"The Main Thing I Would Want Somebody Who's to Ever Read My Story to Understand is...": Using Narrative Inquiry to Advocate for Systemic Changes for High-Profile Black Athletes

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ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

“The Main Thing I Would Want Somebody Who's to Ever Read My Story to Understand is…”:

Using Narrative Inquiry to Advocate for Systemic Changes for High-Profile Black Athletes

Akuoma Nwadike, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2020

The academic outcomes for high-profile Black Athletes (HPBAs), the young men participating in men’s basketball and football, continue to trail those of their peers, especially in college. Researchers have uncovered ample evidence that dispels beliefs about reduced intellect, instead pointing to systemic injustices that result in academic under-preparation and miseducation. But these findings have not resulted in widespread systemic change for HPBAs. Therefore, I designed a study to take another look into this underperformance phenomenon, applying a scarcely used framework, methodology, and findings presentation in HPBA research. I applied an ecological systems theory (EST) framework to seek out the specifics about the various HPBA environments and timelines to isolate potential change agents and/or areas. I carried out this task using narrative inquiry to receive full stories about the HPBA experience from four former HPBAs. The four narratives are presented in the findings, supported by my EST analysis, to demonstrate an example of my study’s additional purpose: bridging professional and public sociological research. HPBA systemic issues cannot be solved by keeping critical knowledge predominantly within academia, so I sought to accessibly present the knowledge to the public who needs to receive it if academic outcomes are going to change. The key audience includes the HPBA’s earliest mentors, who the study found to be fundamental to HPBA initiation into the system that eventually exploits their talents and denies too many of them educational equity.
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

“The Main Thing I Would Want Somebody Who's to Ever Read My Story to Understand is...”:
Using Narrative Inquiry to Advocate for Systemic Changes for High-Profile Black Athletes

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A Dissertation
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Requirements for the Degree of
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at the
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2020
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

“The Main Thing I Would Want Somebody Who's to Ever Read My Story to Understand is…”:
Using Narrative Inquiry to Advocate for Systemic Changes for High-Profile Black Athletes

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University of Connecticut
2020
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

  Background of the Study .................................................................................................. 1

  Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................. 7

  Purpose of the Study and Research Questions ............................................................. 10

  Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 12

  Definition of Key Terms ................................................................................................. 14

  Delimitations .................................................................................................................... 16

  Limitations ....................................................................................................................... 17

  Summary ............................................................................................................................ 21

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ......................................................................... 23

  Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 23

  Relevant HPBA Academic Research ............................................................................... 27

    HPBA Life in the Black Community ............................................................................. 27

    The Athlete-Student: NCAA HPBA Life ...................................................................... 35

    HPBA Life in Summary ................................................................................................. 53

  Professional and Public Sociology ................................................................................... 54

    Professional Sociology in HPBA Academic Research .................................................. 55

    Public Sociology in HPBA Academic Research ............................................................ 57
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

How to Bridge Professional and Public Sociology in HPBA Academic Research ............... 69

Theoretical Framework: Ecological Systems Theory ......................................................... 70

Ecological Systems as Applied to HPBAs ........................................................................ 71

Summary ............................................................................................................................. 74

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .................................................................................. 78

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 78

Research Design .................................................................................................................. 78

Sampling ............................................................................................................................... 82

Participant Descriptions ..................................................................................................... 85

Data Collection .................................................................................................................... 88

Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 91

Summary .............................................................................................................................. 96

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS ............................................................................................... 99

Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 99

Life Chapter One – Ball Becoming Life: Introduction, Induction, and Acceptance ...... 106

  Part One – “From a Very Early Age…it was all Revolved around Sports” ................. 107

  Part Two – “[Sport] was a Meal Ticket.” ......................................................................... 116

Life Chapter Two – Ball is Life…and that Life Comes with Consequences .................. 130

  Part One – “What are You going to Major in?” ......................................................... 131

  Part Two – “They Want You to Play. They Need You to Play.” ................................. 137

Life Chapter Three – What Is Life After Ball? ................................................................. 142
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has mandated supplemental academic support for student-athletes, but these services do not equitably meet the needs of high-profile Black athletes (HPBAs) during their college enrollment (Harper, 2018; NCAA Research Staff, 2018; 2017). Instead, HPBAs have trailed their peers academically (in graduation rates, academic progress rates, and GPAs) for decades while the NCAA and its members continue to receive the majority of their profits from these students’ athletic talents (Harper, 2018; Hawkins & Nwadike, 2018). The NCAA began in 1906 as a way of formally governing college athletics (Berkowitz, 2017). For decades after its founding, there was no real academic policy in place for college athletes (Nwadike, Baker, Brackebusch, & Hawkins, 2016). The absence of policy was only addressed because of public outcry about the perceived reduction in academic standards for the athletes in the midst of increasing NCAA revenue and national attention (Oppenheimer, 2015). To appease critics, Walter Byers, the NCAA’s first executive director, created the term “student-athlete” in 1964 and put in place the first real initial eligibility standards in 1965 (Nwadike, Baker, Brackebusch, & Hawkins, 2016; Solomon, 2013).

Since then, the NCAA has continued to build up its academic policies, and in 1991, made it mandatory for Division I institutions, those participating at the organization’s premier level of competition—and contributing the most to its revenue (Kreher, 2006)—to provide supplemental academic support to student-athletes (Meyers, 2005; Thamel, 2006). Athletic academic centers

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1 In this study, the title “HPBA” refers to elite men’s basketball and football players who went on to play at the Division I college level; any professional opportunities are outside this study’s scope.
house numerous computers and supplemental academic resources, and millions of dollars are spent annually on peer tutoring (Thamel, 2006). Athletic academic advisors are tasked with recognizing potential challenges to academic success and finding methods to resolve them (“Academic Advisors for Student-Athletes,” n.d.). They handle academic monitoring and counseling, course and major selections, and four-year-planning for their assigned student-athletes (Academic Advisors for Student-Athletes,” n.d.; “Athletic Academics,” n.d.).

The NCAA’s supplemental services requirement is evidence of an improved commitment to academics compared to where the organization started. But when focusing on high-profile athletes only, accepting the NCAA’s stated values of equitable treatment of all student-athletes and educational experience as most important become more difficult (“Amateurism,” n.d.; “NCAA Mission Statement,” 2007). “High-profile” is now commonly used to describe men’s basketball and football since they generate the most revenue and national attention (Carey, 2011; Christianson, 2012; Kreher, 2006; Moyer, 2015; Solomon, 2014). For context, the NCAA earned $1.06 billion during the 2017 fiscal year (Rovell, 2018). That revenue was mostly generated as part of the 14-year, $10.8 billion agreement between Division I men’s basketball, CBS, and Turner Broadcasting that provides $797 million to members annually, and the 12-year, $5.6 billion agreement between Division I FBS football (the highest level of NCAA competition) and ESPN that provides $345 million to members annually (Hawkins & Nwadike, 2018).

Many of the high-profile athletes on Division I teams were admitted due to their athletic talents without regard to their academic abilities, with Kreher (2006) stating that many of the schools find the hardest decision to be deciding how far to bend their admission requirements to allow star high-profile athletes to attend. Gaining college entry due to athletics over academics is an example of special admission, which allows students outside of typical institutional entrance
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

requirements, such as SAT scores and GPAs, to be admitted for possessing what are deemed exceptional talents (Ramos, 2012; Teague, 2010). NCAA Bylaw 14.1.5.1.1 allows this type of admission for student-athletes only if the exception is extended to non-athletes at the institution (Teague, 2010). Non-athletes do receive this exception, but typically only represent a single-digit percentage of the student body compared to more than half of high-profile athletes being specially admitted to the 54 (of 130) Division I FBS schools that Knobler (2008) investigated. And unfortunately, the majority of special admit high-profile athletes enter with grades and test scores that place them at the bottom of their incoming classes (Kreher, 2006). As an example, Taylor (2012) compiled publicly available special admit high-profile athlete data for the nine public universities in the Pac-12, one of the five most profitable Division I conferences. His findings are summarized in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Overall Male SAT/GPA</th>
<th>Men’s Basketball SAT/GPA</th>
<th>Football SAT/GPA</th>
<th>Overall Special Admit %</th>
<th>Athlete Special Admit %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>1145/3.4</td>
<td>1016/2.56</td>
<td>924/2.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona State</td>
<td>1111/3.39</td>
<td>906/2.65</td>
<td>937/3.25</td>
<td>unavailable</td>
<td>unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>1329/3.92</td>
<td>948/3.06</td>
<td>967/2.85</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCLA</td>
<td>1307/3.91</td>
<td>935/3.00</td>
<td>930/3.07</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>1121/3.68</td>
<td>unavailable</td>
<td>953/2.86</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon State</td>
<td>1110/3.50</td>
<td>1009/2.87</td>
<td>997/2.99</td>
<td>unavailable</td>
<td>unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1206/3.77</td>
<td>951/2.93</td>
<td>949/2.99</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wash. State</td>
<td>1058/3.21</td>
<td>1013/3.13</td>
<td>916/2.83</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>1152/3.60</td>
<td>943/2.80</td>
<td>966/2.90</td>
<td>unavailable</td>
<td>unavailable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all of the schools in Table 1, the high-profile athletes have noticeably lower average SAT scores and GPAs than the general male student body. The special admit percentages reported by Taylor (2012) encompassed all student-athletes, but he inferred that they would be
much higher if limited to just the high-profile sports. This idea was supported by Knobler’s (2008) findings. One of her examples was the University of Georgia, which specially admitted 73.5% of its high-profile athletes compared to 6.6% of the general student body (Knobler, 2008).

Sack and Staurowsky (1998) stated that it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a Division I program that does not lower its admission standards for high-profile athletes. Each institution decides how far it is willing to stray from typical admissions standards to bring in the best athletic talent (Kreher, 2006). But high-profile athlete data, like what is displayed in Table 1 above, help explain why Division I institutions usually make supplemental-service utilization mandatory for this group of student-athletes throughout their college tenure, to try to address incoming academic gaps compared to the general study body (Kreher, 2006; McCann, 2012; Menzer, 2014; Ramos, 2012; Taylor, 2012).

However, even with mandatory supplemental services in place, high-profile athletes continue to struggle to maintain academic eligibility and post lower graduation rates than their peers (Ganim, 2014; Gutting, 2012; Whitner & Myers, 1986). The lowest of these numbers come from high-profile Black athletes (HPBAs), which is especially problematic when considering that the multibillion-dollar financial contribution of high-profile sports to the NCAA and its institutions is generated by majority-Black teams (Harper, 2018; Hawkins & Nwadike, 2018; Lapchick et al., 2018). Black athlete overrepresentation in the high-profile sports is even more striking when considering that Black males are severely underrepresented as part of the general student body at their schools (Lapchick et al., 2018; Harper, 2018; Hawkins & Nwadike, 2018).

