded in the belief that the extra year will allow their child to experience further cognitive development to match the demands they will face when they enter school (2013). Other researchers (Frey, 2005; Matlack, 2011) suggest that the strategic desire that parents display when they delay their child's entry to kindergarten reflects the sense that they want to ensure their child enters kindergarten older, taller, and with more mature cognitive ability than their child's classmates. Ultimately, the belief that undergirds redshirting in kindergarten is in the potential of an extra year for children to further develop cognitively, socially, and physically.

In the realm of intercollegiate athletics, the term "redshirt" originated in 1937 when Warren Alfson, an offensive lineman who played for the University of Nebraska, asked his coaches to practice but not play with the team; as part of the agreement, Alfson was not issued a jersey number, but rather a blank uniform, and because the team's primary color was red, he was literally "redshirted" (Yandle, 2019). Redshirting for student-athletes can be utilized in a number of ways. For instance, coaches can simply choose to redshirt one of their players; in other words, the coach, for whatever reason (usually because a player is not ready to meaningfully contribute to the team's success), has chosen to withhold a student-athlete from competing for the year,

which subsequently extends the student-athlete's athletic eligibility one extra year on the end of their college careers. This increases the likelihood that the redshirt athlete will contribute meaningfully to the team's success in each of four years of eligibility. The term redshirt can also be used to describe a player or group of players who have suffered significant injuries that enable them to apply for a "medical" redshirt. Medical-redshirt players are those who have forgone the ability to play in official game contests in order to rehabilitate an injury. The term "academic-redshirt" has recently been used by the NCAA for any student-athlete who fails to meet academic requirements (2.3 GPA & 10 core classes) by the start of their senior year in high school. In the case of the academic-redshirt, the student-athlete who fails to meet those requirements is suspended from official game contests during their first year in college until they meet academic progress requirements. The term "redshirt-freshman" is used for first-year student-athletes within intercollegiate athletics who will not participate in official game contests for their first year at their respective institution. The practice of redshirting, both in kindergarten and in intercollegiate athletics, is driven by the same goal; that the individual who garners the redshirt year may benefit from a delay in direct progress through the system.

Whether a kindergartener or a collegiate student-athlete undergoes the practice of redshirting, there is limited research that suggests a year of readiness has the potential to benefit the recipient. In the realm of intercollegiate athletics, there is a dearth of research which examines the potential benefits that the redshirting year has on the student-athlete beyond their athletic and physical progress. Perhaps the traditional viewpoint of the redshirt-freshman year -- pausing a student-athlete's athletic career in order for their bodies and minds to mature so that when the next season comes, the student-athlete will be better equipped to contribute to on-field success -- has put blinders on the way scholar-practitioners, higher education faculty, and

intercollegiate athletics professionals view the redshirt-freshman year. Further, some research (Williams, 2019) has indicated that the practice of redshirting revenue-generating athletes does have intellectual, social, and physical benefits. Additionally, recent conversations in college athletics have proven that the topic is pertinent to the discussion of how to most effectively serve student-athletes and support the NCAA's mission to garner the best student-athlete experience possible (cite the source of the "conversations"). The lack of understanding of the history of the redshirt year and the rationale for the NCAA bylaws governing eligibility that have changed over time, and the scarcity of research on the multiple purposes of the redshirt year, further support the notion that the redshirt year should be further studied as a tool that may benefit student-athletes beyond their sport, not merely a delay in student progress to a degree that contributes to the success of a football program and generates revenue.

History of Redshirting

In the sport of football, you protect your quarterback at all costs, this is the reason the five offensive-lineman, who in addition to run-blocking, are primarily responsible for protecting the quarterback and are generally the largest humans on the football field at any given time. In order to protect the quarterback in inner-squad practices, the practice of literally putting a different color jersey on the quarterback gives a stark reminder to players that says "don't touch," unless the team's primary color is red, the alternate jersey is red. This practice began in the 50's and has continued to modern day athletics, but often coaches will have their quarterbacks put an alternate-colored jersey that doesn't look like their team's traditional jersey color. The meaning of the literal red shirt, "don't touch," draws some literal comparisons with the way redshirting has been utilized in college sports: for the first year, "don't touch," or "don't use" this athlete for their athletic ability.

Until 1972, the NCAA prohibited freshmen from competing in football or basketball (Hyres, 2015). Even after the 70's, where legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden led his teams to 10 national championship victories in his final 12 seasons, Wooden regularly had the freshmen in his program play on the junior varsity team prior to their participation in varsity contests. Wooden understood the value in allowing his players to develop and mature prior to their full participation in varsity basketball contests. Although the focus was on athletics, the sentiment remains that a year of readiness could benefit the student-athlete. In Berry III's (2013) article, he suggested that the NCAA should re-envision the student-athlete model in intercollegiate athletics. Although the article focuses on graduation rates and the structure of the full scholarship in revenue-generating sports, Berry III (2013) also mentions the practice of redshirting student-athletes, specifically in college football programs. His main points for restructuring the student-athlete model in college athletics focuses on how many students take six years to graduate in the first place, the costs to the athletic department to fund scholarships, and that in order to receive a worthwhile education, six years is required for the student-athlete (Berry III, 2013). Due to the reality that a significant number of Division-I football student-athletes experience a redshirt year, the student-athlete will ultimately experience a fifth year in college, whether at their original institution or as a graduate transfer to another institution. Berry III (2013) posits that because the NCAA assumes a six-year academic career for its student-athletes, as they measure graduation rates for Academic Progress Rates (APR) using a six-year metric, the schools could sustainably decrease the student-athlete's academic workload per semester and allow them another year (or two) to complete their undergraduate education.

Framing the Redshirt Year

Medley's (2018) study on the impacts that the redshirt-freshman year has on Division-II men's basketball players suggests that the positive impacts that redshirting can have on college athletes during their transition from high school to college and beyond are noteworthy. Medley (2018) concluded that the male basketball players who experienced a redshirt-freshman year in his study made successful transitions in identity from high school to college. Additionally, results from Medley's (2018) study showed positive social, emotional, academic, and athletic development as a result of the redshirt-freshman year. Specifically, participants in his study who experienced a redshirt year during their transition to college had higher graduation rates than those who did not redshirt (Medley, 2018). Although Medley's (2018) research is notable, he sought to understand whether the redshirt-freshman year has positive effects in a variety of developmental areas (e.g., identity, social, emotional, academic, athletic). He also notes that there are additional independent variables which exist in each of the areas that may have influenced his participants' development. For instance, solely studying whether the influence of a redshirt year was responsible for the positive athletic development of a men's college basketball player is shortsighted. The player could have had great coaches and teammates, amongst other influential factors that could have a positive effect on his athletic development. Medley (2018) effectively addressed the presence of other independent variables that may play a part in the positive identity, social, emotional, academic, and athletic development of his participants, while giving credit to the redshirt-freshman year. That is to say, both the redshirt-freshman year and other influences simultaneously play a role in the transition to college, the first year of college, and the overall college experience of student-athletes.

The positive impacts that the redshirt-freshman year can have on intercollegiate student-athletes are highlighted in Medley's (2018) work. However, his participants were Division-II men's basketball players. There is reason to expect that the fundamental experiences of the transition to college, identity challenges, and the myriad of responsibilities and commitments that come into play when a student-athlete first arrives at their campus may be different in the Division-I, Power Five level of football, the most competitive and commercialized arena in intercollegiate athletics. In congruence with Medley's (2018) study, Williams' (2019) suggests that the mandatory redshirt year for Black Division-I graduate transfer men's basketball players also has positive impacts for academic, social, and athletic development during their transition to the receiving institution. Although all 15 participants in Williams's (2019) study recognized advantages they received from the redshirt year, only three of the participants expressed support for the redshirt year. The contrast in positive experiences related to the redshirt year and the overall lack of support for the redshirt year in prior research is notable, as Williams (2019) suggests that the specific needs of her participants (Black Division-I student-athletes) were not being met during their graduate transfer redshirt year. Based on Williams's (2019) research, for Black Division-I graduate transfer men's basketball players, the redshirt year could have positive impacts, yet the population still fails to experience an overall inclusive and positive transition due to their position in their communities and on their university campuses. The findings for both Medley's (2018) and Williams's (2019) studies suggest that while certain groups may benefit from the redshirt year, there is still much to be discovered about the phenomenon.

The relationship between redshirting and academic performance for college student-athletes has been a subject of prior research (McArdle & Hamagami, 1994; Wilkes, 2014). McArdle & Hamagami (1994) used redshirting as an independent variable to understand the

relationship between redshirting and student-athlete academic performance. Wilkes (2014) suggested that although the study compiled by McArdle and Hamagami (1994) showed that redshirting had a positive and significant effect on graduation rates, the study failed to address potential bias and other variables that also may play a role in the student-athlete's academic experience. Wilkes (2014) concluded that redshirting can potentially be used as a device for improving graduation rates for college football players. Wilkes (2014) questioned the nature of cause and effect between redshirting and academic success. For instance, the little research that has been conducted on the relationship between academic success and redshirting solely seeks to discover how student-athletes perform academically once they are redshirted (i.e. the coach determines the student-athlete will redshirt based on athletic ability). In contrast, if incoming academic ability is used as the determining factor in redshirting a student-athlete during their first year, the redshirt-freshman year is subsequently reframed as a tool that may facilitate academic performance.

In addition to the social, academic, and athletic benefits that redshirt-freshman could experience during their transition to college, the opportunities for post-graduate education are also notable. In Haslerig's (2020) phenomenological study exploring the academic trajectories of Division-I Football players who completed post-baccalaureate coursework prior to the exhaustion of their athletic eligibility, participants noted that the opportunity to pursue graduate studies was a pleasant surprise and found that they were able to capitalize on the opportunity. Given that some athletes in revenue-generating Division-I sports can over-identify with their sport, the relationship between a first-year redshirt and the potential for future academic benefits deserves additional consideration (Haslerig, 2020). This research adds to the literature that frames the redshirt year as an academic opportunity that has the potential to re-center a student-

athlete's academic identity and reduce psychological stressors associated with athletic performance, injury, and athletic identity.

Current Climate

The scarcity of research that focuses solely on the impacts a redshirt year may have on collegiate student-athletes is troubling. As a result, the potential positive influences the year may offer the recipient may not be realized, and the continuous consideration the NCAA and its member institutions are placing on the redshirt year is not yet effectively addressed in research. The few recent studies (Medley, 2018; Williams, 2019) that have been conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how college student-athletes are affected by a "year of readiness," as former Big-Ten commissioner Jim Delany refers to a redshirt year, is compelling evidence that the current climate of redshirting and the subsequent effects the year can have on those who experience it should be further researched. Although there are far fewer academic articles and proper research studies conducted on the impacts of redshirting than there are internet articles written on the topic, the fact that the NCAA, leaders within the NCAA, and member institutions are discussing and changing redshirting policies shows that the year is worth investing attention and time toward.

Summary of Literature

Black male student-athletes in revenue-generating sports endure unique encounters with discrimination during their college experience; additionally, this population faces isolation, integration challenges, and racial barriers which can have negative effects on a positive college adjustment and overall experience (Steinfeldt, Reed, & Steinfeldt, 2010). Especially in the case of the Black Division-I football player who attends a predominantly White institution, the ability of the student-athlete to successfully transition from high school to college and be prepared to

endure a myriad of challenges while balancing full-time academic and athletic commitments is paramount. Ultimately, the aforementioned literature highlights the pertinence of further examination into the effects that a redshirt-freshman year can have on Black Division-I football players as they transition to a predominantly White institution. In doing so, the purpose of this study is to explore the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players during their redshirt year and the effects of the redshirt-freshman year perceived by Black Division-I football players.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived effects that the redshirt-freshman year has on Black Division-I football players' transitions to a predominantly White institution (PWI). The location of this study was assigned the pseudonym "State University" to prioritize confidentiality. The specific population was chosen due to the academic, social, and cultural challenges that Black Division-I football players face during their transition to college and especially to a predominantly White institution's campus. By applying Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) transition theory as the theoretical framework and Schlossberg's (2011) four S's system for coping with transition, the intention of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players who experienced a redshirt-freshman year during their transition to college. Three tenets of critical race theory (CRT); interest-convergence, counter-storytelling, and permanence of racism, were utilized as a lens for data analysis in order to gain a deeper understanding of my participants' experiences during their redshirt-freshman year as it pertained to race and racism (Cooper and Cooper, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007).

Research Questions

The following research questions are grounded in Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory and guided this study:

RQ1: What are the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players with redshirting?

RQ2: What are the perceived effects of the redshirt-freshman year experienced by Black Division-I football players?

Research Design

Qualitative research seeks to explore and further understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, qualitative research is holistic and often involves a rich collecting of data to further understand individual participants, including opinions, perspectives, and attitudes (Nassaji, 2015). This study implemented a qualitative research methodology to gain further insight on the experiences of Black Division-I football players who have experienced a redshirt-freshman year during their transition to a PWI. Due to the explorative nature of qualitative research and its procedures, a qualitative research methodology perfectly suited this study and allowed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the redshirt-freshman year and the perceived impacts that the redshirt-freshman year had on Black Division-I football players who are transitioned to a PWI.

Qualitative research methodology has been successfully implemented in athletics before, as Ronkainen, Kavoura, and Ryba (2016) utilized phenomenological approaches to gain a deeper understanding of athletic identify in sport psychology. Additionally, qualitative methodologies have been utilized to further explore Black collegiate athletes' perceptions of athletic career transitions, that is, transferring out of a collegiate athletic career and into a professional career (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Regarding the many research designs that exist within qualitative research, the five approaches to qualitative inquiry that Creswell and Poth (2018) describe are heavily utilized in qualitative inquiry because they are popular across social and health sciences. The five recommended types of qualitative inquiry designs include narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon described by the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological approaches involve a return to experience with a priority placed on the value of the description and the conveyance of the essences of the lived experiences which, in turn, inform future practice (Randles, 2012). The "essences of the experience" are referred to by Randles (2012) as the starting points for an understanding of each phenomenon. Therefore, in order to further explore the lived experiences of Black Division-I football players during their redshirt-freshman year at a PWI, phenomenology served as an applicable methodology to understand the essences of this phenomenon. Further, an ongoing, emergent approach was utilized during data collection in order to facilitate my connection with the data and make decisions about data needs based on what information was derived from my participants (Williams, 2008).

Phenomenological Research Design

The basis of phenomenological research is the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experiences of individuals (Patton, 2002). The focus of a phenomenological study is in interpreting the essence of the participants' cognitive processing regarding a common experience (Worthington, 2013). Unlike research and published works involving forms of quantitative inquiry, a reader of phenomenological research should have a strong understanding of what the individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon have gone through. The overall purpose of phenomenological research is to understand how people make sense of their lives and lived experiences (Merriam, 2009).

In Bevan's (2014) approach to phenomenological interviewing, he suggests that interview is by far the most dominant method for data collection in phenomenological research;

however, he also mentions that there is very little instruction as to how the phenomenological interview should be undertaken. Bevan suggests that within phenomenological research methods there are different ways that the researcher can structure their interview and line of questioning. For example, Seidman (2006) used phenomenological theory to guide his interviews with the intention of providing a structured interview in order to explore a phenomenon. Although Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) also utilized a phenomenological theory to guide their interviews, they also included ambiguity in their questioning in order to generate respondent reinterpretation of experience.

In addition to the discrepancies between techniques in methods for data collection, there are also contrasting beliefs about abstaining from personal knowledge throughout phenomenological research. For instance, Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest that a benefit of phenomenological inquiry is that it allows researchers to simultaneously focus on their personal experiences of the phenomenon combined with the experiences of the interviewees. However, Husserl (1970), referred to as the principal founder of phenomenology, posits that setting aside what we already know about a given phenomenon is required for a researcher to effectively utilize a phenomenological research design. Bevan (2014) suggests that although total abstention for research is impossible, the practice of adopting "deliberate naiveté" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009), or becoming reflective when asking questions and remaining aware of his or her natural attitude, is an effective method for researchers to conduct proper phenomenological research.

Although the roots of phenomenology are grounded in philosophy, the impacts of phenomenology have expanded into fields such as sociology, education, psychology, and politics (Dall'Alba, 2009). Today, phenomenology has been recognized as a popular methodological framework that is widely accepted in education research (Randles, 2012). More specifically,

phenomenological explorations have been successfully utilized to gain a deeper understanding of Black female athletes' experiences with race throughout their athletic careers (Carter-Francique, Lawrence & Eyanson, 2011) and the experiences of Division-I men's basketball graduate transfers' experiences during their mandatory redshirt year (Williams, 2019).

Data Collection Protocol

Literature supports a consistent story of participants' experiences in qualitative interviews, and especially for "vulnerable" populations and/or "sensitive" topics, studies show that during interview processes, participants' experiences can be cathartic, empowering, and therapeutic (Wolgemuth, Erdil-Moody, Opsal, Cross, Kaanta, Dickmann, & Colomer, 2015). Although there are conflicting methodologies regarding the structure of phenomenological research methods, including the qualitative interview, I followed Water's (2017) suggestion that phenomenological interviews should remain objective and non-directive. As a researcher, I also abstained from my own personal knowledge or beliefs about the phenomenon at-hand. In doing so, I was able to align my interview and any follow-up questions with the purpose of my research and the research questions that undergirded this study.