Specifically, HPBAs represent 53% of basketball players on Division I teams and 56% of FBS football players, but only 3.6% of the entire student body (Harper 2012; Lapchick et al., 2018). The five most profitable Division I conferences, collectively referred to as the Power Five,
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

encompass half of the 130 FBS teams (Harper, 2018; “College Football Standings,” 2018). Black males represent 55% of football players and 56% of basketball players in the Power Five, but average just 2.4% of these schools’ student bodies (Harper, 2018). At many Power Five institutions, HPBAs are even more disproportionately overrepresented in high-profile sports, with percentages in the 60s and 70s, with a high of 83.2% at Mississippi State University (Harper, 2018). At no Power Five institution does HPBA representation fall below 30%, yet the highest Black male population is just 9% (Harper, 2018).

The disproportionate overrepresentation of HPBAs on Division I teams and the amount of revenue generated annually via high-profile sports connects the NCAA’s current wealth largely to HPBA athletic talent (Harper, 2018; Hawkins & Nwadike, 2018; Lapchick et al., 2018). Meanwhile, Harper (2013; 2016; 2018) showed a pattern of inequitable academic outcomes for HPBAs year after year, cohort after cohort. The NCAA and its members are aware of the inequities between HPBA academic outcomes and those of other student-athletes because the organization’s own metrics show such results (NCAA Research Staff 2018a; 2018b).

The NCAA Academic Progress Rate (APR) is calculated using a 1000-point system based on the retention and continued academic eligibility of student-athletes who receive athletic financial aid. APR is measured on a rolling, four-year academic calendar (“Academic Progress Rate Explained,” n.d.). In the most recently studied cohort, 2013-2017, Division I sport had a combined APR of 983 (NCAA Research Staff, 2018a). Disaggregated by sport, high-profile sports were near the bottom, with FBS football at 968 and men’s basketball at 967; they were only above FCS football, the lower-tiered Division I football program (also majority-Black) (Lapchick et al., 2018; NCAA Research Staff, 2018a). The NCAA does not disaggregate APR data by race, but it does for Graduation Success Rate (GSR). GSR accounts for transfer students,
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

Midyear enrollees, and departed student-athletes in good academic standing with remaining athletic eligibility. In 2018, student-athletes had a GSR of 88%, but that decreased to 85% for Division I men’s basketball and 79% for FBS football (NCAA Research Staff, 2018b). Disaggregated by race, Black basketball players had the lowest GSR at 82%. This does not look too drastically different from the combined men’s basketball GSR until compared to the GSR of White basketball players at 93%. Similarly, Black football players had a GSR of only 75% compared to 91% for White football players (NCAA Research Staff, 2018b). Graduation does not necessarily equate to a successful college academic career, but the racial differences are still troubling. The lower APR and GSR metrics suggest Division I institutions do not properly account for—or disregard—data about differences in HPBA college readiness prior to admitting them into their institutions, focused primarily on athletic talent (Kreher, 2006; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998); publicly available data predict general HPBA under-preparedness.

Sturgis and Jones (2017) shared that Black high school students had a graduation rate of only 73% compared to the national average of 82%. The rate decreases to 59% when focusing only on Black males (Noguera, 2015). Even if they graduate, Black male students are often found to be much less college-ready than their peers (Bryant, 2015; Harper, 2012; IHEP, 2013). For example, a study of New York City students found that of the 59.3% of Black male high school graduates, only 9.3% were deemed college-ready (Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, & Guidry, 2013). SAT data helps center HPBA college readiness within Black males at-large. The SAT is a standardized, valid assessment of college readiness: its score has been significantly correlated with both high school GPA and college freshman year GPA (Camara & Echternacht, 2000). On

2 College readiness is defined as the core academic knowledge, skills, and habits needed to be successful in college without remedial coursework or training (Bryant, 2015)
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

the test, football student-athletes average 220 points lower than their incoming peers, and basketball players average seven points lower than football players (Knobler, 2008). Lower college readiness levels for Black male graduates and significantly lower-than-average SAT scores for high-profile athletes converge for HPBAs, increasing the likelihood of them being underprepared for education at Division I institutions. Harrison, Comeaux, and Plecha (2006) provided additional support for this supposition, finding that Black student-athletes are more likely to attend high schools with insufficient resources and lower national academic standings, which correlated with decreased college readiness.

Pre-collegiate data suggest most HPBAs will have increased academic need; the NCAA metrics corroborate this conclusion (Bryant, 2015; Harper, 2012; IHEP, 2013; Knobler, 2008; NCAA Research Staff, 2018a). So, when HPBAs are allowed Division I entry, especially as special admits, it is the institution’s responsibility to provide equitable academic support to account for these students’ likely lower levels of preparedness. But Division I support services are not equitably meeting the academic needs of all HPBAs during their enrollment (Harper, 2018). In reality, HPBAs continue to trail their peers academically while the NCAA and its members profit from these students’ athletic talents (Harper, 2018; Kreher, 2006). So, while the NCAA must continue to work to properly meet the needs of HPBAs, it is also time to consider what work needs to be done prior to college entry to mitigate the issues that continue to persist at the post-collegiate level.

Statement of the Problem

Data, such as what was presented in the background section of this study, has motivated numerous scholars to research HPBA academic under-preparedness for college and its effects on their experiences at the NCAA Division I institutions that do not equitably serve them. Examples
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

of such research are detailed in the literature review in the next chapter. But, according to Cooky (2017), such scholarship rarely transcends academia. The deficiency in both public translation of scholarly findings and engagement with it in public reduces its potential to bring about social change, defined as changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions (Burawoy, 2005; Cooky, 2017).

Most researchers who study HPBA academic experiences and needs engage in sociological research, whether general sociology or social psychology (see Beamon 2008; 2010; 2012; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Cooper, 2019; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Hawkins, 2017; Oseguera, 2010; Singer, 2005 for prominent examples). These researchers often frame their studies using critical race theory (CRT), identity theories, or theories related to the two. CRT exposes systemic racism in relation to HPBAs (see Armstrong & Jennings, 2018; Bell, 1980; Bimper & Harrison, 2017; Donnor, 2005; Hawkins, 2017; Oseguera, 2010; Singer, 2005). Studies employing CRT typically call for macro-level systemic overhaul (see Donnor, 2005; Hawkins, 2017; Singer, 2009), though Cooper, Nwadike, and Macaulay (2017) strayed from this norm to recommend institutional-level changes to policies and practices. Identity theories explain athletic identity development, from K-12 environments into NCAA institutions, and the contribution of that developmental process to academic performance (see Adler & Adler, 1985; Beamon, 2008; 2010; 2012; Benson, 2000; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Fuller, 2017; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009).

3Sociology is defined as the scientific study of social life, social change, and the causes and consequences of human behavior (Ballantine, Roberts, & Korgen, 2015)
4Social psychologists study how individuals affect and are affected by other people and their social and physical environments, including interpersonal and group dynamics and social challenges (APA, 2014)
CRT and identity theory scholarship in HPBA academic research are predominantly examples of professional sociology: foundational research that provides theoretical perspectives and/or empirical findings to accumulate knowledge and orient conceptual frameworks, legitimizing the research area (see Adler & Adler, 1985; Benson, 2000; Cooky, 2017; Cooper, 2019; Fuller, 2017; Gaston-Gayles, 2005; Singer, 2005). Professional sociology has provided a way to explain the HPBA experience and give voice to a historically silenced group (Cooky, 2017; Singer, 2005). But its main audience is intended to be other scholars (Burawoy, 2005; Cooky, 2017). Professional sociology dominates research because it is the type of sociology that is most valued (Cooky, 2017). This shortcoming in translating much of sport sociology research outside of academia limits the ability to advocate for it in public forums towards change.

On the other hand, there is public sociology, which exists to engage in advocacy outside of academia, requiring scholars to not just generate knowledge, but use it to engage the public and population-of-interest in an accessible manner (Cooky, 2017). Public sociology exists in two forms: traditional and organic. Examples in HPBA academic research are limited, though this is changing as of late (see Cooper, 2019; Singer, 2019). Adler and Adler’s (1991) book is a seminal example of traditional public sociology that is applicable to HPBA academic research; books are the most common format for traditional public sociology (Cooky, 2017). Adler and Adler (1985) expanded and translated their 1985 study of the relationship between athletic participation and academic performance for Division I college basketball players into a book that provided an insider-style exposé of college basketball based on the athletes’ perspectives and experiences. However, traditional public sociology is only intended to instigate public debate, not sustain an academic-public relationship (Burawoy, 2005).
Sustained engagement is the goal of organic public sociology, which calls for researchers to work closely and actively with the “counter-public” to “make visible the invisible, to make the private public, [and] to validate” in ways that counter hegemonic norms (Burawoy, 2005, p. 264; Cooky, 2017). There is a noticeable gap in this type of work in HPBA academic research. One related example is Dr. Gill’s Student-Athletes’ Human Rights Project (SAHRP) dedicated to social justice for student-athletes in the U.S. (Cooky, 2017). SAHRP advocates on behalf of student-athletes to act as a conduit to productive dialogue between them and oppositional parties, (Salinas, 2014). SAHRP’s work encompasses HPBAs, but their needs deserve singular focus.

Cooky (2017) stated that “part of making our work ‘matter’ is in the engagement with communities outside of academia through public sociology of sport” (Cooky, 2017, p. 5). Burawoy (2005) stated that public sociology should complement professional sociology, and within public sociology, traditional and organic should complement and inform each other. Scholarly research has uncovered the theories and themes that define HPBA academic issues prior to and during college, and how NCAA culture condones and often sustains poorer academic outcomes for this population. It is now time to make HPBA academic research accessible to a public who need to be intimately aware of these problems to inspire them to help create the changes needed within the HPBA system, especially because the systemic issues implicate not just athletic programs, but also many of the adults in HPBAs’ communities, especially the men who are the first mentors for HPBAs in childhood.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

Nixon (1991) stated that sport sociologists should want to have an enduring impact on society, and that requires the public knowing who scholars are and having a reason to engage with them in ways that develop “informed awareness” outside of academia; what scholars
“know, say, and do” should “matter to people other than [them]selves” (Nixon, 1991, p. 282). That was my purpose as I sought to translate scholarly knowledge addressing the HPBA academic problem into a format that could better sustain advocacy toward change at multiple systemic levels. Adler and Adler (1985; 1991) moved between professional and traditional sociology, and Gill moved between traditional and organic (Salinas, 2014). Burawoy (2005) stated that the ideal work moves across all three. I connected Burawoy (2005) to my specific population of interest by conducting a study that used scholarly foundational knowledge to inform my engagement with HPBAs as their advocate. My study provided a platform for HPBA voice that would be accessible and act as a conduit towards change, inspired by Adler and Adler (1985; 1991) and SAHRP (Salinas, 2004), moving beyond professional sociology to live in a space between traditional and organic sociology. To do this, I collected and shared HPBA life stories, through narrative inquiry, to represent their position in theoretical dialogue with this study’s intended public audience: individuals invested in high-profile sport, the NCAA, and Division I institutions’ members accountable for HPBA education.

Former HPBA stories were collected to receive experiences and recommendations based on their retrospectives. I used their stories and recommendations to frame my analysis of their understanding of the HPBA system. This study sought to nuance and deepen existing knowledge about HPBA academic experiences and needs while also translating existing knowledge for the public. This mission was framed by the following research questions:

1. What are the stories of former HPBAs about their K12 experiences related to athletics and academics?
2. What are the stories of former HPBAs about their experiences with Division I athletic academic services?
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

3. What recommendations do former HPBAs have for athletic academic services based on their experiences?

Significance of the Study

This study provides an accessible path for the public into HPBA experiences within their precollegiate and collegiate environments and how those informed their athletic-academic development. The study was able to identify a potential point of entry for change centered around early-life mentorship. Additionally, I provided a platform for HPBAs’ voices, as Singer (2005) stated as a necessity in this research, through their full athletic-academic stories to reignite conversation about expanding advocacy work in meeting their academic needs (see Cooky, 2017). I designed a study that pushed HPBA academic research towards organic sociology without abandoning professional sociological practices (see Burawoy, 2005).

Cooky (2017) called on sport sociologists to bring public attention to the specific injustices that marginalized communities had endured. I connected professional and public sociology to validate HPBA stories with years of scholarly research, which enhanced the value of their provided knowledge (Cooky, 2017). Adler and Adler (1991) demonstrated the value of insider-style exposé, capturing attention inside and outside of academia. My study builds on Adler and Adler’s (1991) through narrative inquiry to provide first-person stories and novel-like engagement. Novels have plotlines and characters that audiences can connect to and be affected by. In presenting my findings as narratives, the participants became characters that the public would hopefully feel compelled to advocate and seek changes for. And like many novels, the barrier to entry was intended to be lower in this study based on reading comprehension as opposed to in-depth pre-existing scholarly knowledge. While the entirety of a dissertation is still intended for an academic audience, the fourth chapter, where the findings live, is designed to
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

provide ample context for the non-academic to validate what is being shared while deeply engaging in the individual stories of HPBAs that can be shared and discussed with others outside of academic, particularly potential HPBA families.

Also, after decades of research, I was confident in the scholarly legitimacy of the research area and existing themes generated from previous studies. This study leverages that preexisting knowledge to carry out its purpose. I aligned my participants’ stories with previously validated themes in the discussion chapter but also highlight divergences to specify my study’s place in HPBA scholarship and further debunk existing cultural myths and accepted truths about HPBA development and academic prowess (see Cooky, 2017; Donnelly & Atkinson, 2015). In reviewing existing literature, I identified the most researched HPBA-related themes to consider against my participants’ stories, such as interest-convergence, athletic identity foreclosure, academic neglect, low motivation, stereotype acceptance, helplessness, levels of racism, implicit bias, miseducation, exploitation, and underdevelopment (see Adler & Adler, 1985; Armstrong & Jennings, 2018; Beamon 2008; 2010; 2012; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Cooper, 2019; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Donnor, 2005; Oseguera, 2010, Singer, 2005). I looked at how the former HPBAs’ stories either reinforced pre-existing themes or challenged them towards new understandings of the HPBA experience. I trusted my participants’ insider ability to generate such new knowledge, leaning on their storytelling abilities for my analytical takes.

Storytelling has always been important in HPBA research. CRT is often used because of its counter-storytelling tenet (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, Singer, 2005). However, full narratives are rarely shared. Employing narrative inquiry allowed me to expand counter-storytelling and share full stories to unearth atypical ideas and challenge professionally and publicly established theories (Bell, 1995; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Fraser, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Using
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

narrative inquiry allowed me to guide participants towards deeply incorporating time, space and environment, people, culture, and social influences (Haydon & van der Riet, 2017). The methodology leveraged public sociology through incorporating participant retrospection and analysis very intentionally into my own analyses.

Finally, this study uses narrative inquiry to encourage the use of participant-as-partner in a more intentional way, valuing their ability to engage in critical analysis and be integral to change design in HPBA systems. Comeaux (2015) suggested a similar bridge, but his approach was only between researcher and educational practitioner. Athletes should not be left out of the process; they should be centered, and I wanted to show their value in such a process. As a tool of public sociology, this study ultimately advocates for improvement to HPBA academic experiences in ways that will reach those with the most vested interests in high-profile athletics.

Definition of Key Terms

- **Athletic academic advisor** – an employee holding an NCAA Division I mandated position intended to assist all student-athletes academically by monitoring student-athlete progress, recognizing potential academic challenges, and finding methods to address them; they handle course selection, scheduling conflicts, major selections, and 4-to-5-year plans

- **Athletic academic center** – academic centers dedicated to providing academic advising, tutoring, life skills development, and study facilities to the student-athlete population

- **Black** – any individual who identifies as someone with a racial identity that falls within the African diaspora or is classified as Black/African American on a census form

- **Division I** – the highest level of intercollegiate athletics sanctioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

- **FBS** – The NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) is the top level of Division I college athletics in the United States, designed around football and comprised of 130 institutional members.

- **High-profile athlete** – a now commonly used term to describe men’s basketball and football players based on their revenue generating ability and the level of national attention they command (Carey, 2011; Christianson, 2012; Kreher, 2006; Moyer, 2015; Solomon, 2014).

- **High-profile Black athletes (HBPAs)** – While applicable at all levels of athletic participation, in this study, the term is limited to elite men’s basketball and football players who went on to play at the Division I college level; any professional opportunities that may have occurred are outside the scope.

- **NCAA** – The National Collegiate Athletic Association, a non-profit organization that regulates more than 480,000 athletes at 1,268 institutions in the United States and Canada.

- **Professional sociology** – the foundation for the other three types of sociology (critical, policy, and public) as it provides the theoretical perspectives and empirical findings that inform and legitimize them, supplying tested methods, accumulated bodies of knowledge, orienting, and conceptual frameworks (Cooky, 2017).

- **Public sociology** – promotes the sociological imagination beyond the academy and provides translational research and/or scholarly engagement in the service of social change (Burawoy, 2005; Cooky, 2017); it can be traditional (encompassing the public translation of research, e.g. books read beyond the academy and or facilitated public discussions facets of society) or organic (working closely with visible and active publics).
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

often in counter-hegemonic ways, e.g. working with labor movements or human rights organizations)

- **Revenue-generating sports** – NCAA Division (typically FBS) men’s basketball and football teams, known for generating millions of dollars in annual revenue for participating institutions; also applicable at the K-12 level in many regions (e.g. South for football, Northeast and Mid-Atlantic for basketball)

- **Student-athlete** – a term created by Walter Byers in 1965 to describe a college-enrolled student who participates on an intercollegiate NCAA sports team (Solomon, 2013); now attended across the K-16 athletic spectrum

**Delimitations**

As a qualitative study focused on delivering multiple narratives that maintain the individuality of each story while aligning them within the same ecological system, I focused on delimitations that would support that process. The first choice was to bound the study to the pre-professional student-athlete years since I sought to capture the perspective of HPBAs prior to any ability to personally generate revenue from their athletic talents. The NCAA has a strict rule of amateurism that bars student-athletes from financially profiting, in any public and/or personal way, from their athletic participation during K-16. The claim is that this reduces individual competition and focuses on sportsmanship and the collegiate experience, particularly educational programming (Afshar, 2016; “Amateurism,” n.d.). Decades of research have contradicted the educational success claim for HPBAs within this amateurism system, and I wanted my study to continue to support this finding while bolstering the reasons behind HPBA academic underperformance. To do this, I focused on the contrasting relationship between athletic and
academic experiences and development beginning in childhood and continuing throughout their collegiate careers.

Additionally, in intending to share full athletic and academic stories, I sought a small sample to receive the stories from, adapting the approach of Singer (2005) whose study only had four participants in order to highlight and better honor the counter-stories of those participants. For my study, I also settled on four participants so that even if full stories were long, I could feel more comfortable sharing them in their entirety without the narrative sections feeling too long overall. The chosen representatives covered both high-profile sports, two from each, representing three universities. I used a semi-structured interview process with a narrative-centric protocol to encourage storytelling aligned to the specific time frame and experiences I sought to study (Haydon & van der Riet, 2017). The delimitations set the study boundaries but were also chosen to mitigate what I knew would be the limitations of the study.

**Limitations**

First, in seeking only four participants, I tried to mitigate sampling bias by recruiting widely before settling on my final four. I used purposive sampling, selecting the top recruits based on my selection criteria (see Appendix D, p. 186-187). I recruited from various network connections to diversify my pool and avoid excluding individuals who did not belong to my immediate networks (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). I wanted a final four who could be classified as key informants about HPBA life (see Schensul, 2004). The four individuals I settled on had broad knowledge of the high-profile sport system and HPBA development, experiences, and needs. I considered them experts in the topic since I was focused on lived experiences, and the four participants’ expertise was based on alignment within their HPBA lifestyles when compared to what has been uncovered in scholarly research on the topic (see Schensul, 2004).
Second, given my small sample, while data saturation was not my focus, it is often a goal of qualitative research. Saturation is reached when there is no new data, themes, or coding, and there is enough information to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). But I was more concerned with “collecting rich (quality) and thick (quantity) data” within my study (see Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). Additionally, I learned from Bowen (2008) that saturation is not solely about when data becomes repetitious and ceases to offer new information, but also as it is relative to research context and content. Therefore, I sought fullness in each story rather than cross-story data saturation, which is common in narrative approaches (Saunders et al., 2018). This did not prohibit my ability to notice and deeply engage with cross-story overlap in the narratives.