Participants

Participant selection for this study was based on a non-random/non-probability approach (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). A purposive-criterion sampling technique was utilized in this study; especially for research where there are certain criteria which will help answer a research study's questions, selecting participants based on specific purposes was appropriate (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). Robinson (2014) suggests that inclusion criteria for a study should specify attributes that participants should possess in order to be eligible for selection into the study. Criteria for this sampling strategy were:

- Self-identified man of color
- Participated as an active member of the institution's Varsity Football team
- Currently a sophomore, junior, senior, or redshirt-senior student-athlete on the institution's Varsity Football team
- Redshirted during their first year of college

Purposeful sampling was especially relevant for this study because I garnered relationships with support staff and members of the athletic department at State University and I had physical access to the pool of potential participants who met the research criteria. Although I studied the experiences of first-year Division-I football players while redshirting, this study did not include the experiences of first-year student-athletes who were currently experiencing their redshirt-freshman year. Henderson (2013) suggests that student-athletes may not be able to accurately reflect on their experiences while they are in moments of transition. Therefore, I purposefully sampled sophomore, junior, senior, or redshirt-senior football players who reflected on their experiences with redshirting during their first year in college. Although salience plays a role in sophomore participants' ability to reflect more recently than upperclassmen, older participants who have had more time to reflect on their experiences with redshirting may offer a unique lens to view this phenomenon through. My intention to exclude first-year student-athletes who were currently experiencing a redshirt-freshman year was aimed at obtaining accurate and complete information and allowing at least one representative from each class (sophomore, junior, senior, redshirt-senior) to share their experiences with the phenomenon.

Sample Size

Unlike quantitative research where methodological approaches require a specific number to achieve an appropriate study, qualitative approaches produce a process (Trotter II, 2012). This

process is commonly referred to as data saturation, or the ideal standard for qualitative sample sizes where the process consists of conducting interviews until all concepts are repeated or no new concepts are emerging (Bernard, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Trotter II, 2012). However, Patton (2002) contends sampling and data collection to the point of data saturation, suggesting that sampling to the point of redundancy is largely ideal for researchers who have unlimited timelines and unconstrained resources. Further, Patton (2002) suggests that rather than set a goal to achieve data saturation, researchers should use their judgement and specify minimum samples based on reasonable coverage of the phenomenon (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Williams' (2019) study on the experiences of Black Division-I graduate transfers during their mandatory redshirting process provides both an enlightening study on a similar population to this study, and a fair minimum sample for an adequate phenomenological study. Although research (Dworkin, 2012) suggests that a minimum of five participants would be adequate for a phenomenological study, I set my sample range from 10 – 15 participants. Based on Williams' (2019) study where she successfully interviewed 15 Black Division-I men's basketball players in order to further capture the essence of their experiences with redshirting during their graduate transfer year and knowing that there were 28 student-athletes who met the aforementioned criteria at State University, I posited that my research could achieve adequate data saturation with a minimum of 10, and a maximum of 15 participants.

Access and Entry

In order to gain access to my participants I had to negotiate permission from the Head Athletic Director and the Head Football Coach at State University on January 11, 2021. Additionally, I obtained permission from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to officially gain access to my participants and conduct a study involving human subjects.

The outreach process for my participants began once I obtained permission from State University's IRB. Upon granted permission, I utilized the athletics website to come up with a list of participants who met the sampling inclusion criteria. Afterward, I created the list of potential participants and worked with State University's athletic department to access each participant's State University email address. My initial outreach was multi-faceted in hopes of raising the chances of getting responses from my participants. The first message was sent through the school emails that each student-athlete was assigned when they were first admitted to the State University. The second outreach message was sent as a direct message through the social media platform "Instagram." Because research (Mackson & Brochu, 2019) shows that over one-half of US adults aged 18-29 use Instagram, I found it appropriate to communicate to participants who failed to respond to my initial outreach through Instagram direct messages for a follow up message.

I ensured confidentiality was maintained by taking appropriate measures to protect participant identities by assigning pseudonyms to each participant. All transcripts, notes, audio files, and any information associated with the study that has identifiable characteristics associated with the participants was stored on a password-protected computer which was stored at my home or carried on my person.

Data Collection

In order to gather the participants' detailed descriptions of their experiences with redshirting during their transition to college, and to further understand the essence of the phenomenon, in-depth interviews were utilized as the primary method of data collection (Simon & Goes, 2011). Each participant was interviewed a total of three times over the course of a three-month period (one interview each month), where each interview was undergirded by interview

protocols structured by Schlossberg's (2011) four S's framework: a) situation, b) self, c) support, and d) strategies.

The first round of interviews was structured according to the first two S's in Schlossberg's (2011) framework: situation and self. Situation refers to the situation that the person is in at the time of their life transition (Barclay, 2017). Schlossberg (2011) suggests that practitioners can more effectively help students in transition depending on whether the transition is anticipated (i.e. moving to college), unanticipated (i.e. a car accident), or a nonevent (i.e. wanting a scholarship to play football, but the coaching staff doesn't offer the student-athlete a scholarship) (Barclay, 2017; Schlossberg, 2011). "Self," the second "S" of Schlossberg's (2011) framework refers to personal, demographic, and psychological characteristics that the person in transition has experienced (Barclay, 2017). Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011) suggest that an individual's personal and demographic characteristics have direct implications for how a person perceives their life. Personal and demographic characteristics refer to socioeconomic status, age, ethnicity, culture, stage in life, state of health, and gender (Barclay, 2017). With those elements of "situation" and "self" in mind, the first round of interview protocol was presented in alignment with gaining a deeper understanding of who the student-athlete is (self) and how the transition was presented and experienced by the participant (situation).

Immediately after the first round of interviews utilized a transcription service to transcribe the interviews and begin initial coding processes. Afterwards, I conducted the second round of interviews structured by the third S, "supports" (i.e., support systems during transition), followed by another round of data transcription, organization, and coding. Lastly, the third and final round of interviews was structured by the fourth S "strategies" (i.e., coping resources and

strategies during transition) (Barclay, 2017; Schlossberg, 2011), followed by a subsequent round of transcription, organization, and coding.

The intention for conducting three separate in-depth interviews over the course of a three-month period with the four S's framework as the foundation of the interview protocol(s) was two-fold: 1) participants had more context and information on the topic, the line of questioning, and got more comfortable with the interview protocol as time passed and 2) Schlossberg's (2011) four S's framework allowed me to derive more specific information aimed at my research questions and provided an effective structure to data collection processes.

In structuring the interview protocol, I utilized Giorgi (2009) and Englander's (2012) suggestions for meeting interview standards specifically within phenomenological research. For instance, Giorgi (2009) suggests that researchers who conduct an in-depth interview that follows a phenomenological structure should not ask traditional questions; rather, they should ask the participant for a description of a situation in which the participant has experienced the phenomenon. In doing so, the interviewer achieves a descriptive mode of consciousness rather than putting the interviewee in strict guidelines of how they should answer a question. This recommendation also follows Englander's (2012) recommendation that interviewers should maintain a sense of openness in their mode of consciousness during an interview and specifically throughout their line of questioning.

Pilot studies are referred to as a feasibility study that are made up of small-scale versions or trial runs of the planned study (Kim, 2011). I was able to conduct a pilot study of a single participant that met some, but not all, of the criteria that my study required for participants. I found that the pilot study had a positive impact on my current proposed data collection and methodology, as Kim (2011) mentions that pilot studies can provide researchers with an

opportunity to adjust before the main study occurs. Although the information derived from the pilot study was informative and appropriate for my research, the findings from the actual study influenced my proposed methodology, interview strategies, and data collection more than information derived from the pilot study, and specifically regard to the pilot-participant's experiences as a Black Division-I football player reflecting on their experiences with his redshirt-freshman year.

For the study, I collected demographic data before each interview through State University's athletic website. Further, pseudonyms and numbers were assigned to each participant for the purpose of data organization. As I mentioned previously, all identifying information that had the potential to breach participant confidentiality was kept on a locked, password protected computer in my home or on my person.

Similar to Williams's (2019) study of Black Division-I graduate transfer men's basketball players' experiences with the mandatory transfer redshirt year, each of the three interview protocol guides (see Appendices C, D, E) consisted of a series of pre-determined questions that attempted to gain further insight into the essence of the phenomenon of redshirting as a Black Division-I football player during the transition to a PWI, and the perceived effects that the redshirt-freshman year had on participants. Each interview protocol followed Giorgi (2009) and Englander's (2012) recommendations that interview questions should follow an openness that merely allows the participant to divulge their experiences with the phenomenon rather than a rigid line of questioning. Additionally, interview questions were constructed to better understand impactful situations that the participants experienced with the phenomenon of redshirting during their transition to State University.

Data Organization

Throughout the study, notes were taken and kept during each interview. Although I recorded the interviews through the Voice Memos application on my iPhone, Opdenakker (2006) suggests that there are also benefits to note-taking throughout interview processes. For instance, I was able to check if all the questions had been answered, write down live emotion and reactions that participants had when they reflected on their experiences, and had notes ready in case any technological malfunctions occurred.

I had originally planned to conduct in-person, face-to-face interviews with my participants. Research (Krouwel, Jolly & Greenfield, 2019) shows that in-person study interviews may be superior to video or phone calls in certain areas, such as interviewees divulging more information in-person; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I utilized video interviews through the Zoom application, and strictly recorded and saved the audio from the call. Additionally, I recorded the interviews using the Voice Memos iPhone application and then exported the audio files into .mp3 format. The audio-recorded files were transcribed by a professional independent transcription service as soon as each interview was finished.

Data Analysis

Critical Race Theory

Three tenets of CRT were utilized as lenses to view my participants' experiences through as they pertain to race and racism (Cooper and Cooper, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT is comprised of five largely accepted tenets: (1) counter-storytelling; (2) the permanence of racism; (3) Whiteness as property; (4) interest-convergence; and (5) the critique of liberalism (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998); however, Hiraldo's (2010) research points to counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, and interest convergence as key tenets for illuminating the

experiences of student-athletes of color in higher education settings. In 1995, Ladson-Billings and Tate proposed CRT as a means to examine race and racism in education, where more recently, scholars (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009) have cemented CRT as an appropriate lens to examine the experiences of "raced" people in educational settings (Tate, 1997). Applying CRT in education is significant because racism has a dramatic impact on the lives of students of color (Solórzano et al., 2002); furthermore, this race-based epistemology is pertinent to higher education settings because it provides a lens to question and challenge the ways that race, White supremacy, and racist ideologies have shaped policy efforts for Black students (Harper et al., 2009).

The first tenet I utilized as a lens, counter-storytelling, was described by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told." (p. 26). Further, Cooper and Cooper (2015) utilized counter-storytelling as an analytical framework to examine the experiences and perceptions of achievement among Black scholar athletes at a Division-I historically Black college/university (HBCU). Their study confirms that counter-storytelling can be utilized as an effective framework to support the permanence of racism and oppressive experiences that students of color experience in higher education (Hiraldo, 2010). Second, interest convergence, describes the phenomenon of White people advocating for the advancement of minoritized populations only if their own interests are simultaneously served (Delgado, 1995; Harper, 2009). Interest convergence also plays a role in the juxtaposition between Black student-athletes and White college administrators (Harper, 2009). Donnor (2005) contends that the educational futures for Black males who possess physical potential to compete at the Division-I level are not at the forefront of institutions' interests; rather, educational

stakeholders, such as football coaches and administrators within institutions of higher education, are interested in personal gains (i.e., cash bonuses for academic incentives in contractual agreements) and institutional advancement gained through exploitation of the physical talent of Black male athletes. The third and final tenet of CRT that I utilized, the permanence of racism, suggests that racism controls the political, social, and economic foundation of society in the United States (Hiraldo, 2010). It is imperative that, especially in higher education settings, race and racism should be analyzed through a lens that considers the structural impact that Black subordination has on the structural impact on U.S. society. Hiraldo (2010) specifically suggests that if racism in higher education is not analyzed through a lens that considers the existence of structural impact and systemic racism, that not doing so will propel and reinforce institutional racism. Therefore, the consideration and application of the permanence of racism as the third lens through which I analyzed my participants' experiences through was integral to appropriate data analysis.

Validity

Prior to checking the interview transcriptions for errors, I ensured the validity of the transcripts by having the interviewees validate the transcripts by correcting them and adding clarity to any unclear statements or experiences (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Once member-checking was complete, I then reviewed all memos and notes that I took during the interviews and sought to clarify any unclear transcriptions that still existed. Once the transcriptions were checked by interviewees and myself, I moved to developing categories and codes to further understand what the data said and identified all patterns that emerged within the data (Sgier, 2012).

Categorization and Coding

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that once the data are organized and prepared for analysis, researchers should engage in the coding process, or the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word that represents a category in the margins. I engaged in my data-analysis processes by utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis to detail how participants made sense of their experiences, and then how I made sense of the participants while they described their experiences (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Codes were generated both deductively and inductively, as I used existing data in a new context in addition to developing new codes and categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

One advantage of using Schlossberg's (2011) four S's framework as the foundation for interview protocol was that the themes, codes, and patterns that arose from the transcripts were already be organized into categories (situation, self, support, strategies). Similar to Williams's (2019) study, the four S's framework allowed me to conceptualize and organize the data into concise and structured categories, further suggesting that the four S's framework was an appropriate framework for data collection and analysis processes.

Trustworthiness

Credibility and Dependability

In this research study, trustworthiness was strengthened in ordinance from two of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for strengthening trustworthiness: credibility and dependability. In order to establish credibility, researchers must ensure that those who participate in the research are described accurately (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014). Elo et al. (2014) suggest that selection of the most appropriate method of data collection and how well the data address the intended focus of the research are both critical aspects of establishing

credibility. In regard to credibility, I ensured that the proposed data collection methods and the intended focus of the research were both appropriate and aligned with the overall goal of this research. Lastly, I conducted member-checking to accurately represent my participants perceptions and experiences to further strengthen credibility (Polit & Beck, 2012).

The dependability of a study refers to the longitudinal stability of the data and under different conditions (Elo et al., 2014). In order to strengthen the dependability of a study, the researcher should state the principles and criteria used to select participants so that the transferability of the data can be assessed for other contexts (Elo et al., 2014). One practical strategy that is commonly used in qualitative research are audit trials. An audit trial involves the examination of the inquiry process to validate the data, to account for all research decisions made, and to show how data were collected, recorded, and analyzed (Anney, 2014). In recording my inquiry process, I created an audit trial in hopes that the stability of this data and the criteria of data collection could be considered for other contexts and future research.

Researcher Positionality

In the process of conducting qualitative research, it is integral that researchers engage in researcher positionality. Milner IV (2007) understood the importance of researchers reflecting on their own cultural positionality in the research process, suggesting that a lack of awareness which a researcher holds regarding their own cultural experiences can circumvent misinformation, misrepresentation of individuals, and can be dangerous to communities and individuals of color. In regard to this study, I have a deep understanding that people of color have historically been misrepresented, silenced, and exploited in education research (Dillard, 2000; Milner IV, 2007). It was pertinent to the accuracy of this research that I, as the researcher, properly reflected on my

cultural and societal experiences and biases, especially when conducting research on an oppressed population.

I understood that my position as a White male had the potential to impact this research process. As I have experienced life as a White male, there was no possible way to remove the lens through which I see the world. However, being aware of my biases and experiences, culturally and socially, allowed me to add perspective to my research process. Additionally, potential biases had to be addressed in regard to my own experience as a student-athlete, and more specifically, a former Division-I football player who experienced a redshirt-freshman year during my transition to college. Although I have a foundation of experience with and understanding of intercollegiate athletics and specifically Division-I college football programs, it was important for me to remove my personal experiences and perceptions of the redshirt-freshman year from the experiences that my participants shared with me.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived effects that the redshirt-freshman year has on Black Division-I football players' transitions to a predominantly White institution (PWI). Using Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, the study aimed to provide a better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages that a redshirt-freshman year can have on Black Division-I football players as they transition to and through a PWI. The transition experience was examined by utilizing the four S's framework (i.e., situation, self, supports, strategies) developed by Schlossberg (1995). Additionally, critical race theory (CRT) was employed as a lens to frame my data analysis and capture participants' experiences with redshirting as it pertains to race and racism (Cooper and Cooper, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). By utilizing CRT tenets (i.e., permanence of racism, counter-storytelling, interest convergence) as lenses during data collection and analysis, this study captured the experiences of the Black Division-I football student-athlete through their redshirt-freshman year and transition to and through a PWI in relation to each of Schlossberg's (1995) four S's categories.

Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory was applied by first prioritizing my participants' perceptions of their transition experiences, rather than on the transition itself. Additionally, it should be noted that had data collection processes been conducted during my participants' transitions, the results may have differed. Therefore, the data represents my participants' complete reflection of their experiences since they each had already completed their transition

through their redshirt-freshman year. Student-athletes who are in moments of transition may not be able to accurately reflect on their experiences (Henderson, 2013); therefore, to capture a holistic understanding of my participants' experiences during their transition and their perceptions of their transition, I employed a reflective method of data collection and analysis.

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players with redshirting?

RQ2: What are the perceived effects of the redshirt-freshman year experienced by Black Division-I football players?

Ten current Division-I student-athletes who met the criteria of the study participated in three rounds of semi-structured interviews. On average, interviews lasted 34 minutes, and ranged between 19 and 44 minutes. Each round of interviews and was structured by one or two of Schlossberg's (1995) four S's framework, and each interview sought to gain a deeper understanding about each participant's a) situation, b) self, c) supports, and d) strategies during their transition to a PWI, their redshirt-freshman year, and through their time in college as a Black Division-I football player.

Demographics

Ten participants were interviewed for this study. Table 1 provides a demographic and personal summary of the participants, including name (pseudonyms were used to protect participants identity), year in school, whether the participant had been exposed to predominantly White settings prior to their arrival at a PWI, whether the participants' proudest moment in their college career (at the time of the interview) was related to an athletic achievement, and whether the participant expected to redshirt upon arrival to college.