Narrative research often strays from saturation because it is less concerned with theory development and more intent on receiving complete biological accounts (Saunders et al., 2018). Focusing of saturation in narrative studies runs the risk of losing story coherence and the story conceptualization being stretched too widely (Saunders et al., 2018). Narratives tend to center individual accounts, and narrative analysis focuses on “strands within individual accounts” (Saunders et al., 2018; p. 1898); the goal is to seek continuous narrative strands throughout each story (Saunders et al., 2018). Marshall and Long (2010) suggested that saturation was not appropriate in their study of maternal coping processes because of its narrative methodology, and Hale et al. (2007) stated a lack of concern with saturation, instead focusing on obtaining full and rich personal accounts within each individual interview. Similarly, I sought to use the accounts I received to provide a public platform for full HPBA athletic-academic stories that could be transferable to non-scholarly understanding. Each story would be subtly different, but preexisting HPBA research assumed there would be limited story diversity around major topics due to commonalities in HPBA experiences (see Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016).
Additionally, Saunders et al. (2017) stated that there are many uncertainties as to how saturation should be conceptualized and inconsistencies in its use. Therefore, it is not and should not be applicable in all cases (O’Reilly & Parker, 2012). So, in my study, like Marshall and Long (2010) and Hale et al. (2007), reaching saturation was not as important as exploring the full stories that could collectively represent a common version of HPBA academic experience.

Third, I knew I would be faced with my own biases. I had to acknowledge my own pre-existing thoughts, values, experiences, and assumptions in relation to HPBAs and HPA research (see Appendix A, p. 178). With my academic and professional background within the topic, I knew it would be challenging to address objectively. I am a former academic advisor for Division I football teams, have completed much research in this area, including my master’s thesis, and I still work with HPBAs. I have intimate knowledge of what and who I am studying. One of the reasons I chose narrative inquiry was to mitigate my biases. Narrative inquiry calls for an interviewee-led approach. But within qualitative research, the researcher is still the analytical instrument, and how I dealt with my bias would determine how I conducted reintegration (Gearing, 2004). Knowing that my study was intended to confirm preexisting knowledge and ideas, I had to consider how to reintegrate my findings into the research area discussion in a way that did not sound biased, but furthered existing scholarship (Gearing, 2004). That was why I chose to over-prioritize my participants’ voices and employ strong bracketing.

Bracketing is consciously placing aside preexisting knowledge prior to embarking on a study. Eliminating all a priori knowledge of HPBAs was impossible, but consciously trying to avoid implicit bias had to remain in my foreground (see Wadams & Park, 2018). Prior to data collection, I wrote down my personal thoughts and beliefs to maintain awareness of my major biases, especially anticipation bias (see Wadams & Park, 2018); I kept these notes with me when
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

interviewing to police myself during the receipt and analysis of the stories. Such bracketing also enhanced the ability for participants’ stories to align with the analysis of other researchers (Fischer, 2009). Tufford and Newman (2010) state that researchers should be explicit about bracketing within research. So, in introducing my study to each participant, even if we had a previous relationship, I told him he would drive the conversation and I would speak as little as possible to mitigate my biases. However, this interviewee-led process did create its own limitation: such bracketing limited my probing out of fear of leading the conversation.

Fourth, narrative meanings are not static, so grasping them was still up to my interpretation. I was at the mercy of the HPBAs’ recollection and the attached subjectivity of personal memory (Kim, 2016). Storytelling fidelity is enhanced by trust, but I still had to be conscious of how I would be affected by the interviews and how the HPBAs would tell the story based on our relationship (Kim, 2016). Narratives are typically told in “episodic units” (Kim, 2016, p. 191). That is not how life naturally unfolds, so there were limitations to some necessary outside context as I tried to limit the stories told to the specific time period and situations directly related to my study topic. To mitigate some contextual gaps, I utilized narrative smoothing, a to arrange the parts of individual stories in ways that readers could better understand (Kim, 2016).

Finally, and arguably most importantly, there were time constraints due to submission deadlines. I had to consider the availability of participants and the time transcription and analysis would take within the bounds of these deadlines. I did not share the narratively smoothed versions of stories with the participants so there is the possibility of some bias in restorying despite my bracketing attempts and maintaining as much of the originally told stories as possible. But I am confident that because I am mostly reproducing the same stories, the essence of what the former HPBAs wanted to share is still be maintained in my restorying. I did share my
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

methodology and findings with two doctoral peers to assess the validity of my findings and
strengthen my study’s credibility (Thomas, 2006). However, without member checks with my
participants, I continue to acknowledge and accept this study limitation (Thomas, 2006).

Summary

This chapter introduces my dissertation study, providing background information and
establishing the proposed problem that contributes to HPBA academic underperformance
continuing. In my purpose statement and significance of study sections, I stated that what this
study investigated was not new, but my approach to data generation and dissemination, through
public sociology, would contribute to the scarcity of work available in this area for this specific
population on this specific issue. The nuancing in the findings would challenge how the HPBA
system has typically been considered and who should be implicated more in changing its
outcomes. Additionally, I sought to collaborate more intentionally with HPBAs and expand the
accessibility of the findings to be understandable to a non-scholarly public audience.

The NCAA evolved into an organization that had to account for the academic
performance of its student-athletes, especially its high-profile athletes that produced the majority
of its revenue. The organization monitors its academic success using its own metrics and
mandates supplemental academic services from athlete-specific academic support centers. This
need arose from the rise in specially admitted high-profile athletes, whose likely academic under-
preparedness was superseded by athletic talent. These young men have turned the NCAA into a
multibillion-dollar industry and provide millions of dollars to the institutions they play for, but
their academic outcomes are far below that of their peers. These negative outcomes are lowest
for Black males and disproportionately affect them since they make up the majority of high-
profile sports teams. The academic underperformance of these HPBAs is well-researched yet
remains an issue. I posited that the persistence of this issue may be tied to the gap between scholarly knowledge generators and disseminators, and the early athletic mentors in the public audience who need to receive and the scholarly knowledge if change is to occur.

I designed a study to promote moving professional sociology more into the public sociology space, landing in between traditional and organic sociology, to translate HPBA experiences and needs outside of academia. This was primarily carried out by former HPBAs through storytelling. Through narrative inquiry, I gathered stories to gain an authentic understanding of these athletes and the high-profile system they existed in, receiving retrospectives about what happened and what is wrong within the HPBA system. I was able to discover that in addition to the NCAA, main change agents were to be found much earlier in HPBA careers in the form of their original athletic mentors.

Advocacy is about lifting the voices of the voiceless. Former HPBAs are equipped to place themselves within the system and problematize their academic development during this time period. Much HPBA academic research already engages in this critical work but falls short of collaboration in a way that consistency transcends academia and keeps scholars on the front lines of advocacy. If former HPBAs are given the opportunity to co-construct research about their experiences, such professional-public engagement may be able to build a more responsive athletic academic system to transform how HPBA development progresses and improve their academic outcomes. In this study, HPBA knowledge and experiences are the axes of change.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Decades of sport education research have made it clear that high-profile Black athletes (HPBAs) are the lifeblood of the NCAA, constituting the majority of the members of Division I men’s basketball and football teams: 53% & 56%, respectively (Lapchick et al., 2018). They have helped the NCAA become a multibillion-dollar industry, and its member institutions reap hundreds of millions of dollars in rewards annually (Berkowitz, 2017; Harper, 2018; Hawkins & Nwadike, 2018; Rovell, 2018). In return, HPBAs receive full scholarships to attend many of the best institutions in the country (Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Gutting 2012; Harper; 2018; Hawkins & Nwadike, 2018). The special admissions process grants high-profile athletes entry due to exceptional athletic talents (Kreher, 2006; Teague, 2010). The goal of allowing athletes to receive special admission entry is supposed to provide an opportunity to participate in high-level athletics while receiving an equally balanced high-quality education (Meyers, 2005; Moyer, 2015). But unfortunately, the majority of special admit student-athletes are young Black men who end up experiencing the lowest achievement (as measured by graduation rates, academic progress rates, and GPAs) in college despite receiving mandatory supplemental academic services (Harper, 2018; Maloney & McCormick, 1993; Menzer, 2014; Meyers, 2005; Ramos, 2012; Thamel, 2006).

A review of publicly and privately available data showed HPBA academic underperformance was to be predicted by a U.S. educational system that had long underserved Black male students, especially the fact that only 59% graduate from high school compared to a national average of 82% (Bryant, 2015; Cooper, 2019; Harper, 2012; IHEP, 2013; Noguera,
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

2015; Sturgis, 2017; Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, & Guidry, 2013). Most recently, Cooper (2019) added to the decades of evidence about Black males continuing to graduate at the lowest rates at both the secondary and postsecondary level and being less likely to enroll in postsecondary education. The negative academic trend for Black males has continued even after Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, the outcome of which was intended to foster integration and educational equity (Donnor, 2005; Hodge, Harrison, Burden, & Dixson, 2008). Instead, outcomes for Black males remained disproportionately low, with the lowest academic performance coming from Black male athletes (Cooper, 2019). Researchers described how educators and athletic staff have allowed statistics that show lower academic outcomes for HPBAs to justify stereotypes, assumptions, and biases about Black male intellectual inferiority (Cooper, 2012; 2019; Hawkins, 2010; Singer, 2005). Many HPBAs internalized these beliefs and, as a consequence, steer away from academics towards a singular focus on athletics. They are determined to earn college athletic scholarships en route to professional play, forsaking proper academic development (Beamon, 2012; Benson, 2000; Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007; Cooper, 2019;). Concurrently, the Black community and media help establish, and continually reinforce, HPBAs’ athletic identities which, in turn, uphold structural inequities in the education that these young men receive (see Beamon, 2010; Cooper, 2019; Donnor, 2005; Edwards, 1992; Hodge et al., 2008; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009).

Numerous studies, empirical and otherwise, established HPBAs prioritizing athletics over academics as the norm catalyzed by an exploitative high-profile sport system (see Beamon, 2012; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Cooper, 2019; Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, & Bimper, 2011; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Singer, 2008). Research has explored the power dynamics between the NCAA and the greater revenue-generating sports culture, Division I institutions, and
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

the HPBA labor force (see Hawkins, 2017; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Oseguera, 2010; Singer, 2009; Singer, Weems, & Garner, 2017). HPBA researchers often employ race-based and/or identity-based theories to frame such studies, exposing multilevel miseducation and injustice, academic inadequacies and inequities, and ultimately critiquing a broken athletic academic system (see Hawkins, 2010; 2017; Oseguera, 2010; Singer, 2005; 2009). Research typically concludes with implications and recommendations based on newly uncovered, or complementary to existing, information (see Beamon, 2010; Harrison et al., 2011; Singer, 2008).

More recently, HPBA studies include some form of a call to action, but the directives from these studies are predominantly for researchers to pursue and apply to subsequent work (Hawkins, 2017; Singer, 2009). The aforementioned process is common in professional sociology (Burawoy, 2004; Cooky, 2017). Professional sociology has helped establish theories that explain HPBA academic underperformance as a structural phenomenon and has validated the pervasiveness of this academic underperformance as one worthy of scientific study (see Bimper, 2014; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Hawkins, 2017; Singer 2008; 2009). But the research rarely transcends academia, often failing to reach the population that needs to receive it and be involved in change (Cooky, 2017; Burawoy, 2005). After reviewing relevant literature, I supposed that the lack of transfer of professional sociology to a public that is part of and/or influences HPBA experiences precludes the application of knowledge and recommendations that could foster change and reverse the negative academic outcomes for these Black athletes.

Such a supposition is not intended to understate the value of professional sociology about HPBA academic research, especially what has been written in the last two decades (which will largely be the scope of this review of literature). The last 20 years of HPBA academic research have critically explored the complexity of the phenomenon. Research during this time period has
uncovered practices and complicity that span multiple levels and populations of people, including the Black community (Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Hodge et al., 2008; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). In this review, I consider the studies that have defined modern scholarly work on HPBA academic underperformance. I narrowed my literature review to a few specific areas that I believed were the most relevant to my study. I investigated how HPBAs’ mostly predetermined outcomes began before NCAA Division I entry (Beamon, 2010; Hodge et al., 2008; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). I also looked at the NCAA and the culture it supports, and how that culture generally exasperates HPBAs undermining the need for academic investment (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Salinas, 2014; Schere, 2014; Smith & Willingham, 2015). I explored how HPBAs foreclosed on athletic identities, and how the academic experiences they had at their postsecondary institutions helped them double-down on their singular athletic mindsets (Beamon, 2012; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Fountain & Finley, 2011; Meyers, 2005; Singer, 2005; 2008).

This chapter then pivots to how knowledge from recent professional sociological research has inspired some scholars to branch out towards public advocacy to curtail the negative trajectory of HPBA academic outcomes (see Comeaux, 2015; Cooper, 2019; Edwards, 1969; Hawkins, 2010). I included public sociology that does not always narrowly focus on HPBA academics, but relates to HPBA needs at-large, especially the organic sociology of Dr. Harry Edwards, a pioneer in the field of Black male athlete sociology. The results of such research, professional and public, led me to design a study framed by ecological systems theory so that I could continue to validate professional scholarship about HPBAs while leaning intentionally towards more publicly transferable and accessible research, centering the stories of the athletes and making them central change agents in undoing negative systemic outcomes.
Relevant HPBA Academic Research

HPBA research, by way of professional sociology, has explained many of the internal and external factors that sustain HPBA underperformance (see Beamon, 2008; 2010; 2012; Benson, 2000; Bimper, 2014; Cooper, 2012; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Njororai, 2012; Sailes, 1993; Singer 2005; 2008; 2009; Stone, Harrison, & Mottley, 2012). The research applies theories that provide the necessary scholarly validation of professional sociology (inclusive of social psychology and/or psychology that is adaptable to a sociological lens) to establish that HPBA academic underperformance is long-standing, systemic, and an area of research that deserves scientific exploration. In seeking to understand what causes and sustains HPBA academic underperformance, particularly in the midst of modern high-profile sport culture, I mostly reviewed more recent literature, but cited earlier seminal studies for context when applicable. The resulting review explores the lived experiences of HPBAs and the systemic structures that envelope them in relation to their education. I surveyed the professional sociology that detailed HPBA life in the Black community and how it is influenced by the high-profile sport culture in general. I then explored HPBA experience in college as athlete-students, a term coined by Singer (2008). The proceeding research exposes the layers and stakeholders in HPBA miseducation and underdevelopment (Cooper, 2019). The research also acts as a primer for the necessity of continuing to increase public sociology when advocating for HPBA educational needs.

HPBA Life in the Black Community

Years of research have outlined the relationship between high-profile sports and Black males. The scholarship spans connections to the broader lens of Brown v. Board of Education to intensive focus on the Black community and the pressures it directly and indirectly places on Black youth to use sport as a vehicle for upward mobility because of systemic inequity in
education resulting from *Brown* (Hodge et al., 2008). Donnor (2005) used CRT’s interest-convergence principle to analytically explain the role of race in the educational experiences of HPBAs, specifically football players, by connecting multiple examples of case law to their lives, particularly the *Brown* case. Donnor (2005) discussed the media perceptions of Black males in sports, legitimizing it as the most dependable method for social and financial mobility. The high-profile sports system promotes the image that Black male athletes should be considered the primary hero figures for young Black men in the U.S. And, as Donnor (2005) highlights, coupled with the legacy of racism that has been exacerbated by the *Brown* decision, the merits attached to sport participation are portrayed as the main symbol of hope for Black families, leading to the significantly higher likeliness for young Black males to prioritize an athletic career in ways detrimental to academic development.

According to Hodge et al. (2008), the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision was originally intended to change the trajectory of education in the country, setting every student up for an equal opportunity at academic success. Instead, it led to “divergent realities in education and sport” for Black children (Hodge et al., 2008, p. 928). While separation based on race became illegal in U.S. schools, most students still attended mostly-racially-homogenous schools, and in too many Black communities, the students continued to have less access to high-quality educational resources and curricula (Hodge et al., 2008). The researchers offered evidence that within the Black community, males suffered the most, often performing at or near the bottom of their educational systems, having higher dropout rates than their peers and being less likely to graduate from high school, with a white-male-to-Black-male graduation rate of 80%–to-59% as of 2013 (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2013). For example, the researchers shared *USA Today* (2004) data that found 13 states having graduated only between 30–40% of Black
Advocating for High-Profile Black Athletes

males on time and two graduating less than 30% on time (Hodge et al., 2008). If they were able to attend college, since many believed themselves unready according to survey data, Black males were found to be less likely to finish (Hoge et al. (2008).

Hodge et al. (2008) stated the rate of college participation for Black males trails most populations, but the ones most likely to have access to higher education continue to be student-athletes. The researchers argued that post-Brown, integration for education and sports followed two separate-but-parallel paths, with the former’s path failing to ensure equitable educational access and opportunity, including more poorly resourced schools; the latter’s enhanced institutions’ (K-16 inclusive) winning percentages and revenue. Therefore, predominantly White institutions welcomed all Black students in theory but primarily HPBAs in practice, and the athletic reputations of, and opportunities at, Division I institutions are well documented. While many Black male students would struggle with entry into these institutions normally, Hodge et al. (2008) stated that “Arguably, there is an affirmative action program that is rarely challenged in the courts...That is, some Black athletes are admitted into [prestigious Division I institutions] with academic credentials that fall below the regular admission criteria” (p. 936). Knowing this, Black males developed a tendency to dedicate numerous hours to athletic skill development and competitive play to attend these schools. The Black male dedication to high-profile sports is so much so that, according to Hodge et al. (2008), being an HPBA has become part of the Black male identity and larger Black community. In support of this notion, Bimper and Harrison (2011) describe an inability for the two identities to be separated, and Hawkins (2010) describes how the systemic-prescribed necessity of sport in Black male lives has led to the development of an athletic industrial complex. This conclusion was further supported by Eitle and Eitle (2000) who
found that Black male youth were 1.6 times more likely to participate in interscholastic football and 2.5 times more likely to participate in interscholastic basketball than their White male peers.

Athletic aspirations were not believed to be entirely intrinsic, with Hodge et al. (2008) concluding that it was frequently the reaction to fewer community resources and increased expectations in the Black community. Comeaux and Jayakumar (2007) described the single-minded focus on sports in the Black community as a reaction to marginalization processes that foster disbelief in the abilities of education through inequity in academic programming, less qualified teachers, more poorly resourced schools, and racial microaggressions from predominantly White teachers that expect lower performance from Black students.

The findings from Hodge et al. (2008) and Comeaux and Jayakumar (2007) were supported by Johnson and Migliaccio (2009), who continued to investigate the commitment to high-profile sports in the Black community. Johnson and Migliaccio’s (2009) study sought to understand how athletic identity was constructed within Black athletes, starting at the outset of athletic participation, by interviewing families and boys aged between six and twelve (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). The pair of researchers conducted 17 in-depth interviews with Black boys and their parents/guardians. From their study, they narrowed down athletic identity arising out of the threefold influence from family, community, and media (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). The researchers interviewed the athletes at the outset of their participation to uncover the reasons for their initial participation, what they hoped to achieve, and their experiences as budding athletes. The parents/guardians were also interviewed to understand their influence in constructing the boys’ athletic identities and corroboration with the youth view. Providing more context to Hodge et al. (2008), Johnson and Migliaccio (2009) found that HPBA athletic identity construction was
tied to how sport allowed for achieving the “African American Dream” of fame, success, and money, with the athlete as the primary symbol of success in Black communities (p. 102).

Identity development was solidified through four constructs: a) early introduction to sport, b) relating to professional athletes as the primary reference group for success, c) embracing the social recognition that accompanied sport participation, and d) succumbing to a specifically athletic identity even at the expense of others (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). Interview analyses led the researchers to conclude that the Black professional athlete was the most constant symbol of success in the Black community, so the desire to replicate such success spread throughout HPBA families, rising to the point of becoming a need (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). Introduction to sport, and staying in it, was more impactful if it derived from family, and the impact was compounded by additional community influences and the media. The parents in the study stated they turned to sports as the most likely, and sometimes only, perceived legitimate avenue for success for their sons, which aligned with their boys’ statements that they felt compelled to follow their parents’ wishes. Soon, those wishes transformed into the athletes’ own (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). Once there was wish alignment, true identity formation took over, as demonstrated by the next several studies.

In a suitable follow-up study, Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, and Bimper (2011) surmised that for many Black males, becoming a professional athlete appeared to be the only door to mobility that was always open. This was demonstrated by the overrepresentation of Black males in every level of high-profile sports. In their study, Harrison et al. (2011) wanted to show the impact of race on athletic role identification, believing that the two were intimately linked. They argued that for Black male youth, sport participation and developing athletic skill was “a significant aspect of life and [was] a critical factor in the development of social acceptability and prestige”
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

Building upon Johnson and Migliaccio (2009), Harrison and colleagues (2011) believed that as Black males matured, parental and family influence was superseded by peer group association and approval, leading young Black men to associate positivity with all things related to their athletic identities. The group of researchers described racial and athletic identity development as “parallel pathways” connected to both cultural and structural influences (Harrison et al., 2011, p. 94). They shared that hours of commitment to athletic development in HPBAs “often calls for the athlete to forsake many other interests that may occupy significant quantities of time, including academic endeavors” (Harrison et al., 2011, p. 94).