Table 1

Demographic Summary of Study Participants

#	Name	Year in School	Previous exposure to predominantly White settings?	Proudest moment in college related to athletic achievement?	Expected Redshirt year?
1	Chris	Junior	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Noel	Sophomore	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Dean	Sophomore	Yes	Yes	No
4	Scott	Grad Student	No	Yes	No
5	Avery	Junior	Yes	Yes	No
6	Michael	Sophomore	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Jermaine	Sophomore	Yes	Yes	No (Injury)
8	William	Senior	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Eli	Junior	Yes	Yes	No (Injury)
10	Luke	Sophomore	No	Yes	No

It is important to note that other demographic characteristics, such as gender and race, were qualifications for the study; therefore, it is assumed that each participant identifies as a man of color. While freshmen were purposefully omitted from this study, a diverse array of perspectives consist of sophomores (5), juniors (3), seniors (1), and graduate students (1). At the time of the interviews, all 10 participants were enrolled at the same PWI, and each of them were members of the football team.

All 10 participants shared their own unique experiences with their redshirt-freshman year during the transition to a PWI and the challenges of being a Black Division-I football player at a PWI. Schlossberg's four S's was an effective framework that allowed each interview to specifically prompt participants on their a) self, b) situation, c) supports, and d) strategies during their transition to and through a PWI. Participants were also directly prompted to discuss their experiences as a Black football player on a predominantly White campus, and the differences between their racial, athletic, and academic identities were discussed. It is important to note that

as it pertains to their racial identity, all 10 participants denied any experiences with overt racism. As racism has largely transformed from overt racial hatred and bigotry to an ambiguous, covert form, these results aren't groundbreaking (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Huber and Solórzano (2015) mention the differences between overt and covert experiences with racism as it pertains to Black males in higher education, and while research (Sue et al., 2007; Williams, 2019) support the notion that microagressions can be classified as both subtle and blatant, the societally-ingrained experiences with racism fall more in line with tenets of critical race theory, such as interest-convergence, counter-storytelling, or the permanence of racism (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007).

Transition Experiences with Redshirting

Each participant provided different, yet related, perspectives and experiences in regards to their transition to a PWI through a redshirt-freshman year. Although each participant experienced a unique set of situations, supports, and strategies they used to cope with their transition, is important to reduce the data and idenfity patterns in order to form connections and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Using thematic analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018), a descriptive analysis strategy which reduces the data and allows flexibility and interpretation for the researcher, the following section is two-pronged: the first addresses common stereotypes that were embedded in each participants' experiences with their transition to, and through a PWI as a Black Division-I football player; the second is a joint analysis of the codes and themes which emerged from the interviews. The summary of thematic findings and the following sections are in accordance with Schlossberg's (1995) four S's system of coping with transition: a) the situation, b) the self, c) the supports, and d) the strategies. Table

2 provides the thematic findings in agreement with the four S's in addition to the aforementioned codes taken from Schlossberg's (2011) four S's framework.

Table 2

Thematic Findings in Relation to Schlossberg's (1995) Four S's themes

Situation	Self	Supports	Strategies
• Previous exposure (to predominantly White areas) • Transition to college (unequipped; outside factors effecting transition)	• Life outlook (viewing failure; resilient or optimistic) • Competing identities (athletic, student, and Black identity)	• Moral confliction (inability to confide in or fully trust support systems) • Isolation (demographics; student-athlete identity; don't belong)	• Blending-in (deny athletic affiliation; change appearances) • Code-switching (conform identity to be accepted; dumbing down Blackness)

Stereotypes

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, participants consistently expressed their troubles with, and distaste for the stereotypes they endured during their time at a PWI. Throughout my participants' experiences, stereotypes related to academic identity, academic support, and athletic identity were consistently expressed. It is important to detail these experiences because of the implications they have on my participants' ability to experience a posititve transition to and through college. Rather than embed these experiences in Schlossberg's (2011) four S's framework, I felt that these narratives should be highlighted seperately from themes derived in the following sections. Although these stereotypes are multi-faceted and complex, utilizing Schlossberg's (2011) four S's framework during data collection allowed me to conceptualize how each of these experiences fit into the theoretical framework that undergirds this research. Illustrating these lived experiences separate from the bulk of data analysis adds important context and detail to themes derived in later sections.

Academic Identity

Throughout data collection and analysis, the balance of competing identities was repeatedly brought up by my participants. Specifically, my participants struggled with stereotypes and unfair treatment in academia. Eli, a junior, described perceptions of his non-athlete peers and professors looking at him, almost as if to say, "what does he do?" His first year in college, Eli did not receive the typical "athlete backpack," a common piece of equipment given out to every athlete at a Division-I institution to be used for school, that has turned into the "main identifier of a student-athlete," according to Eli. Although Eli expressed that "if you're wearing that backpack, people will think that you won't hold your weight in group projects," he insisted that that the backpack was all he wanted to have his first year because of his race and his physical size, he felt like without the backpack, classmates and professors would think that he's "just big and Black for no reason." Dean, a sophomore, also described his experiences with outward perceptions of his academic identity, saying that "people around me just perceive me as another football player, [you know um] a person who goes there to pass a class so that I can go on in my athletic career…I am not perceived as someone who really wants to learn and enjoy a class." The threat of stereotypes that involve my participants' academic identities and their feelings of inadequacy in academic settings was consistent across all ten of my participants.

In addition to how my participants were viewed in academia, they also expressed frustrating expereinces specifically relating to the support systems they interacted with in academic settings. Schlossberg (2011) mentions that support systems are integral to identify how positively a person in transition will matriculate through their experience. To this end, my participants' ability to successfully access support systems at State University was negatively impacted by preexisting stereotypes and narratives involving Black student-athletes in higher

education. Avery, a junior, detailed his experiences with going to office hours with one of his professors, and the racial and athletic stereotypes that come with being a Black Division-I football player at a PWI:

> My first couple [office hours], like when you first go to a teacher, ‘cause most of them by their profile, you like, I'm a big Black guy in the class…they know I play some type of sport and usually like their first question is "oh what sport do you play?", and once you come to the office hours then [like] after that, [like] you start asking questions, and they can tell [like] you actually been paying attention in their class or [like] have some type of interest in learning the conversation. You can feel the conversations shift from more [like] oh, I’m about to have to help this kid do this class to [like] oh, he actually wants to learn in this class. And you can feel [like] the language they use shift...it's like I got to prove to the other students that I’m an actual student.

From Avery’s experience, it is clear that preexisting perceptions about Black student-athletes being academically inadequate compared to their non-athlete peers adds another layer of friction that he must work through in order to receive adequate and unbiased support from his professors. William also commented on a similar feeling, mentioning that in classes, especially when he is the only student-athlete, he gets the feeling from his professors that it is almost like he does not belong in his classes because the professors believe that “everybody else is on an entirely different page academically.” The sentiment remains, whether in office hours or classroom settings, preexisting perceptions of Black student-athletes being academically inadequate persist.

Athletic Identity

That it is difficult for my participants to balance their academic identity, being a Division-I football player and facing the challenges of stereotypes that accompany their identity is hard to refute. All 10 of my participants felt that at some point in their experience at State University they were unfairly stereotyped for their identity as an student-athlete, and specifically a football player. Similar to the participants who shared their experiences with feelings of inadequacy in academia and having to prove to their professors that they can succeed in the classroom, participants actively try to disprove stereotypes around being a football player. Scott shared his opinion on the matter:

> I make it [like], I like to make it be known that I'm intelligent. Like I'm not just an athlete you know? So White students or Asian students in these discussion sections see me, I walk in [you know], I don't wear anything crazy, I just keep it pushing in my shorts and t-shirt normally...and they see me, and I feel like they're saying "he might not be smart," or "[you know] he, he's just an athlete"... and so I like to let it be known that I do the school, like I do school too!

When asked about strategies that my participants used to combat these stereotypes, Scott was the only participant who actively tried to invalidate these perceptions of student-athletes in academia. Other participants used subtler, but nonetheless, methodical strategies to hide their athletic identity in academic settings. Dean, a sophomore, describes his strategies by changing outfits to make it seem like he is a member of the general student body.

> Sometimes I put on [like] a different 'fit. [Like, uh] I'll just try to switch it up, [like] put on a different outfit, because I guess it's cool to be perceived as an athlete, but I don't want to be perceived as that all the time…I want to be

> perceived as a guy who does [like] other stuff too, but he's also on the football team, you know? So more often than not, you'll see me in the sweat suit, but I'll try to switch it up from time to time if I have the chance.

From each of these examples, it is clear that stereotypes and preconceived notions about Black football players in higher education affected how my participants were able to matriculate through their college experience. Due to those stereotypes, participants described strategies they employed to sustain a more positive experience in academia, such as changing outfits, making a distinct effort to participate in classes, or choosing to not wear paraphernalia that identifies them as a student-athlete. It is clear that my participants' ability to seamlessly matriculate to and through college as Black Division-I football players was made increasingly difficult due to omnipresent stereotypes and racial microaggressions that exist in higher education.

The following section includes the integrated data analysis of the themes that emerged from data collection in accordance with Schlossberg's (2011) four S's framework of coping with life transitions. Accuracy, transparency, and consistency in the interpretation of this data was paramount to the researcher's analysis.

Situation

Situation encompasses the person's situation at the time of transition and extenuating stressors or circumstances that play a role in the difficulty of the transition (Schlossberg, 2011). Additionally, subsidiary factors relating to a person's situation that can help participants identify whether a life transition may prove beneficial or not: a) the degree to which the person in transition's life has been altered (i.e. changes in relationships and routines), and b) what point is the person at in their transition (i.e. considering a transition, beginning the transition, ending a transition) (Schlossberg, 2011). As it pertains to this research, my participants' situations were

all unique in their own right, but shared underlying similarities. Situations in this context pertain to, but are not limited to, my participants' transition to and through their redshirt-freshman year at a PWI.

For any student, the transition to college can be a difficult experience where major life transitions are occuring simultaneously, including, but not limited to, new living circumstances, financial independence, adjusting to new social and academic demands, and coping with the stress of uprooting from familiar surroundings and habits (Leary & DeRosier, 2012).

As a result of these compounding pressures during a major life transition, first-year college students are more likely than upperclassmen to experiences stress and anxiety (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). Student-athletes, however, balance the demands of an academic schedule in addition to full commitment to their sport. Albeit apparent, it is important to delineate the differences in time demands for both the general college student and the Division-I college football player in regards to the degree to which a person's life is being altered, as the latter experiences additional, compounding stressors to an already steressful transition. The transition to and through a redshirt-freshman year at a PWI in addition to full-time athletic and academic commitments was described by my participants as humbling, horrible, and extremely difficult.

Situation: Previous Exposure As an Extenuation Circumstance

The theme of previous exposure relates to research (Guiffrida, 2003; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010) on the Black student experience at predominantly White institutions. Guiffrida & Douthit (2010) suggest that the positive social integration and academic achievement for Black students at PWIs could be enhanced by participation in Black student organizations; ultimately, an environment where Black students, specifically those who are from predominantly Black areas, can feel comfortable on White campuses by letting their guard down to socialize in familiar ways

without fear of perpetuating Black stereotypes (2010). It is reasonable to imagine that Black students with previous exposure to predominantly White elementary, middle, and high schools located in predominantly White and high-SES neighborhoods may feel less uncomfortable with the transition to a PWI.

Jermaine, for instance, discussed his previous exposure to predominantly White schooling and how that affected his transition to a PWI:

> My high school was not even that [like] different from here [like] demographic wise. So my whole life really I went to predominantly White schools…[like] it was one of those situations where [like] many times I would be the only Black kid in class, so I've already had to deal with those things, I've had plenty of arguments with just [like] other White people in my high school in terms of political views and that type of stuff, so the transition here honestly, like, it wasn't really a big culture shock just cause I felt like I was around a similar demographic leading up to college.

Jermaine discussed his experiences with being exposed to a predominantly White schooling system growing up, and how that affected his childhood by being one of the only Black students in his classes and his neighborhood. Of the 10 participants in this study seven experienced similar situations with "previous exposure" during their childhoods, but the setting/context of the responses varied by participant. For instance, Avery, a junior, referenced his experiences with previous exposure to predominantly White environments specifically in academia:

> People will flat out say it sometimes too, like you're just an athlete and that's the only reason you're here, and it's just like, they only, they only [like] accept one point of [like] my personality of who I am…I just be shocked, but not surprised

> because it was the same way in my high school. It was like I was only there for that purpose. So it came to a point where it doesn't bother me anymore, but [like] when it first started to happen I was just, like I said, either way, [like] I'm in these classes, sports may have helped me get into this school, but I'm getting some of the same grades that these kids are getting in the same classes and they think they earned it more than I did.

From Avery's interviews, it was clear that he had not only previous experiences with the exposure to predominantly White environments growing up, but he was specifically exposed to popular racist stigmas which Black student-athletes are often burdened with, such as the Dumb-Jock Theory, which implies that Black student-athletes are linked to intellectual inferiority and innate Black athletic superiority (Comeaux, 2008).

Avery and Jermaine specifically touched on the academic and social experiences during their transition to a predominantly White institution and how their previous exposure to predominantly White schooling and environments have allowed them to be less surprised and more properly equipped for the challenges a Black football player may face at a PWI. The overarching characteristic of "previous exposure" has to do with culture shock, or lackthereof. Michael, a sophomore, talked about the lack of culture shock upon his arrival to State University, saying that his high school is "literally the same thing as here…just like it…there was nothing really new to me when I came to college. [Like] I didn't, I felt like I didn't have to get used to anything because I was [like] already, I mean, I want to a predominantly White high school." A similar sentiment was offered from Dean (a sophomore), "I went to a private high school in the ninth grade. It was smaller classes, olympic sized pools, a big gynmasium, all you can eat food and stuff like that. I remember in my high school graduating class I was the only African-

American, I was already exposed to a predominantly White school." Noel, another sophomore, cited the challenges his peers who aren't from predominantly White areas may experience during their transition to a PWI, "I bet it's way harder for people from [like] more Black populated areas. You know, some people come from [like] Louisiana or Mississippi…[like] I'm used to a country area, I grew up around a lot of White people, so I think that really helped me with how to navigate through [like] just what's going on."

Of the 10 participants, three discussed the effects that the lack of previous exposure to predominantly White areas had on their transition to college. Luke's experience sheds light on the feeling of being "othered," and why previous exposure to predominantly White areas may have a positive effect on Black students as they arrive to predominantly White college campuses.

> My high school was pretty diverse..and then like, college it's all White…and then I'm sitting in orientation, and they're saying the average SAT for the class was [like] a 1400, and it got to the point where I was like, I don't [like] belong here. And then [like] I'm going to class, walking around campus, and I'm walking around [like], I don't see any Black people [like] out. [Like] all i see is [like] White people. Wow. and that was a big culture shock for me. I would say that being biracial wasn't such a big part of my identity until i got to college.

It is clear that the previous exposure, or lack thereof, to predominantly White schools and communities had profound impacts on my participants' transition to college, as each participant who noted their previous exposure to these experiences expressed less culture shock when showing up at a predominantly White institution; whereas participants who grew up in diverse areas expressed how they did not feel they belonged on campus. The transition to college for all students, not just Black football players, is difficult, but for this specific demographic who were

previously exposed to predominantly White upbringings, where they grow up and who they grow up around seemed to play a role in their transition to college.

Situation: Transition to College

The challenges that student-athletes experience during their transition to college are well documented. As it pertains to my study, the theme "transition to college" includes my participants' ability to properly reflect on their experiences with factors that affected their ability to successfully transition to college that were affected by their redshirting status. Factors such as maturity, time management, prioritization of assignments, stress, depression, and leaving familiar surroundings are discussed by participants. Highlighting the experiences of my partcipants as they pertain to their redshirting status helps shed light on potential benefits and pitfalls of redshirting during their redshirt-freshman year in college as they transitioned to a PWI.

Skills which are non-negotiable for successful academic integration for college students during their transition to college, such as time management and work prioritization, were discussed by multiple participants. Chris reflected on his time management skills upon arrival to college:

> Time management was horrible, man. [like], I mean, I loved going to classes and stuff, but having the, having the classes being spaced out, [like], if they weren't all in one building like high school, figuring that out on top of figuring out when to eat, coming from practice in the morning, now I'm tired, now I got to go to class, I got homework and mentoring to do, and all I wanted to do was watch some TV or call somebody, [like] it's hard.

Understanding that time management is an important skill to be successful in college is important, but having the bandwith to successfully implement time management practices while

balancing the added commitments of sport to the equation, Chris seemingly felt in over his head. Chris then referred to his maturity and other skills he wish he had the time to focus on during his transition:

> It might have to do more with my maturity, but when I came in I never capitalized. I, I came in, didn't learn the playbook like I should have, school is new to me, I had to learn how to write citations, didn't know how to write a proper paper and what not. But as far as athletics, I came in, thought it was going to be similar to high school…but it was completely different…physically, my body wasn't ready for the pressure of, [um] college football, even though mentally, I felt like this was about to be a smoth transition. It was not.