Harrison and colleagues’ (2011) study compared Black and White college-level HPBAs using the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) developed by Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder in 1993. AIMS has been widely utilized in athlete identity research, having been validated as a reliable measure. Survey data was collected from 109 former and current high-profile athletes, 67 Black and 42 White, at a single Division I institution. A statistically significant finding revealed that HPBAs had higher athletic identity than their White counterparts. Harrison et al. (2011) concluded since the athletes had played on the same team for the same school, and therefore experienced the same coaches, environment, and influences, the survey results demonstrated race must be of particular importance to athletic identity, quantitatively supporting the conclusions of Hodge et al. (2008) and Johnson and Migliaccio (2009). From their findings, they asserted athletic identity development must have begun in youth with the stronger influences apparently coming from Black communities (Harrison et al., 2011). Similarly, Harrison, Harrison, and Moore (2002) supported the alignment of Black racial identity and the pattern of Black male participation in high-profile sports beginning early in their youth. The researchers aligned identity and participation with HPBAs’ historical overrepresentation in
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

basketball and football. Applying the Cross (1995) model of racial identity development, Harrison, Harrison, and Moore (2002) concluded a major part of being Black for these young men was being an athlete.

This connection between Blackness, maleness, and athleticism continues to be studied in HPBA research. For example, Beamon (2010) interviewed 20 former Black male student-athletes to gauge the relationship between socialization and athletic participation. The former HPBAs stated the socialization process began in childhood through their families and larger communities, with sports being used to “deliberately and intensively…limit exposure to other hobbies and role models…pushing sports as a possible career path early in life” (Beamon, 2010, p. 282). Beamon (2010), like other scholars, correlated this early socialization with the overrepresentation of Black males in high-profile sports. Interestingly though, Beamon (2010; 2012) found that the Black community tended to ignore the fact that the push toward athletics for Black males hindered their social and cognitive growth in the long run.

In 2012, Beamon delved into the consequences of the Black community’s overreliance on sport socialization for male success. Her study was framed by the concept of athletic identity foreclosure, which is caused by the overemphasis of the importance and strength attached to the athlete role and is maintained and influenced by environment, creating an inability to invest in other available roles (Beamon, 2012). By conducting qualitative interviews, Beamon (2012) uncovered evidence of strong athletic identity foreclosure in the 20 former Black male revenue-sport student-athletes she interviewed. Even though most were in the midst of post-athletic life, they still defined themselves predominantly as athletes, and 12 of the 20 men believed sport still defined over 75% of who they were (Beamon, 2012). The author learned how HPBAs center their lives around athletic pursuits, making it highly probable that they would experience identity
foreclosure and its negative effects. The 20 former HPBAs described their struggles with post-sport-career maturity and development, stunted ability to make decisions, and transitional failures (Beamon, 2012). Beamon’s (2012) descriptions of the Black men’s struggles is supported by additional studies such as Bimper’s (2014) work, which showed that athletic identity foreclosure correlates with stunted development in non-sport areas and academic underperformance. Bimper’s (2014) study found that higher levels of athletic identity in Black male student-athletes correlated with lower GPAs.

A semi-synthesis of the literature of this section, Bimper and Harrison (2011) found that a) many HPBAs do not seek to separate their athletic and racial identities, seeing them as one in the same, b) because of heightened athletic pressure in their lives, Black male athletes foreclose on athletic identity more intensely than other racial groups, and c) this singular identity manifests into greater academic woes. Bimper and Harrison (2011) found that the saliency of HPBAs’ conflated racial and athletic identities is unique to the Black community and is related to where Black people believed they could find power and agency. Eventually, outsiders, i.e. the White majority, began to also only identify HPBAs with their sport participation, reinforcing Black males’ identification of themselves and their athletic expectations until being an athlete became the most prominent identity for this group and the Black community (Bimper & Harrison, 2011). This singular athlete identity, particular as HPBAs move into collegiate life, becomes the crux of the problems at the collegiate level, coalescing into academic underperformance (Bimper & Harrison, 2011). However, it is important to acknowledge that while the findings of the researchers above are true, the studies generally employ deficit-based approaches, not fully implicating the systemic inequities that precede athletic identity development. Macrosystem
injustices lead the young men, and many in their communities, to believe that athlete is a crucial identity to develop for a chance at success.

**The Athlete-Student: NCAA HPBA Life**

Many researchers refer to the businesses-like qualities of NCAA Division I institutions (Kihl, Schull, & Shaw, 2016; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (2010) describes the prioritization of athletics over academics in funding, institutional values, and the treatment of student-athletes. The norms of Division I athletic departments expect all members to promote student-athlete socialization into pure athletes, guiding the athletes toward this primary commitment, which often results in minimal to no commitment to academics (see Snyder, 1985). For example, Jayakumar and Comeaux (2016) began their case study about the organizational culture in Division I institutions with an anecdote from a former high-profile athlete, reproduced below, that sets the tone for how HPBA life unfolds on a Division I college campus:

They talk about how academics are a priority; you are here for an education. You hear it. But when you show up...you are herded into a room to take your physical. They are weighing you; they’re seeing how tall you are, poking at you, trying to feel around for injuries. You get the feeling that you are like cattle to them, but that’s just the name of the game, I guess. Then, for the next couple of weeks it’s just football...I played in three big games before I saw an actual college classroom...It sets the tone for where you set your priorities and, really, how your college career is going to be...You are there for sports. Regardless of what other people say...all of what you do is telling you that you are there for sports, and academics come second (p. 489).

This excerpt from “Chaz” is not unique, but rather the reality of how student-athletes become athlete-students during their Division I tenure (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Singer, 2008). For HPBAs, many of whom have already developed singular athletic identities, having universities consistently reinforce athletics first continues to hinder their academic development (Jayakumar
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

& Comeaux, 2016). This academic disservice is jarring at institutions that are also known for academic excellence (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Instead, high-profile sports at the Division I level reflect values of commercialism, capitalism, and competition driven by the revenue-generating power of men’s basketball and football (Kihl, Schull, & Shaw, 2016).

Armstrong and Jennings (2018) also studied the capitalist structure of the NCAA and how it exploits HPBAs. Framing their study using CRT, they reflected on the disproportion between the percentage of Black men attending Division I institutions (2.8%) and their representation on men’s basketball and football teams (well over 50%). With the evidence of Black male athletes graduating at rates that trail their white peers (Harper, 2018), the assumption is that Black men are predominantly brought to college campuses to become athletes, not scholars, normalizing expectations of lower academic achievement for HPBAs. The researchers described these normalized lower expectations as a “disenfranchisement in higher education…contribute to [HPBA] miseducation” and that of all Americans as it relates to these young men (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018, p. 350). Armstrong and Jennings (2018) reached their conclusions through the application of a core CRT tenet: counter-storytelling, which was also the impetus behind the term “athlete-student” that is used in this section’s title.

“Athlete-student” was used in a Singer (2008) study of four HPBAs who were attending a prominent Division I FBS institution. Singer (2008) conducted a focus group and individual interviews with the athletes, who stated that the term “student-athlete” was an inaccurate description of who they were at their university. Contrasting the time dedicated to their high-profile sports compared to their academic pursuits, the HPBAs stated that they preferred the term “athlete-student” (or “scholarship athlete”) (Singer, 2008, p. 403). The HPBAs’ mindset was molded not solely by the athletes, but especially by the athletic stakeholders in their lives,
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

including coaches, administrators, and academic counselors. Singer (2008) found that while the NCAA has a rule that should limit athletic-related activities to 20 hour per week and no more than four hours per day, the rule is never properly enforced by coaches. This lack of enforcement was supported by an O’Shaughnessy (2011) survey administered to Division I high-profile athletes that included both required and voluntary time. The survey revealed basketball players and football players spent an average of 39.2 hours and 43.3 per week, respectively, on their sport while in season (O’Shaughnessy, 2011). The athletes in Singer’s (2008) study stated they felt like they were always made to choose between sport and education, and the expected choice was their sport, hence their identification as “athlete-students.”

Hardin and Pate (2013) further defined the process of becoming an athlete-student, studying the transitioning-in process of freshmen football players at an FBS university in the South. They examined the challenges of carrying a full-time academic load while in-season for the first time (Hardin & Pate, 2013). Seven freshmen were interviewed and observed while four juniors were interviewed for a retrospective view. The student-athletes stated balancing their time was challenging because of coaches’ expectations on and off the field and the academic pressures of college. The athletes stated that while the athletic academic centers were useful, they did not teach decision-making, but instead directed the high-profile athletes to achieve short-term goals, so they were never taught long-term skills for self-management (Hardin & Pate, 2013). Hardin and Pate’s (2013) study was not explicitly about HPBAs, but considering the racial identity of most high-profile athletes, their findings contribute to understanding the athletes’ perspectives about their NCAA experiences. The researchers described the athletes’ role conflict as they struggled to balance dual roles not only due to personal challenges, but also coaches and academic personnel emphasizing athletics over academics. This sentiment from the athletes in
Hardin and Pate (2013) aligns with the anecdote from Jayakumar and Comeaux’s (2016) study, the interview data from Singer (2008), and the survey findings about the number of hours spent on athletics from O’Shaughnessy (2011).

Since HPBAs are primarily expected to be athletes first, it should make sense that their motivations while enrolled in Division I institutions aligns with this socialized prioritization (Gaston-Gayles, 2005; Singer, 2008). Gaston-Gayles (2005) administered a survey to student-athletes to measure their motivation and academic performance. She used the Student Athletes’ Motivation Toward Sports and Academics Questionnaire (SAMSAQ), which measures academic and athletic motivation as it pertains to student-athlete academic performance and published GPA data (Gaston-Gayles, 2005). The SAMSAQ contains 15 items that measure academic motivation and 15 that measure athletic motivation ranked on a 6-point Likert scale. Data was collected from 236 Division I student-athletes at a university in the Midwest who participated in eight sports: football, men’s and women’s basketball, men’s volleyball, men’s and women’s lacrosse, women’s field hockey, and baseball. One of the key findings showed high-profile athletes had athletic motivation scores that were higher than their academic motivation scores while also posting the lowest average academic motivation scores. The study was not disaggregated by race but given Black males’ majority representation in high-profile sports at the Division I level, Gaston-Gayles’s (2005) findings are applicable to HPBAs. Additionally, she found only high-profile athletes were unable to post both high athletic and academic motivation scores, and the group’s GPAs reflected the consequences, being lower than all of their peers (Gaston-Gayles, 2005).

Low academic expectations from those around HPBAs have fostered their lower motivation to achieve (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018; Gaston-Gayles, 2005; Singer, 2008).
the history that follows HPBAs into college and institutions reinforcing low academic standards, too many of the athletes endure the effects of stereotype threat (Donnor, 2005; Sailes, 1993; Steele, 1997). Steele (1997) stated that societal beliefs about groups that have crystalized into overarchingly accepted negative stereotypes can frustrate positive identification within those stereotyped domains, making it more difficult for individuals from those groups to perform in the associated domains. The greater the stereotype internalization, the greater the stereotype threat due to the pressures of others’ judgments (Steele, 1997). For examples, Sailes (1993) collected questionnaires from 869 college students at a Division I institution and found White male students perceived student-athletes to be less intelligent and on an easier academic track. These same White respondents believed Black athletes to be the least academically prepared for college. Sailes (1993) argued that such beliefs by White peers, along with constant reports about HPBAs not meeting academic admission standards and having lower academic performance and graduation rates, fostered a belief of anti-intellectualism for this Black population that permeated collegiate institutions and contributed to HPBA academic underperformance.

Stone, Harrison, and Mottley (2012) continued the study of stereotype threat and its effects on HPBA college life. The researchers found that for collegiate Black male student-athletes, the label “student-athlete” was a threat cue that negatively affected their academic engagement. Whether presented as “athletes” or “scholar-athletes,” the young men studied still performed poorly on a test of verbal reasoning (Stone, Harrison, & Mottley, 2012, p. 101). The study’s results provided further evidence that stereotype threat’s stigma affects Black male student-athletes even if they are trying to succeed (Stone, Harrison, & Mottley, 2012). Being identified as Black, male, and an athlete at a Division I institution was unfortunately
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

accompanied by negative history and stereotypes that permeated through to academic performance (Donnor, 2005; Stone, Harrison, & Mottley, 2012).

Sailes (1993) and Stone, Harrison, and Mottley (2012) demonstrated that stereotype threat for HPBAs was not just about being a high-profile athlete but also intimately connected to racist beliefs about Black intellect. Both Njororai (2012) and Cooper (2012) further studied the connections between athlete stereotypes and racism at systemic and institutional levels. Njororai’s (2012) literature review summarized a “legacy of racism and discrimination” in college sports and how social, cultural, individual, and institutional racism at Division I institutions impacted Black athletic and academic success using critical race theory and student involvement theory (p. 42). When focusing on Black males, Njororai (2012) stated that because of historical and social circumstances—which were described in the previous section of this review—HPBAs were led to believe that they could only prosper in athletics. By college, lack of personal involvement in academic pursuits was fostered and maintained by a “participation system” where Division I institutions only expected HPBAs to bare-minimum participate in school so that they could perform on the field/court (Njororai, 2012, p. 42-43).

Cooper (2012) framed his examination of Black male collegiate athlete racism through Mills’s (1959) conception of sociological imagination. Cooper (2012) stated that “racism in the U.S. has a social marker used to justify various forms of discrimination, subordination, and injustice against [Black people]” (p. 262). Black athletes endure increased discrimination at Division I institutions, stemming from the persistence of the “dumb jock myth” that labels them as athletically superior and intellectually inferior (Cooper, 2012). The widespread acceptance of this myth sustains the psychological obstacles and negative academic outcomes that Black athletes face. Cooper’s (2012) study also described how racist beliefs have historically created
barriers to equal educational attainment for Black people in America. Between racist stereotypes and the increased likelihood of HPBAs entering college underprepared, they remain less likely to academically achieve compared to their peers (Cooper, 2012). Cooper (2012) did not attribute collegiate HPBAs’ academic underperformance to any intellectual deficiencies, but instead to “institutional arrangements and educational malpractice which treat them as intellectually inferior” (p. 264). Therefore, according to Cooper (2012), HPBA academic neglect does not stem from the athletes, but their institutions failing to prioritize proper academic support, believing and investing in only the HPBAs’ athletic talents.

Connectedly, Adler and Adler (1985) conducted the seminal study about how HPBAs are socialized into academic neglect at Division I institutions. The pair of researchers conducted a four-year participant-observation study of a DI men's basketball program; 70% of the participants identified as Black (Adler & Adler, 1985). The researchers found that while most of the athletes entered college optimistic about their impending academic careers, athletic, social, and classroom experiences led them to become progressively detached from academics (Adler & Adler, 1985). Upon entry, the high-profile athletes realized that athletic requirements decided their courses and would affect their academic performance. Eventually, the athletes submitted to fatigue and lack of time, which caused apathy towards academic work (Adler & Adler, 1985). Adler and Adler (1985) also found that athletes were uninvolved in any major academic decision-making, so they failed to develop initiative or learn to handle (academic) matters independently. Instead, they settled into diminished academic efforts since they received greater positive reinforcement in athletics, resigning themselves to academic underperformance (Adler & Adler, 1985). Many of the athletes in the study ended up off-track to graduate since they were only made to focus on maintaining athletic eligibility (Adler & Adler, 1985). The researchers
believed the combination of the structure of FBS athletic programs and athletes’ patterned experiences within these universities undermined the espoused goals of the educational institutions the athletes were in (Adler & Adler, 1985).

Cooper and Cooper (2015) provided further evidence of the process towards academic neglect. Using role engulfment theory, Cooper and Cooper (2015) studied 10 HPBAs who explained that the deeper they became attached to the athlete role, the more they abandoned association with student-centered goals and priorities. Dubbing the HPBAs who faced academic challenges potential educational navigators (PENs), Cooper and Cooper (2015) found the PENs faced challenges of being first-generation college students in their families, but just athletes on campus. Cooper and Cooper (2015) stated, “It was clear that sport participation was not only a safe haven from the negative pressures…but also a space where [HPBAs] received strong self-concept and affirmation” (p. 140).

Furthermore, the racism and stereotypes that HPBAs experience at Division I institutions not only affected academic performance, but also their transitioning processes into post-athlete careers (Beamon, 2008; 2012). Beamon (2008) studied HPBA struggles with occupational preparation. She conducted ethnographic interviews with 20 former HPBAs where the men poignantly shared they felt like “used goods,” “used up,” and “used and abused” when reflecting on treatment by their collegiate institutions when it was time to leave school (Beamon, 2008, p. 358). Twelve of the 20 interviewed described HPBA labor exploitation (Beamon, 2008). The athletes also described lack of career preparation since they had not had autonomy in choosing their majors or classes, leading to post-athletics complications (Beamon, 2008).

The conditions within NCAA Division I institutions sustain the structures that make it difficult for HPBAs to conceptualize life not dictated by sports, which Singer (2009) saw as an
integrity issue at these institutions. He conducted a qualitative case study of four Black Division I football student-athletes, exploring their takes on institutional integrity. The HPBAs discussed the lack of integrity seen in their athletic program’s miniscule commitment to their education as demonstrated by athletic department structures and functions and the types of activities they were encouraged to pursue, with everything connected to furthering athletics (Singer, 2009).

One of Singer’s (2009) main purposes in having HPBA discuss their perspectives on their institution’s integrity was to provide a larger platform for student-athlete voice. And, generally, the studies cited above gave voice to HPBAs to deepen researcher understanding of the systemic and institutional disservices, racism, stereotypes, misconceptions, and miseducation that define HPBA NCAA life. The researchers cited in the following two subsections continue providing voice to HPBA experiences in the NCAA. The first subsection focuses on one of the hardest areas to gather data about: supplemental academic support. The second subsection, in an effort to tell the full story, discusses the experience of HPBAs who succeed academically despite the odds against them. However, anti-deficit research shows that academically successful HPBAs are still greatly affected by many of the same factors as their Black male counterparts who struggle academically. But first, the important discussion about mandated academic support.

**Academic support.** There is less published research about the intricacies of the NCAA Division I mandatory supplemental academic support compared to other areas of HPBA research. I hypothesize that it remains an understudied area due to the NCAA’s hypervigilance and security around its detailed study. But a number of researchers have done their part to unearth as many details as possible, each contributing more knowledge to the overall understanding of this mandated service. Meyers (2005) shared that much of the academic integrity controversy involving student-athletes and their educational attainment revolves around
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

athletic academic advisors who she believes may have the most challenging job in higher education. These advisors have to balance institutional integrity, academic welfare of student-athletes, and athletic demands to keep the students eligible for competition (Meyers, 2005). Meyers (2005) stated that many people argue that eligibility is the primary job of advisors, believing them to be nothing more than “eligibility brokers” (p. 15). In summarizing what has led to this conclusion, Meyers (2005) provided one of the most thorough overviews currently available of the mandates and details of athletic academic support for all student-athletes.

Meyers (2005) wrote that in January 1991, maintaining NCAA Division I membership required offering supplemental academic services for all student-athletes to include counseling and tutoring. The applicable NCAA bylaw, 16.3.1.1, states:

Member institutions shall make general academic counseling and tutoring services available to all student-athletes. Such counseling and tutoring services may be provided by the department of athletics or the institution's non-athletics student support services. In addition, an institution, conference or the NCAA may finance other academic support, career counseling or personal development services that support the success of student-athletes (2018-19 NCAA Division I Manual, 2018, p. 241).

Meyers (2005) stated that in understanding that not all student-athletes enter at the same level of academic preparation, the NCAA purported that dedicated supplemental services would give all student-athletes equal opportunity at a full educational experience, not just an athletic one. And in 2002, as included in the Bylaw reproduced above, the NCAA added that Division I institutions should finance any additional academic services deemed necessary for the success of all athletes (Meyers, 2005). The NCAA’s espoused purposes appear sincere, but Meyers (2005) shared that in practice, in trying to keep athletes eligible, advisors often enroll student-athletes in majors that predict eligibility as opposed to those that may be challenging or cause a conflict with athletics.

The phenomenon of funneling high-profile athletes into specific majors, referred to as clustering, is the norm at many Division I schools. High-profile athletes largely pursue the same
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

majors and take athlete-friendly courses, those deemed less competitive, in numbers that are disproportionate to the general student body to more easily maintain eligibility (Crepeau, 2006; Knight Commission, 2008; Schneider, Ross, & Fisher, 2010). According to Busch (2007), athletic academic advisors exist to maintain the eligibility of student-athletes and play a major role in the clustering process. Lederman (2003) stated that multiple athletes from one team are given the same major for simplicity, flexibility, and competition eligibility, and “every school in the country has a hideaway curriculum, a secret underground tunnel, for athletes,” the results of which are unethical and work to the detriment of student-athletes (para. 9).

Schneider, Ross, and Fisher (2010) conducted a clustering study of the academic major selection of football players on the Big 12’s (one of the most prominent FBS conferences) 12 football teams during the 1996, 2001, and 2006 seasons; a sample size of 30-50 student-athletes was selected from each institution. The researchers created a list of each major represented by a junior or senior on the team during each of the three seasons. Any major with 10 or more football players was compared to the percentage of the regular student body enrolled in the same major at the respective institutions (Schneider, Ross, & Fisher, 2010). Evidence of clustering was found during each season. For example, 30.6% of players during the 2006 season were in a social science, 59.58% were in communications during 2001, and 37% were in social sciences and communications during the 1996 season (Schneider, Ross, & Fisher, 2010). In comparing athlete percentages to the general student body, the researchers focused on comparisons within schools. For example, in 1996, Iowa State University and the University of Colorado had 26.2% and 30.6% of their football players majoring in sociology, respectively, but 1.5% of Iowa State students and 2.2% of Colorado students majored in sociology in the same year. In 2001, 50% of the football players at Kansas State University majored in business compared to 16.7% of the
rest of the student body. And in 2006, at the University of Texas at Austin, 69% of the athletes majored in liberal arts compared to 5.8% of the general student body, and at Texas A&M University, 41% of football players majored in agricultural leadership and development compared to 2% of the undergraduate population (Schneider, Ross, & Fisher, 2010).