Similar to Chris, feelings of being overwhelmed during the transition to college were mentioned by all 10 participants. Scott, a graduate student, still reflected on the salience of his rough transition to college as a Black football player, comparing his redshirt-freshman year to a "tornado," mentioning that "there were so many different factors playing at once, I don't even know how to really describe it…it all hit at once and you're just trying to figure it out." In addition to learning about, garnering, and applying critical skills in an attempt to achieve successful academic and social integration during their transition to college, my participants also referenced additional stressors having to do with leaving familiar surroundings, feeling depressed, and worrying about family members back home. Dean described his first fall football camp during his transition to college as a "time that really humbled him," mentioning that he felt like he was "failing at everything." He added, "It was really, really, really bad…to the point where [like], I felt like I couldn't do it. And I remember [um] it got so bad that I had to [like] lay down on my carpet when I came home from practice, just thinking about life, and if I can really

do it or not." More specifically regarding Dean's situation at the time of his transition, Dean referred to "a lot of problems going on with my life, [like] just back home," he referred to football as the only thing he didn't have to worry about, so when he was failing at football it was overwhelming for him. Later in the same interview, Dean circled back to discuss other stressors which affected his transition experience, mentioning that he was worried about how his family was doing everyday.

> It's kind of a calling home every day, calling my mom everyday, my sisters just to see how the house is, stuff like that. [um] I guess like also with the stress of that too, I always felt like I owed my family, [like] something in return for raising me, you know what i'm saying? I feel like this football stuff can [like] really, you know, contribute to that...so that kind of added a little bit of stress to my transition too.

It is clear that Dean dealt with compounding stressors which resulted in him feeling overwhelmed during his transition to college. An imporant aspect of "situation," one of Schlossberg's (2011) four S's, is that a myriad of factors can affect a person's experience during their life transition. Dean, like the rest of the participants, felt overwhelmed with his situation during the transition to college in regards to time management, feeling homesick, and balancing athletic and acadmic commitments. However, unpredictable factors can also play a role in a person's ability to make a smooth life transition; Jermaine explained his unique situation during his transition to college:

> I was in a really, really low place. Just being [like] really far from home, [like] I was already dealing with homesickness and then having to go through that [injury] away from home, and then just, I don't know, like not really feeling like I

> was a part of the team. And then on top of that, my classes are super, super hard. My first semester was [like] the most challenging window of time in my life that I probably ever went through just cause there was like so much new stuff already. Then on top of that, dealing with an injury, losing a family member. That semester was one of the hardest things I've ever had to experience.

Understanding that every individual's experience the transition from high school to college has its own unique set of challenges allows us to understand that far more than practical skills, such as time management, can affect someone's situation during their transition to college.

As it pertains to this study, using "situation" as the lens to analyze my participants' transition experinces through allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the circumstances, relationships, upbringings, and unpredictable events that can challenge a successful academic, athletic, and social transition from high school to college. Organizing the two themes related to Schlossberg's (2011) "situation," "previous exposure" and "transition to college," was fundamental to understanding what other sources of stress were present at the time of transition, whether paticipants had previous exposure with similar transitions, and/or if my participants had experienced identity/role changes during their transtion as it relates to their connection to family, friends, or significant others.

Self

Self, the second tenet of Schlossberg's (2011) four S's framework for coping with life transitions, refers to psychologial characteristics and inner strength of the individual in transition. Characteristics of "self" include, but are not limited to, the strengths, weaknesses, coping capabilities, life outlook (optimism vs. pessimism), and how resilient the individual in transition may be (2011). Identifying and understanding my participants psychological characteristics was

integral to fully capture how Black Division-I football players may experience and endure their redshirt-freshman year during the transition to State University.

Three themes emerged within "self": a) life outlook – participants reference to resilience, optimism, or pessimism pertaining to their transition to college and specifically during their redshirt-freshman year; b) competing identities – how the prioritization, or lacktherof, of their racial, athletic, or academic identity affect how participants view themselves and specifically how those identities affected their transition experiences to a PWI; and c) stereotypes – refers to participants' experiences with unfair racial and/or athletic misconceptions, microaggressions, and stereotypes that affect their identities.

Self: Life Outlook

The theme of life outlook, as reflected in the data, refers to how participants discussed their resilience, view of failure, optimism, or pessimism during their transition to a PWI and how that affected their experiences with their transition. Life outlook aligns with Schlossberg's (2011) "self" by turning attention to individuals' resilience and their beliefs that they can or cannot persist through adversity during their transition to college. While the measurement of an individual's resilience, strength, or optimism is difficult to quantify, some participants were transparent and unwaivering in their self-belief, and clearly described their life outlook, their concept of quitting, and how resilient they thought of themselves. Participants shared their life outlooks through individual experiences during their transition to and through college.

Chris described his personal resilience through his concept of quitting: "not quitting, not giving up, no matter how hard things get." Noel, a sophomore, provided a similar sentiment: "I see failure in the big picture, and I think its actually the same [you know] when I fail a test, I fail forward." These examples of my participants' ideologies related to quitting and failure each lend

themselves toward the notion that Chris and Noel are both considered resilient and optimistic when it comes to their outlook on life.

Participants' resilience and life outlook was also identified through their descriptions of and experiences with discipline. Eli (junior) described his ability to set goals, accomplish them, and then set his sights on the next opportunity: "I guess just always having, having the discipline to get to the next goal, and then when you achieve that, then, [um], these little goals like making the depth chart, and then once I make the depth chart, I want to be number one on the depth chart. I guess, just having the discipline to do those little goals every day." The data reflects that participants' personal outlook on reslilience is affected by their ability to set, and then achieve, goals. As Eli did, Scott spoke about how achieving goals further cemented his self-belief that he can accomplish whatever he sets his mind to in life:

> That's what I wanted to do, starting (for the football team) that's my goal, and I understood it was a tough mountain to climb, but not impossible…I was able to start the first game, and that was probably my favorite moment because it was just like, wow, after all I've been through, I was still able to reach a point where I wanted to be three years ago...like I can honestly do whatever I want to do if I really want to do it.

These data suggest that there can be a link between participants' involvement in high-level athletic and academic demands and self-belief. Experiences like the examples provided by Eli and Scott can reaffirm a person's life outlook and positively affect life transitions. Scott's pursuit and achievement of his ultimate goal of starting in a college football game changed his life outlook, as he indicated that the lessons about adversity he took from the football field have now spilled over into the rest of his life:

> I'm very optimistic about my life for the simple fact that it doesn't matter if I'm on a football field. It doesn't matter if I'm working in a corporation or office, a school district…I understand that after everything I've been through throughout my life and especially in my college experience, [like] it doesn't matter what i'm doing, I'm going to compete and I'm going to be the best at it.

Because one of the goals of U.S. higher education institutions is to help teach and develop young people who can ultimately contribute to our greater society, the fact that Scott mentioned his steadfast belief in his ability to achieve outside of collegiate athletics is critical to understanding how life outlook has contributed to his sense of "self." Of the 10 participants in this study, nine of them echoed similar statements; Avery's was similar to Scott's self-belief after college football ends:

> I'm ready for whatever the world throws at me. Because [like] in college I feel like I'm taking the best opportunities I can to [like] be healthy, happy in what I'm doing in life. Whether that's football, if I make it that far or whether It's [like] taking what I learned in school and turn that into a career. I feel like either way, I'm comfortable and I'll be able to take whatever the world throws at me.

Avery's sentiment connects his life outlook with the unpredictability of life transitions, that no matter what the world throws at him he has now been prepared for it. Further, because of the compounding challenges that Black Division-I football players experience, it is essential that we gain a deeper understanding of how life outlook plays a role in their transition experiences.

Self: Competing Identities

It has been widely recognized that the dual roles, or identities, that collegiate student-athletes take on have implications for overall student-athlete wellness. As it pertains to this

study, my participants divulged their experiences with balancing conflicting identities and explained how their academic and athletic identities played a role in the way they feel they are perceived in their community, and how their significant time and energy demands play a role in forming their priorities as they move through college.

During the first round of interviews, I was intent on discovering where my participants were receivng a deep, visceral experience from. In hopes to gain a deeper understanding of how salient their competing identities were, I asked the question, “what has been your proudest moment in college so far,” and every participant answered with an experience they had in their athletic careers, none answering anything to do with their academic or personal experiences. Upon being asked about his proudest moment, Noel responded with the following: “definitely the scholarshp…I was just thinking about [like] man, [like] that's just like two years of doing [like], you know, trying to get it every day. [uh] You know, [like] you come in and that's your only, that's your only goal. Nothing can get you off of that, [like], that was my only goal. But that has definetely been my proudest moment." Earning an athletic scholarship, as opposed to other academic achievements a student could earn and obtain, captured Noel’s attention and he was unwavering in his commitment to achieve that milestone. Perhaps the wide-spread noteriety that comes with achieving an athletic milestone on a big stage affected Noah’s drive to achieve his goal, but perhaps the salience for his athletic identity was just stronger.

When asked about failure, and how my participants looked at failure through the lenses of their academic identity and their athletic identity, all 10 participants noted that athletic failure is deeper, with participants explaining that a failure on the football field is “just different”: “they just don’t hit the same for me, [like] failing on the, on the football field…[like] I value school, but I just feel like it’s a different type of hurt between the two.” The unique nature of being a

student and an athlete and the conflicting principles of both of those identities demands the person who identifies as such to invest in one identity just as much as they invest in the other. Luke explained this challenge to me through how he prioritized both academics and athletics over time:

> I guess [like] academics just took a lower role on my list of priorities and [like], as bad as that may sound, I don't know, I just don't really get like, too upset about [like] failing a test or a quiz, whatever, just [like] on to the next one. But not like I don't try to or don't put effort into academics, [like] obviously I'm going to a good college, so I want to put some effort in, but I'm just not as invested in academics as I am in athletics.

In addition to the academic and athletic "playing fields," Scott, a graduate student, also added that there has to be an emphasis placed on athletic identity in his community as well. Largely because of what Scott refers to as how he is percieved as a Black man in a predominantly White area, he discussed the extra emphasis that has to be placed on his athletic identity in social settings:

> You gotta understand that you need to make it an emphasis to make sure it's known that you're an athlete because you're going to be treated two completely different ways, like night and day…if they [students/community] don't recognize you as an athlete right away, they're just more or less, like, who are you? Why are you here? We don't want any trouble...and based on what category you're perceived as, as a person, that determines how you're going to be treated.

My participants also discussed their unique experiences with balancing their racial, athletic, and academic identities. It was made clear that for one reason or another, my participants leaned into

their athetic identities more than their identities as a student or a Black male in higher education. Additionally, racial perceptions of the greater community, including students, faculty, and non-athlete students affected personal emphasis placed on athletic identity to combat stereotypes and racial microaggressions.

Supports

Schlossberg (2011) maintains that sources of support during an individual's transition experience, or lacktherof, is critical to one's sense of well-being. During the transition to college, a particularly demanding experience for some college students, not just student-athletes, the importance of relationships and support systems is heightened. In regard to the participants in this study, Black Division-I football players during their transition to college, support systems may include, but are not limited to, their family, friends, coaches, teammates, academic and athletic support staff, sports psychology staff, spouses, and professors. It is important to note that while support systems, such as college coaches, support staff, or sports psychologists exist, student-athletes making their transition to college lack strong social support networks due to their lack of time to take advantage of support systems. Furthermore, their ability to manage the stress and anxiety of their schedules may be affected by time constraints.

Although the transition to college, and specifically the transition to a PWI for Black Division-I athletes, is riddled with challenges, research (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015) has shown that the unique campus environment, schedule, and experience provides Black student-athletes the opportunity to forge deep relationships with one another. These social networks can provide a much needed support system, specifically for a marginalized population during their transition to a predominantly White institution. In my findings, it is clear that the

participants leaned heavily on their teammates during their transition to college rather than institutionally-provided support systems.

Supports: Moral Confliction

Throughout the interview process, participants drew on their experiences with their support systems and noted how important they were to their transition to college. The majority of participants leaned on their teammates during the most adverse times. While this relationship makes sense, 10 out of 10 participants noted that they know of, interact with, and have relationships with academic support staff, athletic trainers, and sports psychology staff, not to mention their position coaches whom they interact with on a daily basis. Adults in these scenarios (e.g., support staff and coaches) are in these positions to help the student-athletes make the transition to college, and then support them through their experience at the school; yet, participants still relied on their teammates for the majority of their support. The theme, moral confliction, describes the unique positioning and responsibilities that employees within intercollegiate athletics have, and how the participants from my study feel like the prioritization of athletic success over academic or holistic development interferes with the ability to be supported by, and build trust with support staff and coaches.

As it pertains to football-related stressors, Eli described his inability to confide in his position coach:

> Most of my stress comes probably from football-related stuff, and [um], if I bring that to the coaches, I feel like its not a hundred percent of just, what can I do to help you? It's what does this mean to the team, to my job, this position… and if I go to my coach and go dude, like, I don't know if I can do this… you know, first

> you got to explain that that's even tough, and second he is going to think, do I need to get the next guy ready? That's where it's going, 1000 percent.

Eli is describing the unique paradox of revenue generating intercollegiate athletics – coaches are at their respective institutions, ultimately, to win games, but student-athletes are there to go to go to college, earn a degree, and compete in athletics. Noel, much like Eli, feels that his coaches' main focus is on taking advantage of their physical talent in regard to football:

> Just getting four [football] years out of you… I feel like, especially here, they [coaches] is just trying to get four years out of you, you know, however they can get your best four [football] years out of you, if its NFL or not, after that, we're just going to try to get it out of you…and so I don't know, that could just be a college coaches thing, but I don't know if they always have your best interest at heart.

The description of a support system, much less during a highly volatile life transition, not having the person in transition's "best interest at heart" is worrisome. This experience was consistent amongst all 10 of my participants, which highlights a larger issue, that the person who has recruited a student-athlete to their college, has built trust with the student-athlete and his family, and is the adult who interacts with the student-athlete the most, ultimately cannot be trusted. Jermaine describes his personal experiences with this issue:

> I feel like they're always football first, you know? And even if it's not necessarily first, it's very high..and so whatever I talk to them [the coaches] about, they're just going to be thinking about their job and the team. And [like], if I really want true support, I'm not going to want to be [like], worried about [like] what they say.

The theme of moral confliction and the prioritization of the student-athletes' athletic identiy over academic identity by support staff were consistent in my participants' experiences. For instance, academic support staff within intercollege athletic departments ultimately have to help student-athletes "stay eligible." "Staying eligible" is a phrase commonly used within academic support departments in college athletics. Per the National Collegiate Athletic Administration (NCAA), maintaining academic eligibility requires student-athletes to be enrolled and attending their respective institution as a full-time student each semester, passing 12+ credits to stay on track for their undergradate degree (NCAA, 2023). Like coaches, academic support staff may have pure intentions and aspirations to form relationships with student-athletes; however, the competitive demands in revenue-generating athletics require academic support staff to ultimately prioritize keeping the student-athletes eligible instead of their development as students. In this research, all 10 participants described their experiences with their academic coordinators, each describing the challenges that they and their academic coordinators experience in the high-pressure, "win at all costs" environment created by the pressures to stay eligible and win. During Chris' transition to college, he experienced the moral confliction of his academic coordinator when it was time to determine which major he would pursue:

> I notice that when they tell you what major or whatever they want you to do, that kind of puts you in a cycle that you'll be expected to just go with the flow…but sometimes you have to be blunt, like, alright I'm taking this class and here's why…I feel supported to a degree, that'll get me where I need to be, but that road of support has been bumpy, it has not been smooth as it should be and I felt like some of those bumps could have been flattened or avoided.

The cycle that Chris describes is commonly known as “major clustering,” a pattern highly-researched within intercollegiate athletes, and specifically for revenue-generating athletics, where academic coordinators tend to cluster student-athletes in less-demanding majors in order to keep student-athletes eligible (Paule-Koba, 2019).

The loss of trust in support systems was also discussed. As it relates to academic pursuits, there is no person more pivotal in shaping a student-athlete’s path than their academic coordinator. A loss of trust in this relationship and a student-athlete’s ability to confide in this person should not be taken lightly. Scott described his loss of trust in his academic coordinator:

> Ever since then, bro, I just had [like] a really big mistrust for them. [Like] I was like, bro, they're not bad people. They're there to help. But at the same time I feel like some of them are not really, you know, some people are just doing their job…like they're just making sure you're passing classes. Almost like, are they just keeping you eligible or keeping you in classes they know you can pass? And when I really looked at it through that lens, I feel like sometimes they be trying to push guys through. Like if guys are not careful enough and if they're not diligent enough to pay attention to their studies, which most aren't their first couple of years. Cause [like] why would you be, at the end you're going to get screwed.

Ultimately, my participants’ experiences with their coaches and academic coordinators demonstrate a conflict between doing their jobs and trying to to support the student-athlete. According to my participants’ lived experiences, they receive a poor version of support, one that is largely driven by the motivation to help the program, rather than the student-athlete, succeed.

The same theme was evident in my participants’ experiences with sports medicine staff, another critical support position for the experience for student-athletes, and especially football

players. My participants reported that they saw the sports medicine staff at least once a day, whether to assess an injury, rehab an injury, or to paticipate in injury prevention practices. There were participants who reported great relationships with some of the staff, even going as far as to mention that the people who work in the athletic training room "feel like my actual family." However, Eli still felt the moral confliction that sports medicine staff have to deal with in their job. He went on to say the following:

> I really, I really like all of them, but, [um], there, there are times I feel like, [um], you go in there with an injury and you say something's hurting or whatever, and its not 'let's figure out what's wrong and why is it going on?', it's really just, 'how can we put you back on the field so that, you know, we don't have a laundry list of guys coming in the training room because we don't want to be too busy.'

According to my participants, when asked about the sports medicine staff, they mentioned that the lack of specialized and focused care could be a symptom of being overworked and/or understaffed, that in relation to how many student-athletes they see in a day, their staff can only do so much to give a certain amount of time and effort to an athlete, especially at the busiest times of the day. However, the theme of moral confliction is also clear in the realm of sports medicine. The staff needs to keep student-athletes relatively healthy, healthy enough to take the field, because at the end of the day, the effectiveness of the sports medicine staff will be measured on their ability to get players healthy enough to take the field to help their team contribute and win football games. One participant mentioned that "It's a very big disconnect of their [sports med's] goals and what they're trying to get [players healthy], and what our [football player's] goals are. Not even close." Additionally, Scott specifically mentioned a "morality issue" in sports medicine in college athletics, he said the following:

> I feel like there's a morality issue in medicine in general, but especially in college athletics…I swear I played a whole game with a concussion…It's just like bro…I knew it…bro, I got on that field bro and you know what they said - I'm good - so I must be good right?...I don't know, it's very weird, there is a conflict of interest where in the training room I want to get as healthy as possible, but they're all thinking let's get him healthy enough...that's the big difference...they're just trying to make sure you can play...there's a disconnect.

The lived experiences of my participants highlights a clear disconnect between the goals of intercollegiate athletics teams, their support staffs, and the student-athletes that make up those teams. The ultimate goal, to win, creates a blurred line between the holistic support and development of student-athletes, which ultimately can have a negative effect on the transition experiences of student-athletes while they get to and move through college. No matter the values and priorities of the coaches, academic coordinators, and sports medicine staff, the bottom line within major revenue-generating athletics is that they have to strategize their rosters, keep student-athletes eligible, and get student-athletes healthy enough to take the field in order to win contests. This can create an environment where doing the bare minimum to fully support student-athletes, especially those who may also be experiencing a myriad of social, academic, cultural, and athletic challenges, becomes the standard. As a result, the support systems that are in place for a major life transition, that can be integral to one's sense of well-being during and after their transition, are not as effective as would be ideal.

Supports: Isolation

As with moral confliction, "isolation" is shaped by the circumstances student-athletes find themselves in during their transition to and through college. "Isolation" is presented through

my participants' experiences with forming deep relationships shared by common scheduling, challenges, and lived experiences. This theme can be viewed through both positive and negative lenses as student-athletes and, in this case, Black Division-I football players make their transition to a PWI. The former, because they can find solace in shared experiences with their teammates who are going through similar transitions; the latter, because of feelings of isolation and the inability to form relationships outside of their sport. My participants all shared their experiences with showing up to a PWI as a Black male, and all but one participant mentioned that they felt like, outside of athletics, they were isolated and/or unsupported by their school when they arrived, feeling more isolated by living together in dorms, following similar schedules, and leaning on each other through adversity can also further exacerbate feelings of isolation for this population.

The potential positive outcomes for college students who arrive to their respective schools and are a member of a team, organization, or club are clear, as the social challenges of finding friends or people who share similar experiences and feeling like they are a part of something bigger than themselves can add stressors during a major life transition. Especially for Division-I athletes in general, the added purpose of being a member of a team can foster positive relationships and shared experiences that can create positive outcomes related to social belonging. Of my participants, Chris, a junior, described these shared experiences by comparing the challenges that he and his teammates have gone through together in relation to creating friendships outside of sport:

> I know exactly what those guys go through. I'm dying, they're right there on the line with me. I'm going to gravitate to people who are more like me as well. My boys [teammates] play football, people that are outside of sports don't really know

> what that's like. They [general student population] don't have our schedules. They don't, they don't go through a two-a-days. So obviously I'm going to gravitate to my boys that I've been dying with.

Although fostering relationships outside of sport has been a known factor for combating attrition in first-year college students, it is clear from my participants that the relationships garnered within sport also add immense value for their social belonging. Avery, a junior, also reflected on his experiences with isolation in regards to his student-athlete identity and his identity as a Black male at a PWI. Avery mentioned how important his relationships in sport are, but also how he feels safe with the relationships he has within athletics, and specifically with his Black peers on his team: "Once it gets away from being a student-athlete and it's just me [like] as a Black male here, I feel [like] just from [like] the people around me to [like] the atmosphere of the school I feel like at cetain times it's not meant to support a Black male." Avery's thought process adds an interesting layer to the theme of isolation, that although he understands how outside of athletics there may be opportunities for him to form relationships, he doesn't believe that the landscape of a PWI is set up to support a Black male once he removes himself from athletics. In these two examples from Avery and Chris, the case could be made that the isolation which my participants experience within the bubble of athletics has actually added value, rather than removed them from experiencing positive social interactions outside of sport.

In contrast to Avery and Chris' experiences with isolation and forming relationships outside of athletics, Scott and Jermaine's perceptions of isolation away from the general student population, and even their lifestyle, can harm their views on the overall college experience and where they, as student-athletes, fit into the greater picture at their university. When Scott and Jermaine were asked, "do you have friends outside of your sport?," they each seemed elated at

the idea that their position at the university was not limited by their athlete identity, but rather, had expanded into a more holistic position within the university. Scott described his experience with his friends outside of athletics as an "escape," and that his true college experience began when he formed relationships outside of sport.

> I will say outside of my sport, I do have friends. Yea. And I will say it's easy for me to make friends outside of sport, but you personally have to be invested in that…so I had these two friends who were normal students, and from there bro, I swear the moment I met them, oh that's when college truly changed for me. Like, [uh], I was hanging around the team a lot, hanging out with the guys a lot and you know, it was cool, but you know, that's all we (teammates) know. We only know each other. And the second I met someone outside of my sport, that's when I started feeling like a part of the university, that's when I started feeling like a student-athlete...knowing people out of my sport is almost like a getaway.

Jermaine expressed similar perceptions of the familiarity which he and his teammates share by describing the different life perspectives that students outside of the athletic realm have, also relating these relationships as an "escape."

> It's always good to get away from sports sometimes. Cause when you're around sports people, all you want to do is talk about sports, do sports. But [like] outside people is more of like, it's just more relaxed and like everything's more laid back and they give a different perspective on life. Cause [like] athletic, I mean athletes in a college perspective is way different from a normal student's perspective of college, especially here. So, I feel like it's a nice escape.

The perspective that Avery and Chris shared in relation to Jermaine and Scott illuminated an interesting juxtaposition – that the theme of "isolation" is both real and unique to the person going through this experience. The perceived effects of being isolated from the general student body, much like any life transition, differs substantially on a person-by-person basis, and my participants' perspectives confirmed that. The demands of a Division-I student-athlete, more specifically a Black Division-I football player at a PWI, are drastically different than their non-Black, non-student-athlete peers, yet the common denominator between "isolation" and previously discussed themes remain the same: the support systems that are in place in these organizations are not "cookie-cutter" solutions; rather, support systems, and the way that their members interact with these systems, should be viewed as dynamic and flexible.

Strategies

The fourth tenet of Schlossberg's (2011) four S's framework on transition is "strategies," which refer to the actions that an individual in transition takes to cope with the transition. Participants described a plethora of strategies that they used, consciously or unconsciously, to cope with their transition to a PWI as a Black Division-I football player. Throughout the data collected on participant strategies, three themes capture the essense of what my participants described: a) blending in, b) code-swtiching, and c) time prioritization and preparedness. Reported strategies revolved around wearing certain clothing to classes and in their community, the ways that participants speak in certain settings, and the use of the redshirt-freshman year as a tool for successfully transitioning to their university. In some cases, participants described their redshirt-freshma year as a key strategy to take advantage of the benefits that were afforded to them during their transition to college.

Strategies: Blending In

"Blending in," an act commonly known in CRT literature which refers to persons of color feeling pressure to moderate their otherness in order to avoid standing out amongst non-minority peers (Atienza, 2021), took on many forms in the data. The plight of being a Division-I football player at a PWI is clear, in that, for better or worse, this population is obvious to identify amongst their peers. In order to blend in to their classrooms and in their communities, participants, consciously or unconsciously, use strategies to hide their athletic identities or abate their Blackness. In academic settings, participants mentioned sitting in the back of their classes, monitoring the questions they ask, and going so far as to change their backpacks in hopes to be recognized as a member of the general student population. Dean, a sophomore, described the reasons he sits in the back of his classes:

> I don't know why, it's just [like] a specific reason why I sit in the back of class. I mean, probably just because it's the furthest away from the teacher and the lecture. I just know why I sit with people on the football team, because it's just a comfort thing. [Like] we understand each other because we see each other all of the time. We're more comfortable around each other because of the sport that we play together.

The idea that Dean is conscious of being comfortable in academic settings is troublesome and counterintuitive to his pursuit of blending in. While the reasoning is sound, he wanted to sit with his peers whom he shares similar experiences with, realistically, his strategy to sit the furthest away from the instructor, and subsequently the lecture as a whole, only adds to common stereotypes that Black student-athletes, and student-athletes in general, are "dumb-jocks," and are more unprepared for their coursework compared to their non-athlete peers. These decisions,

whether conscious or not, are further illustrated by Avery's seemingly hyperactive thought process on how he participates, when to participate, and even what he can ask from his professors in small classroom settings:

> You gotta put a lot of thought in what you're about to do. [Like] where are you about to sit? If you're going to eat snacks during class, you got to think about that. Can I go to the bathroom? [Like] will the teacher think I'm just skipping out on the class if I go to the bathroom? There's just a lot of negative BS that comes when you look at me and the sport I play, [like] a lot comes with it. Certain things I would never even think to do like skip out on a class, I wouldn't even think to do that, but [like] a teacher would just assume the worst because of what I look like and what sport I play.

Blending in, to the lengths that Avery describes, is an on-going, internal strategy that he frequently felt like he must act upon, as decisions as simple as going to the restroom can prove to be complex and multi-faceted through his lens. Whether professors aid in or reject common stereotypes related to Black students or student-athletes in higher education, the internal dialogue that exists in Avery's consciousness in academic settings remains the same, a feeling that if he stood out, it will be perceived in negative light; thus, he felt the need to blend in. William also described this idea through his experiences with being called on to volunteer in small classroom settings, mentioning the following:

> I never want to be the person answering when called on to be a volunteer or to answer a question…because I feel like everybody else is there for academics, and you kind of tell yourself that you're there for football…so you just kind of want to fit in and not make it obvious or be exposed, whether I know the answer or not.

Similarly, Eli stated that he would like to completely remove his athletic identity when he enters academia: “I feel like in an academic setting, I want to [like] distance myself from the athletic part of my identity further…like not bring my athletics into academia at all.”

The pressure to fit into academic settings required some of my participants to deny their athletic identity entirely. From William and Eli’s experiences with blending in, one could surmise that not sticking out in their classrooms is more important than being proud of their dual-identities. Although the aforementioned examples illuminate more subtle examples of strategies my participants utilized within academia, Eli continued to describe common interactions he has with his non-student-athlete peers around campus, going as far as lying about his athletic identity and affiliation with the football program:

> Sometimes I don't even tell people I'm on the team…[like] if I'm walking with some teammates or whatever, [like] around campus and I talk to someone, I'll tell them I'm the equipment manager. I [like], I'm starting to not want to tell them I'm a football player, because I don't want people to [like], look at me [like] as a football player. So [like] I would try to avoid telling people that I'm on the team.

Aside from strategies related to interactions, or lack thereof, in academia, all 10 of my participants mentioned some form of changing their outward appearance to blend into their surroundings. In addition to being hyper aware of their student-athlete identity, participants also commented on their identity as a Black student in academia, and how the compounded challenges add another layer of perceived detriment that they have to strategize around. Avery expressed his frustrations about looking like the “big Black kid” in class, even after he has accounted for removing identifiable football apparel:

> I try not to wear football affiliated gear really, so like the sweatpants and bookbag, I try my hardest not to wear that stuff. So, I, then I just look like a big Black kid in class...so that at least takes away the sport part of it, because there's also a negative connotation that comes with being Black, and especially a football player. I feel like there's a negative connotation that comes with us in the classroom, so I try to take the athlete part away from it. So at least that's not holding me back too. So that's one less thing holding me back.

It is important to note that through Avery's description of his experiences that he is aware of the negative connotations that come with being Black and a student-athlete in higher education. Therefore, these strategies serve as a reaction to those challenges in order to even the playing field, which hopefully allowed him to blend into his surroundings more effectively.

Strategies: Code-Switching

Code-switching can be defined as the use of more than one language, or a variety of that language, used as a hybrid language (Young, 2009). Applied to Black students in higher education, code-switching is embedded within the context of W.E.B. DuBois' "double consciousness," or, a set of sociological processes altered by social interaction and participation (Meer, 2019). The reasoning behind displaying a double consciousness are presented as strategies utilized to present dual characters, where the individual is able to alter how they are viewed through the eyes of others, usually through the practice of changing their dialect, accent, or commonly used verbiage. Code-swtiching, according to W.E.B. DuBois, is one aspect of a range of attempts to mediate between individual and society, and minority and majority subjects (Meer, 2019). Black men and women in America have devleoped this double consciousness throughout centuries of racist stereotypes, as Blacks have commonly been associated with a race

who has contributed little to American life; therefore, these narratives have created an internal echo of White America's racist judgements, where Blacks "look at one's self through the eyes of others" (Meer, 2019, pg. 52).

Avery, without any encouragement to do so, related his eperience with code-switching in college to W.E.B. DuBois' reference to "wearing a mask," saying the following:

> That's what it feels like…we (Black people) wear the mask, and I relate that so much to [like] being at State University and being a Black person in America, it's like a mask, [like] when you leave your door you have to put on a mask just to fit in or just to survive…and it feels like if I don't do that, I won't make it.

The "mask" Avery referred to is congruent with code-switching or blending in, feeling the need to change appearances or language to satisfy the expectations of majority subjects. Embedded within code-switching was an inherent anger that my participants described, a helpless feeling that Dean described as "frustrating, because it felt like I had to stop being me in order to please other people," he continued:

> It's not fair that I have to, [like], I have to conform myself so that other people can feel safe…it's sad to see it come to that, because people don't want to get to know people, you know, every first impression is what people go off of and they dont have to [they don't], people don't want to have patience and sit down and [like] take the time to get to know me.

This feeling of conformity was described by all 10 of my participants. While frustrating, Dean further described his relationship with conforming and code-switching, "since middle school I've had to learn to tone down my Blackness in a way to make other people feel comfortable." Noel also described the act of code-switching through strategies that his parents taught him,

specifically as it pertains to phone conversations, “with Black parents, they harp on you on how you [like] talk on the phone, what you sound like on the phone…what race would they think you are if someone heard you on the phone. So I just feel like that in the back of my head all of the time.” Through the voices of my participants, it was made clear that this strategy is a mandatory practice used in everyday life, whether interacting with coaches, professors, or non-Black peers. Scott, a graduate student, described the obligatory nature of code-swtiching specifically in academic settings:

> You got to code-switch…[like] it's mandatory because that's just how the world works…it's talking in a manner that White people can understand, I wouldn't say it's necessarily talking White, but I'm talking very clear on purpose [yeah]…I'm going to use words that are pretty standard, throw a couple of big words in there just to let y'all know that I do the school stuff so there's no misunderstanding about what I’m saying.

Scott is not alone in these experiences, as Chris also mentioned that he “hits a switch” when he gets in the classroom. Referring specifically to his Blackness, the switch, as Chris described it, refers to “a verbiage change and a snap to attention.” When asked about experiences with culture shock, Chris also added the following:

> Only thing I do have to say on culture shock is in classroom settings, when I am the only Black person or the very few ethnic people in a classroom, I do feel some type of way. It is very isolating. And I feel like I have to act a certain way, it might change how I act…I might change how I say stuff. I might change my, my verbiage. I might not talk how I normally talk just because I’m singled out and

> isolated. I will say that flat out. I've done that plenty of times in classrooms here, for sure.

Chris' experiences describe the intersection between feelings of isolation, otherness, and code-switching. That is, when participants felt like they were the "only," and especially in classroom settings, there was an intrinsic reaction to cater to majority subjects rather than be their authentic selves. The stories that were described by participants are worrisome, but not surprising. Stemming from the narrative that African-Americans do not add value to our society, it should not be surprising that even Black Division-I college football players feel like they are on their campuses as objects for entertainment and/or exploitation. Eli describes his experience at State University in that "every day here is a hard thing to do, [like] I feel alone…it is also a very unique experience being Black and a student-athlete...I feel like sometimes I'm kind of [like] a show monkey, just [like] an animal in a zoo."

My participants' experiences with blending in to their surroundings, particularly in academia, further illustrate how strategies can be taken to exhaustive measures. As a whole, all 10 of my participants related their experiences with blending in to their athletic identity in academia; whereas, only three participants mentioned their identity as a Black male as a part of their strategy to blend in. However, all 10 participants described code-switching as their primary strategy to "wear the mask" as a Black student at State University.

Strategies: Time Utilization and Preparedness

The theme of time utilization and preparedness describes participants' experiences with balancing academic, athletic, and personal demands in addition to general preparedness, and how those two ideas were affected by their redshirt-freshman year. This theme allowed me to view time utilization and general preparedness through the lens of the opportunity to redshirt during

the transition to a PWI. As discussed, a redshirt-freshman year presents potential benefits for the recipient if they have a level of self-advocacy and preparedness that allows them to take advantage of said year. Chris explained how his redshirt-freshman year felt like "a big waste of time," given the fact that he felt like he didn't utilize any of the extra support that was given to him during the redshirt-freshman year. Chris went on to say that the year "definitely could've been utilized better," and that he "would've definitely benefited from support in the academic field." It is important to note that Chris' frustrations with his redshirt-freshman year are not related to the year itself, but the lack of transparency which he was given by his coaching staff, who did not make it clear to him that he was going to redshirt. As noted, Schlossberg (2011) mentions that a person who has a clear understanding of, and anticipation for, the transition they are going to experience is more likely to experience a less volatile life transition. In Chris' case, not knowing whether he would redshirt or not left him in flux, which forced him to prepare for, and travel to his football games as if he were not redshirting in addition to performing in academia without utilizing the potential benefits that a redshirt-freshman year may provide.

Dean expressed similar feelings about the potential advantages that an anticipated redshirt-freshman year could provide. Like Chris, Dean was uncertain about whether he would be made to redshirt or not, and struggled to balance the challenges that come along with being in that situation. According to Dean, his confusion about the entire process and where he stood in the football program gave him an unsettling feeling about whether he should utilize opportunities in academia, as his peers who were redshirting were, or fully embrace his athletic identity and the thrill of playing in game contests as a true freshman. Ultimately, he was redshirted, but not without important reflection on his perceived missed opportunities, as he described – "I think

that it would have been a cleaner process if I was able to focus on my academics and not think about athletics as much as I did."

The ability to utilize time and take advantage of the potential opportunities that a redshirt-freshman year may provide was discussed by all 10 of my participants. Of the participants who noted that they took advantage of the opportunities, each of them (4) fully anticipated the redshirt year. William, a senior, discussed the challenges of the first year of college and how he believed that, although his redshirt-freshman year was difficult, he still feels like had a "golden ticket" as a redshirt-freshman. William describes his experiences more:

> The redshirt-year, I mean, it's still really, really busy, you know, guys still practice four days a week, but I do think that there is more free time, [uh], guys who play their first year have to travel [away games] six or five times a year, so year, there's more free time there, but we're all still busy, the first year of college for everybody is pretty overwhelming, and an extremely important time to start that trajectory of where you're going to go, you know, it's extremely valuable time.

Ultimately, the strategies that participants employed during their transition to, and through, college helped them manage with their transition experiences. Strategies ranged from subconscious code-switching in certain scenarios to taking advantage of the extra time a redshirt-freshman year can offer Division-I football players all influenced my participants' ability to successfully cope with their new circumstances. Participants who did anticipate their transitions, both as a Black male to a predominantly White campus, and as a redshirt-freshman during their athletic careers, showed more success and comfort with their circumstances during those transitions. Participants who were not previously exposed to predominantly White campuses

and/or did not anticipate a redshirt-freshman year experienced unique challenges during their transitions.

In order to fulfill the intention of this study, it was imperative that Schlossberg's (2012) transition theory was used to prioritize my participants' perceptions of, and experiences with their transition, rather than the transition itself. The four S's framework provided clear tenets that allowed me to highlight the unique characteristics of my participants, the different situations they were in during their transition, the support systems – or lack thereof, and the multiple strategies and coping mechanisms that participants utilized to navigate their transition. In alignment with Schlossberg's (2012) transition theory and the four S's framework, the integrated analysis of the inducted and deducted codes and themes which emerged from the interviews provided accuracy and consistency in data interpretation. Lastly, in accordance with critical race theory (Cooper and Cooper, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007) and the utilized tenets; permanence of racism, counter-storytelling, and interest convergence, subtle descriptions of race and racism were illuminated through the interviews through descriptions of Schlossberg's (2012) four S's framework.

Effects of a Redshirt-Freshman Year

The perceived effects of the redshirt-freshman year experienced by my participants were both positive and negative. All participants indicated that they received some sort of benefit from their experience with the redshirt-freshman year, including academic buffers, opportunities to build relationships in academia, or having a year to physically and mentally adapt to the challenges that come with being a Division-I football player; however, participants also discussed feelings of isolation apart from their team, and feeling as if, at least athletically, that their redshirt-freshman year felt like a "waste" due to not playing in games. Each perceived

advantage and disadvantage that was addressed throughout the interviews are discussed in the following sections.

Holistic Advantages and Disadvantages

According to my participants, holistic advantages of their redshirt-freshman year generally related to starting their college careers off on the right foot and forming their own identity away from home. Along with popular college student development models, research (Chavous, Richardson, Webb, Fonesca-Bolorin, & Leath, 2018) shows that changes in worldview are a central part of cognitive development during the transition to college for Black college students. Participants noted a similar phenomenon during their transition to State University, saying how important it was to "surround yourself with good guys to take a good trajectory." Division-I student-athletes, and specifically football players, arrive to college as a part of a 125-person cohort, and being surrounded by dozens of ideologies and worldviews can affect the trajectory of young men who are in a major life transition. William discusses his perception of this phenomenon:

> I think people will take this [opportunity] and either make a lot of good decisions, or do the same kind stuff that they did their senior year [in high school]…your parents aren't there anymore, and I think guys [who redshirt] get certain opportunities to look up to guys and take a good trajectory when they get to college…so I think as far as your identity goes, it's a malleable time, a very important time to start that trajectory of where you're going to go, so having that first year to [um] slow things down and surround yourself with other teammates who are also going through the same experience can be crucial.

Similar to William, Michael also expressed his appreciation for his redshirt-freshman year, mentioning that "having that year motivated me to, you know, go harder…it gave me more time to develop and it got me on the right track." Michael went on to admit that athletically, the year felt like a setback for him, but continued on to describe how he felt like he made physical and mental gains throughout his transition to college, specifically crediting his redshirt-freshman experience:

> I felt like it definitely helped me though. [Like], even though I'm not where I wanted to be as far as weight or strength, I did put on a couple of pounds and started creating better habits because I felt like I had more opportunities than guys who didn't redshirt…I was lifting more throughout the week, and heavier workouts than the other guys, 'cause you know, in a season they got the freshmen lifting different days than the older guys…so I feel like it helped me get into routines and follow my teammates who were on the same track as me…it helped me.

Noel added similar perceptions of the year, but also mentioned that the success of the redshirt-freshman year has a lot to do with whether or not the student-athlete takes advantage of the benefits that the year has to offer. Noel states that he was "really focusing on time management and balancing all of the things, [you know], I had to balance once I came to college." He added, "it's crazy how much it would benefit people who really don't take it into consideration." As previously discussed, the transition to college is a strenuous experience, and with increased stressors that are associated with being a Black male at a PWI in addition to their student-athlete status, it is important to note that participants described a sort of lenience that the

redshirt-freshman year could provide, if it were communicated clearly to them, and subsequently taken advantage of.

Holistic disadvantages were primarily discussed by participants when they felt as though they weren't prepared for, or properly guided through the redshirt process. Perceived holistic disadvantages were especially discussed by participants who didn't anticipate redshirting during their freshman year. When Dean discussed his experience with the redshirting process, he mentioned how confused was about the process because no one discussed it with him. The lack of clarity and organization throughout the redshirt process made Jermaine weary about his direction at school, but also challenged his identity as a student-athlete:

> I just felt like I wasn't even on the team, I just had to do [like] all the best stuff that came with being on the team without playing in the games…having to sit in the stands for the games, [like] it is just so isolating. My entire fall semester of my first year, [like] I just wanted to go home every single day…we also never [like] brought the redshirted guys together, but that definitely would have been a good idea, because whenever they [the team] leaves to travel, [like] for away games, it's just you at your dorm, and the team that we think we're on is [like] somewhere else.

It's important to note that feeling of homesickness are not solely related to Jermaine's experiences, but the severity of his feelings of isolation and loss of identity as a student-athlete are noteworthy. Eli described a similar feeling of being "thrown into the fire" when he arrived at school. Eli mentioned that there wasn't any "guided direction" or "blueprint" that could help guys through the process. He went on to say that although there were opportunities for academic mentoring and tutoring, "there wasn't really anything that would help you adjust to your new

life." The clarity that the receiving institution provides for the student-athlete regarding the redshirt process and transition to college is crucial to helping the student-athlete experience a smoother transition.

Academic Advantages and Disadvantages

The perceived benefits of the redshirt-freshman year related to academia are discussed as a "cushion" for transition by my participants. Additionally, participants expressed their appreciation for the academic success they experienced during their first semester in college, especially when they were going through a difficult life transition, colleting small "wins" in academia provided positive momentum during a tough time. Scott, who admitted that it was a "rough" transition for him being away from home and not having played his first year, boasted about his high GPA during his first semester in college: "It was rough for me, but I did amazing academically though. That was my best semester to this day, just from the beginning having that good GPA, I was pretty proud to think of myself as [like] a good student.

Dean, who previously admitted that the process could have been cleaner for him, also expressed how even without much structure or clarity for the redshirting process, he benefited academically from the "cushion" that the year provided; although, he believes that the redshirt-freshman experience should be focused on academics even more than it was for him: "I think that it would have been a cleaner process if we were more focused on academics, meeting with academic counselors in mentoring, and building [like] those habits early on...I know doing that early is what helped me." Noel's perceptions of the academic benefits that exist during the redshirt-freshman year mirror Dean's, but Noel added his gratitude for acquiring important skills that helped him in academic settings. He mentioned that the redshirt-freshman experience could serve as a tool to "take some of the pressure off of guys for more than one reason." He went on

to mention that his redshirt-freshman experience allowed him to "just focus on being a good student for a semester" and "focus on the small things" instead of feeling like he had to balance full athletic, academic, and social demands.

On the other hand, perceived academic disadvantages were also discussed by a few participants. As it pertains to academic settings, the theme of "moral confliction" is related to feelings of mishandled academic opportunities during participants' redshirt-freshman year. For instance, Avery expressed that once you are deemed as a "redshirt-freshman" within the football program, the support staff treat student-athletes differently. This is what Avery described about his experience with the academic support staff:

> I feel like once you redshirt and they [the academic support staff] know you're not playing, they really are just pushing you to stay up in your classes so then you don't fall behind and become ineligible, just in case the coaches may need you…so it's really like, they just trying to help you survive as long as possible.

Although participants showed gratitude for the cushion that the redshirt-freshman year could provide them during their academic experiences, it was made clear that wearing the "redshirt-freshman" label caused the academic support staff to look at my participants differently than their non-redshirted peers. Along with the confusion of the lack of structure and clarity of the redshirt-freshman experience, Eli added that coming from a structured high school experience to an unstructured first semester in college left him feeling like he was fending for himself, and described his experience as a "total reprogramming." Additionally, Eli also considered the idea that the coaches and support staff in the building completely took the focus off of his development because of the added fifth-year, saying:

> They kind of [like] took the focus off of you during that year, 'cause [like] you would have your fifth-year at the end…so [like] they wouldn't really need to develop you during that year, right? Like, why would they need to put all of these resources and attention into me?

As previously discussed, the academic demands that are placed on student-athletes, compounded with athletic and social demands, carries substantial pressure, especially because academic success and degree process is integral to athletic eligibility. Based on some of my participants' experiences, it is important to view the redshirt-freshman year as an academic buffer or a tool that can be used to more properly acclimate to their new demands. Recognizing some of these perceived academic benefits that participants received from their redshirt-freshman year is integral to ensure that student-athletes experience some semblance of academic success during their transition to college in the future.

Athletic Advantages and Disadvantages

All 10 of my participants noted that their most significant experience or memory in college was related to their football playing career. Additionally, the majority of my participants described their inability to play in games during their first year in college as detrimental to their identity as a student-athlete. One participant went as far as to say that not playing his first year was "trash," he added, "playing is a part of my entire life, like, it didn't matter what stage of life, I always played – before that year, I had never not played in a game." It was clear that my participants leaned heavily on their identity as a football player; therefore, for participants to hold positive perceptions of athletic advantages during a year where they may be not playing their sport for the first time in their lives suggested that the positive opportunities they received were extremely beneficial. Michael described the athletic benefits he received from his redshirt-

freshman year, where he admitted that he "wasn't [physically] ready" when he first arrived to college, he continued:

> I feel like if I would've just come in here like this, super-duper skinny, 165 pounds, I just wasn't ready to play yet…so I definitely feel like the year helped me to put more size on, and especially as far as [like] learning [the plays] goes, I felt like I had the skillset, but I needed the year to grow mentally and physically. [Like] I'm going against the top two receivers on the team every day, I wasn't ready for that, so I definitely feel like as far as that goes it [the redshirt-freshman year] really helped me.

Although participants described the opportunity to get bigger, stronger, and absorb their playbooks while balancing their other demands, all 10 of my participants mentioned the unique feeling of arriving to college where one, or many, coaches from the football staff had been recruiting them for many years in some instances, all for that relationship to dwindle entirely during the first semester in college. This phenomenon is also in alignment with the moral confliction that coaches in revenue-generating Division-I athletic programs have, especially when their teams are "in-season." My participants, similar to all freshmen making the transition from high school to college, left familiar support systems and surroundings behind. My participants came to State University with the perception that the support systems housed within the athletic facilities would provide guidance and continue to foster a strong relationship during their transition to college; instead, participants described their first year in college as being "thrown in hot oil" or "out of sight and out of mind."

Michael specifically described his experience with his coaches: "they [coaches] wouldn't interact with me at all. Like I was just there and kind of [like] not there at the same time." Eli

mentioned having a similar experience, where he noted the excessive recruitment he experienced in high school and how that experience was in stark contrast to what the relationships were like when he was enrolled in school: “being recruited, [like] out of high school, from having all of these [like] colleges reaching out and sending you letters and just kind of riding you, and then all of the sudden you join your freshman year, and [like] it just kinda felt like I was pushed aside.”

Ultimately, some participants reflected on their redshirt-freshman experiences as they pertain to athletic benefits as regretful or a “waste.” On the other hand, participants also noted that there were clear opportunities for physical and mental growth. Lastly, the player-coach relationship, or lack thereof, was brought up by all 10 of my participants, suggesting that the support from coaches is focused on student-athletes that can contribute to winning during their season, and not the development of the student-athletes who are experiencing a redshirt-freshman year.

Overall Impression of the Redshirt Year

Although every participant expressed some sort of benefit that they received from the redshirt-freshman year, whether holistically, academically, or athletically, only one of my 10 participants agreed with the concept that the redshirt-freshman year could be implemented as a mandatory practice when student-athletes transition to college. The sole proponent, Chris, was overwhelmed with the benefits that he could have received from anticipating the redshirt-freshman year and having a clear plan of how and where he would spend his time during the redshirt year. Overall, Chris’ main frustration with his experience with redshirting was the lack of clarity and planning that went into his transition to college. He mentioned repeatedly that he could have and should have benefited from the opportunities that were there; instead, he felt like

he was strung along, and by the time he was redshirted it was too late for him to fully take advantage of the year.

Of the nine participants who were against the mandatory implementation of a redshirt-freshman year for first-year student-athletes, the sentiment was consistent across the board; a) feelings of isolation from their sport/team were too strong, b) the first year of college is busy for everyone, and redshirting doesn't make that big of a difference, and c) the lack of support from coaches and support staff during their experiences weren't convincing enough to feel the need to implement a redshirt-freshman year as a required practice in college athletics. Scott, the most impassioned adversary of the suggested practice, was vehemently against the notion, where he said the following:

> This, in general, I think is a bad idea…those six months [when you get to college] are where you learn the most about yourself…you're away from home for the first time, you got to make new friends for the first time, and you're in a completely different athletic setting where you're no longer just straight up at the top…I think those six months are what everyone needs…making that year mandatory takes that away from guys who are making that transition, [like] I always had someone trying to guide me, but during that little period I didn't have many other people but my teammates and myself, so I got to make decisions about what I wanted to do, where I want to go, and how I'm going to go about it…every day I learned something new about myself…I think the only way to get that experience is to be thrown in the fire. It was the worst, best thing I could have done.

Even the most compelling experiences that the participants shared did not seem to affect their perception that redshirting first year student-athletes should be a mandatory practice. The

volatility of participants' experiences with their redshirt-freshman year, their personal perceptions of life, the situation they were in during their transition to college, and support systems alongside strategies they implemented during their transition to college suggest that there is not a cookie-cutter solution to redshirting as a first year, Division-I student-athlete.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players with redshirting during their transition to a PWI, and what the perceived effects of the redshirt-freshman year for Black Division-I football players were. Schlossberg's (1981, 2012) transition theory was used as the framework to examine the perceived advantages and disadvantages experienced during the redshirt-freshman year. Schlossberg's four S's (i.e., situation, self, supports, strategies) framework was utilized to examine the transition experiences that participants endured. Additionally, tenets of CRT were applied to examine participants' experiences with redshirting as it pertains to race and racism (Cooper and Cooper, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007).

Data provided insight into how the permanence of racism, counter-storytelling, and interest convergence was reflected in the experiences of the Black Division-I football player through his transition to a PWI. In applying Schlossberg's (2012) transition theory, it was important to prioritize each participant's individual perceptions of the transition, rather than the transition itself. Accuracy and consistency in data interpretation was provided through the integrated analysis of inducted and deducted codes and themes from the interviews that were viewed through the lens of Schlossberg's four S's system for coping with life transitions.

All 10 of the participants in the study noted that they were afforded some advantages, whether holistic, academic, and/or athletically related, from their redshirt-freshman experience.

Disadvantages of the redshirt-freshman year were also expressed by participants. Despite the perceived advantages that participants described, all but one of the participants agreed that a mandatory redshirting policy for incoming freshmen would not be beneficial; additionally, all 10 participants provided suggested improvements or expressed vehement opposition to how the redshirt-freshman year could be utilized.

CHAPTER V

Discussion & Implications

Although the transition to college for freshmen student-athletes has been widely researched, the potential impacts that a redshirt-freshman year can have on the transition of the student-athlete has largely been ignored by researchers. Specifically, for Black male student-athletes who arrive at institutions in higher education with lower high school grade point averages (GPAs) and lower pre-college admissions test scores (i.e. SAT/ACT) than their non-Black peers, the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of the transition experiences for Black male student-athletes with redshirting and the perceived effects that a redshirt-freshman year can have on the trajectory of Black male student-athletes during their transition to college is invaluable. In addition to the academic deficits that Black males may experience during their transition to college, Black Division-I football players who transition to a predominantly White institution (PWI) experience compounded challenges in academia and athletics that are unique to any other sub-population at similar institutions. Illuminating the experiences of this population is integral to assisting practicitioners in higher education, specifically intercollegiate athletics, and can suggest future implications for research.

Through the lenses of Schlossberg's (1981, 2012) transition theory and tenets of critical race theory (CRT) (Cooper and Cooper, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007), this study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of a) the transition experiences that Black Division-I football players had with redshirting, and b) comprehend the experiences and perceived benefits and/or pitfalls of the redshirt-freshman year on Black

Division-I football players. Schlossberg's transition theory (2012) was utilized in order to understand participants' experiences with their transition, while critical race theory (Cooper, Cheeks, & Cavil, 2017) was employed during data analysis as a lens to view systemic racism that is ingrained into Division-I intercollegiate athletics and higher education. The experiences and perceptions of Black Division-I football players during their transition experiences with redshirting were framed by two research questions:

RQ1: What are the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players with redshirting?

RQ2: What are the perceived effects of the redshirt-freshman year experienced by Black Division-I football players?

The research questions were answered through three rounds of semi-structured interviews, averaging 34 minutes, and ranging from 19 to 44 minutes. Through purposeful sampling strategies (Robinson, 2014), participants met the following criteria: a) self-identified man of color, b) participated as an active member of the institution's Varsity Football team, c) currently a sophomore, junior, senior, or redshirt-senior student-athlete on the institution's Varsity Football team, and d) redshirted during their first year of college. In this chapter, the results from the study are discussed through the experiences and perceptions of Black Division-I football players as they navigated their transition to a PWI through their redshirt-freshman year, and the potential effects that the redshirt-freshman year had on them. Additionally, implications for practitioners involved in the transition experiences for freshmen student-athletes in Division-I intercollegiate athletics, athletic department staffs, the NCAA, and student-athletes are also discussed.

RQ #1: Transition Experiences for Black Division-I Football Players

This study explored the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players during their redshirt-freshman year through the lenses of Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory and critical race theory (Cooper and Cooper, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). Results of this study reinforced Schlossberg's transition theory (2011) as an appropriate framework for examining the experiences and perceptions of my participants during their transition. Schlossberg (2011) also provides the four S's framework for coping with life transition; these factors include a) self – who the person in transition is, what is their level of optimism about the transition, b) situation – the situation for the person at the time of their transition, c) supports – the people or assets that can help the person during their transition, and d) strategies – ways that people in life transitions function or cope with their changed reality. In the application of Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory and four S's framework for coping with transition, the key is to focus on the participants' perceptions of the transition rather than the transition itself; therefore, I focused on gaining a deeper understanding of how participants experienced and perceived their transition to State University during their redshirt-freshman year, rather than focusing on the transition.

The challenges that students face during their transition from high school to college is widely researched (Bonanni, 2015). More specifically, researchers have identified and discovered certain challenges that are unique to different subgroups of students that make the transition from high school to college (e.g., students with learning disabilities, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, minoritized student populations). The commonality that underpins each these subgroups during their transition to college is that each of them are experiencing a major life event that is unique to their own backgrounds, situations in life, support

systems that exist, and strategies that they apply during their transition to college in order to matriculate more seamlessly. The subgroup that this study focuses on, the Black Division-I football player at a PWI, experiences additional challenges from the already demanding transition to college, including a heightened sense of racism, stereotypes, and discrimination on their campuses, faculty and Black student-athlete interaction, social-cultural isolation, and the pressure of athletics scheduling on top of academic rigor (Simiyu, 2012).

Findings from this research indicated that participants experienced significant bouts of isolation during their experience with redshirting as they transitioned to a PWI. Williams' (2019) participants also shared similar experiences of isolation during their experiences with the mandatory graduate-transfer redshirt year. More specifically, my participants described ongoing and deep experiences with isolation related to their race and their athletic identity in social settings, academia, and with their non-Black peers. This finding acts in accordance with Sato, Eckert, and Turner's (2018) research on the perceptions of Black student-athletes regarding academic mentorship at PWIs, where loneliness, social isolation, and experiencing little to no meaningful contact with mentorship inside of academic activities was reported. More specifically, participants discussed weekends where their team would travel to an away contest and the redshirt-freshmen would be left back on campus with nothing to do, mentioning that there was no structure or plan in place to get the "redshirted guys" together. One of my participants also added that "[bringing the redshirted guys together] would definitely have been a good idea, because whenever they [the team] leave to travel for away games, it's just you at your dorm and the team that we think we're on is somewhere else."

In congruence with experiences of isolation, findings also indicated that participants felt a substantial lack of support from their coaches once they were designated as a redshirt-freshman.

This finding is embedded in the theme, “moral confliction,” in which participants described the controversial nature of perceived “support” that they received from their coaches. Simiyu (2012) attributes the lack of support from college coaches to the commercialization of intercollegiate sports, where coaches and institutions are largely forced to recruit the most talented players with the priority of winning contests instead of holistic development and personal success. Participants noted that, once they had arrived on campus, it felt like their coaches were just “trying to get four [football] years out of you, rather than focusing on their holistic development as a student-athlete and as a person.

In addition to a lack of support, some participants even discussed a “loss of trust” for support systems they interacted with. This finding holds similar characteristics to the lack of support from coaches that participants expressed; however, this finding was especially pertinent as it related to academic support. Participants specifically discussed that during the transition into their redshirt-freshman year, academic support personnel were “just making sure you’re passing classes,” rather than helping them pursue their academic interests. Further, all 10 of my participants expressed frustrations with “major clustering,” the phenomenon that occurs within higher education institutions where academic coordinators tend to cluster student-athletes in less-demanding majors in order to help them maintain their eligibility (Paule-Kobe, 2019).

RQ #2: Perceived Effects of Redshirt-Freshman Year

The transition to college for first-year Division-I student-athletes is accompanied by a number of challenges that are unique to their own experiences. Prospective college student-athletes bear the unique challenge of balancing multiple intersecting identities (e.g., athletic, academic) when they arrive to their college campuses in addition to balancing the social and academic demands their non-student-athlete peers carry. In a 2010 study on the effects of sport

participation on student-athletes' identity, Chen, Snyder, and Magner discuss the possibilities of student-athletes exhibiting a high level of athletic identity and sport commitment on their psychological or physical well-being, where they found that an athlete's perceived level of athletic identity can determine how one's involvement and experience in sport can affect psychological well-being; further, some research shows that student-athletes who lean heavily into their athletic identity tend to neglect other aspects of life in order to fulfill that athlete role (Hudson, 2000). Additionally, Harper (2013) discusses that from a young age, Black men in particular are socialized to value sports over academic pursuits.

In accordance with Harper (2013), all 10 of my participants noted that their proudest moment in college was related to their careers as a Division-I football player. Additionally, all 10 of my participants noted that during their redshirt-freshman year, they felt isolated from their teammates and coaches. Findings also indicate that, although the preferred ideology for student-athletes is to have a healthy balance of academic, social, and athletic expectations, participants leaned into their athletic identities more than their academic identities in college; for my participants who experienced a redshirt-freshman year during their transition to college, this finding is particularly important because of how my participants unanimously attributed their lack of athletic belongingness to their redshirt-freshman experience. Therefore, one of the perceived effects of the redshirt-freshman year experienced by my participants was a significant loss of athletic identity and athletic belongingness.

In Williams' (2019) study, her participants were able to reflect simultaneously on their distaste for the mandatory graduate-transfer redshirt-year, but also admit that the redshirt-year offered some athletic, academic, and personal benefits for their transition to their new institutions. My participants shared similar feelings about a mandatory redshirt-freshman year

when I prompted them with the idea, their distaste mostly stemming from feelings of isolation from the football team and their athletic identity as a whole. It is important to note that participants also discuss that as it pertains to a redshirt-freshman year, with clearer communication, structure and planning in place, that they think they could have benefited more from the experience, especially as it pertains to their athletic belongingness during their redshirt-freshman year.

The perceived effects of the redshirt-freshman year related to academia had to do with how participants were able to utilize the year. For example, participants who viewed the year as an academic "cushion" to get more properly acclimated to the new challenges reflected on the year as an integral piece of making a successful transition to college. On the other hand, participants who discussed perceived disadvantages of the redshirt-freshman year were adamant that they didn't have any "guided direction" or "blueprint" that could help them acclimate academically, with one participant describing the experience as a "trial by fire." From an athletic-development viewpoint, all 10 of my participants felt like they were able to take advantage of the year to achieve better physical preparedness, with one of my participants explicitly mentioning that the redshirt-freshman year was when he and his incoming classmates who also redshirted took the most time to put on weight and get physically stronger by emphasizing their strength training regimens.

Ultimately, all of the participants in this study described some type of benefit that they received from their redshirt-freshman year; however, nine out of 10 participants were against a mandatory redshirt-freshman year, and each of them mentioned some kind of missed opportunity that they experienced during their redshirt-freshman year due to the lack of clear communication, structure, support, and planning.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This study aims to fill a gap in literature about a largely understudied, yet common phenomenon in college athletics, the redshirt-freshman year, in football, and the perceived effects the year has on the student-athletes who experience it. By examining the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players during their redshirt-freshman year and the perceived effects that the redshirt-freshman year had on participants, this study is likely the only one in intercollegiate athletics or higher education literature that specifically explores this phenomenon under these criteria. The following recommendations are grounded in the literature that undergirds this study and best practices related to intercollegiate athletics departments, college student development, and transition theory.

Recommendation One: Prompt Research on the Redshirt-Freshman Year

This study has timely implications for future research and practitioners, specifically in higher education and intercollegiate athletics. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has been known to stifle reform efforts and avoid policy change (Splitt, 2011). Since the COVID-19 pandemic however, policy reform and adjustments have been made in real time to help support the experiences of the student-athletes at their respective institutions, even granting eligibility relief for student-athletes whose 2020-2021 athletic season was impacted; the recipients of the extra year of eligibility are granted six years to compete in four full seasons of their sport in college, rather than the normal five-years that are allotted for that purpose. If the COVID -19 pandemic showed the world of intercollegiate athletics anything, it is that when the NCAA wants to, they can change policy and adapt to current events rather quickly. In 2018, exception 12.8.3.1.6 was created to change Division-I football player's competition rules, where

the NCAA now allows football-playing student-athletes to compete in up to four official game contests in a season without using a season of competition (NCAA, 2022).

Policy changes, especially exemptions like 12.8.3.1.6, show that the trends, phenomena, and the landscape of intercollegiate athletics is an ever-moving target; therefore, in order to capture the essence of certain phenomena, like the redshirt-freshman year, research has to be done in a timely manner. Especially on the heels of the ramifications that COVID-19 had on intercollegiate athletics and higher education, the NCAA will surely be proactive in doing their part on behalf of the student-athlete, practitioners and researchers should continue to examine the redshirt-freshman year and other understudied, yet common phenomena that student-athletes endure during their transition to, and through their college experience. The findings from this study show that gaining a deeper understanding of the redshirt-freshman year and the effects that the year can have on student-athletes as they transition to college is a worthwhile endeavor.

Recommendation Two: Enable and Advertise Spaces for Black Student-Athlete Belongingness

Research (Strayhorn and DeVita, 2010; Brooms, 2018) identifies that campus climate is a major detriment to Black student success at PWIs. The participants in this research made it clear that in order to positively transition to and through State University, and particularly in academic settings, that they felt the need to constantly code switch, blend-in, or hide their Blackness. In alignment tenets of CRT (Harper, 2009), intercollegiate athletic departments should consider large-scale Black student-athlete belongingness programs and initiatives that foster integration, sense of self, and persistence through the lens of Black student-athletes. Particularly at PWIs, programs like Black male initiatives have shown to assist Black students in navigating the college experience and serve as a buffer this demographic against alienation and isolation.

Intercollegiate athletics departments, and specifically those at PWIs, should consider integrating Black student-athlete belongingness programs into their onboarding process for welcoming incoming classes of student-athletes. My participants made it clear that they leaned heavily on their teammates, and particularly teammates that were also Black, during their transition to college rather than institutionally-provided support systems. Further, Brooms (2018) suggests that participation in cultural student organizations have been shown to support positive integration for Black students. The unique experiences that Black Division-I student-athletes, and particularly football players, at PWIs further demonstrates that Black student-athlete belongingness initiatives would bolster a cultural support network for incoming Black student-athletes.

Scholar-practitioners and support staffs that are housed within intercollegiate athletic departments should partner with departments at their respective institutions to foster an appropriate support system that allows Black student-athletes a critical resource for coping strategies and belongingness, such as African American and African studies and housing and residential life. In doing so, Black student-athletes could claim a space as their own and allow them to build cultural capital and facilitate a 'home away from home' feeling, which can help minimize feelings of isolation (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).

Recommendation Three: Be Proactive with "Redshirt-Freshman" Label

Practitioners, specifically those embedded within Division-I intercollegiate athletic departments, have a responsibility to research best practices for, educate, and promote the well-being of all student-athletes they serve. From this study, it was made clear that the more quickly and clearly that participants knew about their redshirt-freshman year and how support systems were pro/inactive during the transition that the student-athlete experienced from high school to

college were directly related to how positively or negatively the student-athlete perceived the effects of the redshirt-freshman year and their transition to college as a whole. Unanticipated transitions, per Schlossberg (2011), are the disruptive events that occur unexpectedly that can further alter routines and familiarity, thus creating a more difficult experience for the person in transition. Division-I football programs are known for their lengthy recruitment process of future student-athletes, recruiting young men to their institutions as early as the eighth-grade in some cases. Especially with NCAA policy exemptions in regards to eligibility and redshirting, such as 12.8.3.1.6 as previously mentioned, intercollegiate football programs may benefit by being able to play a student-athlete for four games without "using" a year of eligibility; however, the unsettled nature that a student-athlete can develop during their transition to college in regards to whether they are going to redshirt or not adds to the compounded challenges that already exist to a challenging life transition. My participants noted that in a practical sense, not knowing whether or not they were going to redshirt during their transition to college did not allow them to anticipate their circumstances, which ultimately garnered feelings that they had missed an opportunity during a valuable time.

The transition from high school to college is what Schlossberg (2011) refers to as an anticipated and expected transition; however, the majority of my participants felt like they were unsupported during their transition to college, that they could have benefited from structured programs that helped them acclimate to their academic and social surroundings, and felt significant loss of support from their coaching and support staff(s) during their redshirt-freshman year, making an anticipated transition into a more difficult one. It is the responsibility of the practitioners that are housed within intercollegiate athletic departments to integrate student development ideologies to further serve the student-athletes who arrive on their campuses and

make sure that, a) coaches are prompt and clear about who is going to redshirt in their program, and b) support systems exist specifically for redshirt-freshmen.

Recommendation Four: Integrate Academic Support Structures to Athletic Departments

The label, "student-athlete," holds a unique place in higher education. Especially for the student-athletes who compete in men's basketball or football, competing in collegiate athletics has been marketed and commercialized to a point where institutions have to decide on their identity with hopes that the athletic department will align themselves with that mission, vision, and culture. Some athletic departments do not welcome input from the "academic side" of the institution (Howard-Hamilton, 2001); however, a "student-athlete" cannot be the latter without the former; therefore, focusing support structures that integrate academia into athletics departments is critical to support the student-athletes that these athletic departments house. Not widely accepted or admitted in higher education literature is the reality that, although professionals in academic support positions within athletic departments may be passionate about student development, the monumental pressure to "win at all costs" that specifically drives revenue-generating intercollegiate athletics can compromise academic support staffs to keep players eligible, rather than prioritizing the student-athlete's holistic development. Therefore, clear discourse and collaboration between the athletic department and the institution at large is also imperative if both parties' true mission is to help all students matriculate through college positively and ultimately, graduate.

This issue is as pressing and timely as ever, and with the massive commercialization of March Madness and the expansion of the College Football Playoff, both generating upwards of $1.05B and $1.9B respectively; with revenue generation for major intercollegiate athletics' championships skyrocketing, the "arms race" to build $100M football facilities, and NIL

contracts worth upwards of $3M, repairing the relationship between academia and athletics to serve its' student-athletes could not be more important. Integrating academic support structures into athletic departments is a strong first step. For instance, it is typical practice for universities to designate a member of the faculty as a liaison between the institution and the athletic department, popularly referred to as a faculty athletics representative (FAR). One of the responsibilities of the FAR is being tasked with ensuring that student-athletes are upholding the academic values of the institution; however, the FAR can only be as effective as their institution allows them to be. It is important to note that institutions at large, much like athletic departments and the support staffs who are embedded within those athletic departments, are not impenetrable to the theme of "moral confliction" that was discussed in this study's findings. Therefore, if the institution is prioritizing winning over upholding academic integrity and holistic development of the student-athletes who attend the school, then the FAR can only do so much. Other positions within the athletic departments who are involved with academic development of its' student-athletes are enduring an unforeseen era of massive revenue-generating athletics, and institutions should consider a restructuring of their relationships between the academic and athletic sides of their schools.

Recommendation Five: Mandatory Mental Health Services for Incoming Student-Athletes

The participants in this study experienced compounded challenges during a major life transition - being a Black male in higher education, playing Division-I football, and going to school at a PWI. Due to the stigmas that surround psychological distress, Black communities continue to treat mental health as a "silent" problem, and the tendency to silently suffer persists, especially in young adult Black males (Watkins, Allen, Goodwill, & Noel, 2017). Additionally, it should be noted that individuals who encounter racism and/or discrimination are predisposed

to experiencing mental health issues (Pieterse, Neville, Todd, & Carter, 2012). Further, student-athletes are generally unable to recognize forms of anxiety and stress, and student-athletes also purposefully avoid mental health services despite known problems (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020). Although athletic departments and universities as a whole are beginning to invest resources in mental health personnel and services, the barriers that may inhibit student-athletes from seeing a mental health professional still exist, ranging anywhere from a perceived lack of time, lack of understanding surrounding mental health services, or feelings that if the media found out about their connection with mental health professionals that the potential reaction would intensify the experience (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christenson, 2012).

The combination of challenges that come with intersecting racial (for some student-athletes), athletic, and academic identities in addition to the common stressors that exist during the transition to college warrant a push for mandatory mental health programming for all incoming student-athletes. In order to help integrate mandatory mental health opportunities for all incoming student-athletes, intercollegiate athletic departments should consider the following:

1. Bolster mental health personnel within the athletic department and house their offices in the athletic department facility for easy access.
2. Promote mental health professionals to every varsity team in order to destigmatize psychological distress and mental health services.
3. Varsity teams, academic support staffs, and mental health professionals collaborate to find out a) who the incoming student-athletes are and b) what their schedules look like during their first semester to schedule their first appointment.

4. Each student should be offered a 15-30-minute appointment with a medical health professional within their athletic departments, and the student-athlete should then have the option to continue to utilize their support, or discontinue altogether.

Future Research

Due to the massive revenue generation that Division-I football programs create for their institutions, the popularity of college football and the moral confliction that leaders in higher education face will only become greater in the years to come. Due to the conflicting ideologies that Division-I, Power Five athletic departments and the institutions in which they are housed can have, it is important to continue to challenge the normative understanding for common phenomenon that occur in regard to the most important stakeholder in intercollegiate athletics departments, the student-athlete. Additionally, commonly used groups of theory, such as CRT and transition theory, should be examined through an updated lens that aligns with the volatility of the landscape of race and intercollegiate athletics, and specifically, the experience of Black Division-I student-athletes at PWIs.

From this research, it is clear that the results for the current model of redshirting student-athletes are unclear, and that there is an indistinct understanding of whether or not the intended purpose of the redshirt-freshman year is serving who, and what it is intended to serve. Participants consistently shared their distaste for the year, specifically in regards to their athletic identities being shaken during initial transition to college. In order to fully understand the holistic experience of student-athletes, scholar-practitioners and stakeholders in higher education should consider whether or not the current model for the redshirt-freshman year should be revised, perhaps as an additional year of academic scholarship after athletics eligibility is completed, or done with altogether.

The usage of CRT and transition theory in this research also warrant the concern that the way that scholar-practitioners examine the experiences of Black students in higher education, and specifically Black student-athletes, should reflect a more accurate depiction of what this population experiences in present-day intercollegiate athletics, especially in revenue-generating sports. Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory is primarily utilized as a functionalist ideology; whereas CRT directly and indirectly critiques models like Schlossberg's in diverse educational environments. Through the experiences of my participants, it was made clear to me that functionalist ideologies should be examined through the lens of CRT, and specifically tailored to a more accurate portrayal of how Black Division-I athletes are matriculating through their experiences in college, and specifically at PWIs. For instance, when a scholar considers the 'situation' of a college student in transition, rarely would the situation allude to their classmates being afraid of you in educational settings. This idea further demonstrates that functionalist theories, such as transition theory, can't always be used universally, as the social, academic, and athletic experiences of Black Division-I football players at PWIs is profoundly unique to a demographic experiencing a very specific set of circumstances.

Summary

This study was done with the intent to highlight the experiences of a marginalized and largely exploited population within intercollegiate athletics and higher education altogether. This study is necessary to take the next step into gaining a deeper understanding of a common phenomenon in intercollegiate athletics: the redshirt-freshman year. Further, illuminating the experiences of Black Division-I football players during their redshirt-freshman year at a PWI and also gain a deeper understanding of what the perceived effects of the redshirt-freshman year are from the voices of the student-athletes who experienced that year. Ultimately, the landscape of

intercollegiate athletics and the future of the NCAA is volatile; therefore, to influence policy change and structural reform, any research that highlights the voices and experiences of the student-athlete can prove beneficial.

Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory proved to be an effective framework to examine the transition experiences of my participants during their redshirt-freshman year at a PWI. Utilizing Schlossberg's (1995, 2011) four S's framework for coping with transition allowed me to structure data collection and highlight my participants' experiences and perceptions of the redshirt-freshman year. Critical race theory served as an effective framework, utilized during data analysis, that allowed me to examine my participants' experiences with race and racism on a predominantly White campus.

Results from this study can prove to be of immediate value to the NCAA and intercollegiate athletics departments. Results show that the Black student-athlete experiences an extremely volatile transition to college that is accompanied by unique challenges which can be intensified by the redshirt-freshman year. This study builds off of a small foundation of literature that highlights the effects that a redshirt-year has on student-athletes, and the transition experiences of Black Division-I football players who are going to college at a PWI.

Definition of Terms

- **Eligibility** – Student-athletes must meet unique academic and conduct standards set by the university they attend and the NCAA, in order to be eligible to compete in their respective sport; examples include but are not limited to: first-year student-athletes must achieve at least 10 of the required 16 core courses before the start of their senior year in high school to be eligible for collegiate competition; a minimum high school core-course GPA of 2.3 and an enhanced sliding-scale combination of GPA and test scores will be deemed immediately eligible for collegiate competition in their first-year of college (Hosick & Sroull, 2012).
- **First-year Student-Athlete** – A collegiate student-athlete who is experiencing their first year both academically and athletically; the first-year student-athlete can also be determined as a redshirt-freshman or a true-freshman, depending on their coach's belief that they can contribute in official game contests during their first year.
- **Freshman/Freshman Student Body** – A college freshman who is a part of the general student body, who matriculates through college and is classified solely on their academic year (Freshman, Sophomore; Junior; Senior).
- **Initial Academic Eligibility** – Incoming student-athletes in Divisions I and II are required to meet initial-eligibility standards, including standardized test scores, number of core courses taken in high school, and the subsequent grades earned in core courses. Academic eligibility also includes meeting the unique acceptance requirements of the university they plan to attend (NCAA, 2019).

- **National Letter of Intent** – A contractual agreement between the institution and the prospect that the student-athlete will attend that institutions for one year and will be provided with a financial aid award (Meyer, 2004).
- **Power Five (Conferences)** – NCAA member conferences that include the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Southeastern Conference (SEC), Big 12, Big-Ten, and Pacific-12 (Pac-12) (Huml, Pifer, Towle, & Rode, 2019).
- **Predominantly White Institution** - Refers to any institution of higher learning that wasn't labeled an Historically Black College and University (HBCU) prior to 1964 (Cooper, 2012); Intuitions of higher education with White students accounting for 50 percent or more of their student body (Brown & Dancy, 2010).
- **Redshirt-Freshman** – A student-athlete in their first-year of college who does not compete in official game contests in their respective sport (Medley, 2018).
- **Redshirting** – A term that tells a student-athlete that they will not participate in official game contests in their respective sport for one calendar year (Medley, 2018).
- **True-Freshman** – In athletics, student-athletes are classified on the basis of their sports eligibility rather than their academic progress; thus, the true-freshman refers to a true first-year student-athlete who was not redshirted during their first-year in college (Sanderson & Siegfried, 2015).

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Appendix A: Email Recruitment Message

IRB-SBS Protocol 4287
Title: Black Division-I Football Player Research Opportunity

Dear (participant),

I hope you are doing well. My name is Jackson Matteo, and I am currently a doctoral candidate at The University of Virginia. My passion in life is to make a difference in other's lives, and this capstone research has the potential to help Black Division-I football players in the future.

The purpose of my capstone research is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that Black Division-I football players have with redshirting during their transition to a predominantly White institution (PWI). You have been identified as a potential participant that meets the following inclusion criteria:

- Self-identified man of color
- Participate as an active member of the institution's Varsity Football team
- Currently a sophomore, junior, senior, or redshirt senior student-athlete on the institution's Varsity Football team
- Redshirted during their first year of college

In order to gain a deeper understanding of your experiences, I am inviting you to participate in three interviews via Zoom. The first round will take place in May; the second, June; the third, July. Each interview is expected to take approximately 30-45 minutes and the questions will be open ended. You will be asked to identify your age, race, and discuss your experiences as a Black football player at a Division-I PWI. Although you will not receive any payment for your involvement in this study, your insight and experiences will prove invaluable to gaining a deeper understanding of how Black Division-I football players experience and persist at a predominately White institution. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from this project at any time.

Lastly, I can ensure that your confidentiality will be maintained, and any identifiable information you provide will be expelled.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to take part, simply respond to this email and we will work to schedule a time to meet. If you have questions regarding the study you can reach me at (703) 489-6853 or my advisor, Christian Steinmetz at cls5p@virginia.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Very respectfully,

Jackson

Appendix B: Instagram Recruitment Message

IRB-SBS Protocol 4287
Title: Black Division-I Football Player Research Opportunity

Dear (participant),

I hope you are doing well. My name is Jackson Matteo, and I am currently a doctoral candidate at The University of Virginia. My passion in life is to make a difference in other's lives, and this capstone research has the potential to help Black Division-I football players in the future.

The purpose of my capstone research is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that Black Division-I football players have with redshirting during their transition to a predominantly White institution (PWI). You have been identified as a potential participant that meets the following inclusion criteria:

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In order to gain a deeper understanding of your experiences, I am inviting you to participate in three interviews via Zoom. The first round will take place in May; the second, June; the third, July. Each interview is expected to take approximately 30-45 minutes and the questions will be open ended. You will be asked to identify your age, race, and discuss your experiences as a Black football player at a Division-I PWI. Although you will not receive any payment for your involvement in this study, your insight and experiences will prove invaluable to gaining a deeper understanding of how Black Division-I football players experience and persist at a predominately White institution. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from this project at any time.

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Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to take part, simply respond to this email and we will work to schedule a time to meet. If you have questions regarding the study you can reach me at (703) 489-6853 or my advisor, Christian Steinmetz at cls5p@virginia.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Very respectfully,

Jackson

Appendix C: Round 1 Interview Protocol

Capstone: The Redshirt Year: Benefits & Pitfalls for Division-I Black Football Players
Protocol: Round 1
Framework: Situation & Self
Duration: 00:45 minutes
Goals: 1. Resilience
2. Optimism/pessimism
3. Identify situation during transition

Purpose / Confidentiality / Consent

- **Introduction**
  - My passion in life is to make a difference in other's lives, and this capstone research has the potential to help Black Division-I football players/marginalized populations in the future
- **Confidentiality**
  - Your confidentiality will be maintained, and any identifiable information you provide will be expelled
- **Consent**
  - Right to refuse to participate and/or drop out at any time

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Establish Rapport

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1. How is life? How is school going?
2. What are your goals going into this fall semester?
3. How do you see yourself positively?
4. What is your proudest moment in college so far?

Questions: Self

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1. Tell me about your relationships with your family.
   a. Do you have other significant relationships with other adults in your life? If so, who? And tell me a little about those relationships.
2. Tell me about a time you struggled athletically.
   a. How did it feel to fail?
   b. How did you react to it?
3. Tell me how you would handle failing a test in college.
   a. How would you react to this event?
4. When you think about your future as a young man, what do you think about?
   a. Why? Tell me about why you feel like you are optimistic/pessimistic.
5. So, we talked about your proudest moment in college so far, can you describe a harder time in your life where you faced a challenge and how it affected you?
   a. What did you learn from this challenge?

Questions: Situation

1. Tell me about your transition from high school to college.
    a. Can you describe how you felt when you left home to come to State University?
    b. Tell me about your friends/family back home and how they felt about you coming to State University.
2. Can you tell me about your athletic expectations going into your freshman year of college?
3. Tell me about your transition from high school to college.
    a. Were there any significant low/high points, and what made them low/high points?
4. As a Black football player, can you tell me about the ways that you look at the university, your peers, or your community?
    a. In what ways is your lens different from your non-Black peers? How so?
5. Can you describe the main points of stress that you experienced when you first arrived to college?

Purpose / Confidentiality / Consent

- **Closing**
    - My passion in life is to make a difference in other's lives, and this capstone research has the potential to help Black Division-I football players/marginalized populations in the future
- **Confidentiality**
    - Your confidentiality will be maintained, and any identifiable information you provide will be expelled
- **Consent**
    - Right to refuse to participate and/or drop out at any time
- **Next Round**
    - I will be in touch; the next round of interviews will take place in the next month. Thank you for your time! Your responses are valuable and necessary to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. **YOU ARE HELPING.**

Appendix D: Round 2 Interview Protocol

Capstone: The Redshirt Year: Benefits & Pitfalls for Division-I Black Football Players
Protocol: Round 2
Framework: Supports
Duration: 00:45 minutes
Goals: 1. Identify support systems
2. Sport vs. non-sport friend groups
3. Resources specific to athletics

Purpose / Confidentiality / Consent

- **Introduction**
  - My passion in life is to make a difference in other's lives, and this capstone research has the potential to help Black Division-I football players/marginalized populations in the future
- **Confidentiality**
  - Your confidentiality will be maintained, and any identifiable information you provide will be expelled
- **Consent**
  - Right to refuse to participate and/or drop out at any time

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Establish Rapport

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5. How have things been going since the last time we talked?
6. Have you been thinking about our first interview at all?
7. Tell me something good since the last time we spoke. Movies/games/hobbies?

Refresher Conversation

- The last time we spoke we talked about your background, some defining characteristics about you as a person (i.e. resilient/not; dealing with challenges) and the situation that you were in as you transitioned from high school to college. This interview will be centered around the supports that were available at the time of your transition from high school to college. To reiterate, your confidentiality will be maintained, and any identifiable information you provide will be expelled! **YOU ARE HELPING.**

Questions: Supports

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1. Tell me about the first people you met when you got to State University.
   a. Can you describe to me how they treated you upon arrival?
2. Can you tell me about the first friends that you made outside of your sport at State University?
   a. What was it like to make friends outside of your sport?
   b. How do you think those friendships are different than your friends on your team?

3. When things get really tough, who do you go to? Who do you trust the most?
    a. Tell me about your support system at State University – is there someone at State University that you are able to confide in when things get difficult? Can you describe your relationship with them?
4. Tell me about a time you met with a professor outside of class.
    a. If you haven't, why?
    b. If you have, can you describe your interaction(s) with them?
5. Tell me about the sports psychology resources that are at State University.
6. Can you tell me about your experiences with the support systems that are offered to student-athletes at State University?

Purpose / Confidentiality / Consent

- **Closing**
    - My passion in life is to make a difference in other's lives, and this capstone research has the potential to help Black Division-I football players/marginalized populations in the future
- **Confidentiality**
    - Your confidentiality will be maintained, and any identifiable information you provide will be expelled
- **Consent**
    - Right to refuse to participate and/or drop out at any time
- **Next Round**
    - I will be in touch; the next round of interviews will take place in the next month. Thank you for your time! Your responses are valuable and necessary to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. **YOU ARE HELPING.**

Appendix E: Round 3 Interview Protocol

Capstone: The Redshirt Year: Benefits & Pitfalls for Division-I Black Football Players
Protocol: Round 3
Framework: Strategies
Duration: 00:45 minutes
Goals: 1. How did they adjust
2. Understand coping mechanisms related to athletic/racial identity

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Purpose / Confidentiality / Consent

- **Introduction**
  - My passion in life is to make a difference in other's lives, and this capstone research has the potential to help Black Division-I football players/marginalized populations in the future
- **Confidentiality**
  - Your confidentiality will be maintained, and any identifiable information you provide will be expelled
- **Consent**
  - Right to refuse to participate and/or drop out at any time

---

Establish Rapport

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8. How have things been going since the last time we talked?
9. Have you been thinking about our interviews at all?
10. Tell me something good since the last time we spoke. Movies/games/hobbies?

Refresher Conversation

The last time we spoke we talked about the support systems that helped you get through your redshirt-freshman experience and your transition from high school to college. This interview will be centered around the strategies that you utilized to try to cope with the life-transition you were going through at the time. To reiterate, your confidentiality will be maintained, and any identifiable information you provide will be expelled!

YOU ARE HELPING.

Questions: Strategies

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1. Tell me about how you feel walking into a large lecture hall at State University.
   a. Can you tell me about how you pick out your outfit? Do you take your athletic backpack with you?
   b. If you and your teammates walk into a State University classroom at the same time, how do you think the rest of the classroom perceives you?

2. Black male student-athletes have reported to feel alienated and unsupported at predominantly White institutions, tell me your experiences with alienation or not feeling supported.
3. Can you describe a time where you felt like you had to overemphasize your academic ability to "blend in?"
    a. How do you feel about having to adapt to your surroundings to "blend in" with your peers?
4. If you and your teammates are in the same class, do you choose to sit next to them? Can you tell me about a time where you felt you were judged for sitting next to your teammates in class?
5. Can you describe some other strategies you have used/use to successfully matriculate being a Black football player at a PWI?
6. Can you reflect back on your first year in college and tell me what you think about your redshirt experience? Did that experience have any impact on the way you transitioned to college?

Purpose / Confidentiality / Consent

- **Closing**
    - My passion in life is to make a difference in other's lives, and this capstone research has the potential to help Black Division-I football players/marginalized populations in the future
- **Confidentiality**
    - Your confidentiality will be maintained, and any identifiable information you provide will be expelled
- **Consent**
    - Right to refuse to participate and/or drop out at any time
- **Conclude**
    - Thank you for your time! Your responses are valuable and necessary to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. **YOU ARE HELPING.**