Schneider, Ross, and Fisher (2010) found that athletic staff acknowledge encouraging athletes to pursue certain programming, but state that it is because of the majors’ abilities to work with athletic schedules and not about academic performance. But Long and Walker (2011) shared that Trey Burton, a former HPBA at the University of Florida who currently plays in the NFL, stated that he was placed on a Social and Behavioral Sciences track and did not know what the program was but was told it was more likely to keep him eligible. Burton’s case is more of the norm than an anomaly, especially because of his potential to go pro and help the reputation of the school (see Fountain & Finley, 2011). Fountain and Finley (2011) examined a Division I FBS football program over a 10-year period and found that throughout the decade football players were migrated into specific majors. This clustering was especially common in the academic profiles of highly touted recruits and NFL prospects (Fountain & Finley, 2011). Schools producing NFL players assisted with their future recruiting and the reputation of their football teams (Fountain & Finley, 2011).

Still, Meyers (2005) states that there are advisors who see—or want to see—theirselves as more than “one of those people who keeps athletes eligible” (p. 18). Unfortunately, research shows that keeping athletes eligible first is often the expectation when focusing on high-profile athletes at-large, but HPBAs especially (Benson, 2000; Singer, 2005). For example, Benson (2000) conducted ethnographic interviews with currently academically at-risk Black male football players who provided examples of advisors pushing them into easier classes and creating
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

il their academic plans without consulting them. She stated that in advisors planning on behalf of HPBAs, they were helping “maintain prevailing social and economic order” of HPBA underachievement (Benson, 2000, p. 225). Benson (2000) found that the athletes’ academic underperformance was influenced by interrelated practices engaged in by peers, coaches, and instructors, but especially their advisors. The importance of school and academic ability, and any expectation to do well in class was minimized for HPBAs (Benson, 2000).

Singer (2005) found much of the same as Benson (2000) when he researched the impact of academic support on HPBAs. He put forth that institutional and interpersonal racism and bias mattered in HPBA academic neglect. He conducted a qualitative case study of four Black FBS football players and found that racism manifested in how implicit biases impacted advising (Singer, 2005). The athletes described experiencing different treatment when it came to class scheduling, feeling that they were given courses to be eligible to play, with no attention paid to whether the courses would keep them on track to graduate (Singer, 2005). The HPBAs stated seeing their White counterparts provided focused scheduling, with classes properly aligned to graduation plans that would advantage them post-athletics (Singer, 2005). The young men shared feeling as though their advisors did not believe in their intelligence, with one participant stating that HPBAs were placed in academic situations that were detrimental to their development, which was unfortunate considering their dependency on advisors (Singer, 2005). Singer concluded that according to the feelings of the HPBAs, there was evidence of racism manifesting through advising (Singer, 2005).

The likelihood of implicit bias and unconscious racism within HPBA’s academic advisors was additionally explored by Cooper, Nwadike, and Macaulay (2017) who used CRT to recommend culturally competent academic reforms in Division I athletics. One of the
motivations for the need for culturally competent reforms was that advisors tend to be a mostly homogenous group of White men and women (Cooper, Nwadike, and Macaulay, 2017). Specifically, according to the NCAA Demographics Database (2018), 69% of athletic academic advisors identified as White. These White individuals are expected to meet the needs of Black college athletes from different, often underprepared, precollege backgrounds (Cooper, Nwadike, and Macaulay) and as Singer (2005) found, they may be operating with race-based biases.

While not as robust as other areas of HPBA academic research, what exists about academic support suggests that academic advising heavily impacts the academic trajectory of HPBAs, and that stereotypes, biases, and latent racism impact the quality of service provided and help foster the academic neglect that leads to HPBA underperformance (see Singer, 2008, Benson, 2000, Long & Walker, 2011; Fountain & Finley, 2011; Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017). Peters (2013) stated that student-athletes’ academic progress is supposed to be rigorously monitored by institutions and those tasked with upholding NCAA standards. Tutoring, study programs, and time management skill development programs are intended to be built into supplemental academic support (Peters, 2013). However, Peters (2013) also states that if supplemental services were functioning properly, high-profile athlete academic performance would not be as low as it is (Peters, 2013). Even with multimillion-dollar athlete-specific services, high-profile athletes still have greater academic difficulty because “universities have compromised their [academic] mission to ultimately win athletic competitions” (Peters, 2013, p. 35). But some HPBAs do beat the odds.

**Success despite the odds.** Despite HPBA miseducation and disservice that research has found permeating athletic academic services, the institutions at-large, and high-profile sport culture, there are a number of young men who find academic success (see Bimper, Harrison, &
Advocating for High-Profile Black Athletes

Clark, 2012; Fuller, 2017; Fuller et al., 2016; Harrison & Martin, 2012; Oseguera, 2010). Anti-deficit research is based on understanding academic achievement, despite achievement gaps, for students of color (Harper, 2010). Harper (2010) customized an anti-deficit framework that explores three major pipelines: pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college persistence. Anti-deficit research uses an “instead of” query, seeking to understand the success of students of color despite history and evidence predicting the contrary (Harper, 2010). The same “instead of” query has been applied in HPBA research.

For example, Oseguera (2010) adapted an anti-deficit lens to explore the academic experiences of 17 successful Black Division I student-athletes. The study participants detailed fielding negativity, primarily in the form of microaggressions, from faculty, academic advisors, classmates, and other teammates. All of the athletes believed the attacks stemmed from stereotypes about their academic expectations (Oseguera, 2010). Many athletes expressed frustrations with others’ inability to perceive and believe in their academic identities since it was believed to be contrary to their athletic ones. The young men engaged in a number of concerted actions to experience achievement outcomes including a) disguising their athletic identities, b) distrusting faculty, staff, and peers, c) refusing academic assistance, and d) avoiding courses with other student-athletes (Oseguera, 2010). While these men found success, the methods they employed were about avoiding stereotypes and trying to develop successful images in the eyes of the White non-athlete majority as opposed to uplifting the HPBA image (Oseguera, 2010).

HPBA anti-deficit research related to managing perceptions and stereotypes, like in Oseguera (2010) is the norm. Another example came from Martin, Harrison, Stone, and Lawrence (2010). They studied Black male mostly-high-profile-sport student-athletes at four academically rigorous Division I west coast universities. These successful student-athletes stated
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

having to prove their worth, understand their perception as threats to society. They developed
time management and took pride in themselves and their academic work ethic (Martin, et al.,
2010). However, much of their motivation was found to be connected to how to maintain the
confidence to achieve academically despite stereotype threat associations (Martin, Harrison,
Stone, & Lawrence, 2010). The researchers focused on self-perceptions and behaviors that
contributed to positive outcomes and uncovered themes of complex identities, strong
communities, and liberation-minded approaches to their college academics (Bimper, Harrison, &
Clark, 2012). The young men stated that while they were aware of their athletic statuses, that did
not fully encompass their personhood, so they sought liberation through the self-empowerment
of prioritizing education, knowing it could change how they were perceived to help overcome
stereotypes (Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012).

Similarly, Harrison and Martin (2012) investigated common areas in male-student athlete
lives—academic advising and time management—at four Pac-12 universities that are publicly
known for academic and athletic rigor and success. The researchers focused on Black male
athletes, predominantly those participating in high-profile sports using positive organizational
behavior and positive psychology as theoretical frameworks. In order to find out how the athletes
felt in managing their dual roles, two phenomenological interviews were conducted with 27
athletes to acquire first-person accounts of how confident the participants felt about their
academic achievement, and their experiences surrounding time management and academic
advising. Harrison and Martin (2012) found three major themes: a) prioritizing academics over
athletics; b) positive impact of the academic support center in their academic development, and
c) though not losing a desire for professional play, wanting to participate for humanitarian
reasons and/or wanting to persist academically beyond the undergraduate level. The researchers
used the quantitative data relating to weekly schedules to demonstrate how the athletes’ positive academic outlook positively contributed to managing demands inside and outside of the classroom (Harrison & Martin, 2012).

Fuller and colleagues (2016) studied Black male athletes who succeeded by compartmentalizing their feelings about the “jock” label. The researchers looked at the multiple dimensions that accompanied being Black, male, a student, and an athlete at the Division I level for those participating in basketball, football, track and field, and soccer with GPAs ranging from 2.8 to 3.8. Through interviews, Fuller et al. (2016) found that the group of student-athletes saw masculinity differently and associated it with character and integrity connected to positive academic outcomes. The athletes managed their sensitivity to the “jock” labels placed on them by refusing to be limited by them (Fuller et al., 2016). The athletes learned to appreciate the athletic accolades while maintaining their own sense of self and developing their scholar identities separate from negative academic stereotypes (Fuller et al., 2016).

The research in this section demonstrates that anti-deficit research does not necessarily provide solutions, but in its approach to stereotypes, it is intimately related to the trifecta of being Black, male, and a high-profile athlete (Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012; Fuller et al., 2016; Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010; Oseguera, 2010). According to Fuller (2017), what separates successful HPBAs from those who struggle academically is the ability to separate their racial and athletic identities, additionally having developed positive self, social, and cultural identities. In Fuller’s (2017) study, he found that while there were already enough negative academic stereotypes about being a Black male, it was the addition of the athlete role that almost guaranteed academic struggles (Fuller, 2017). The type of stereotype management that Black males have been able to develop to successfully navigate predominantly White institutions
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

(PWIs) has not transferred to those with the added role of athlete. To uncover these findings, Fuller (2017) examined how stereotypes and racial discrimination affected the academic outcomes of Black male college athletes, believing race would be equally tied to gender and being an athlete.

There were 168 participants in Fuller’s (2017) study: 129 football players, 18 track and field athletes, 12 basketball players, six soccer players, and three baseball players, creating an HPBA majority of 84%. In the study, two salient stereotypes were identified: a) being a Black male and being an athlete and b) athletic stereotypes playing a bigger role in academic underperformance. After having the athletes complete surveys, Fuller (2017) found high racial identity bred higher levels of academic self-concept despite racial stereotypes, but high athletic identities resulted in lower academic self-concepts. Black males have it tough but have established various ways of managing stereotypes to build strong senses of academic self-worth. However, the tougher challenge arose when the athletic identity was most salient, controlling Blackness and maleness, leading those men to succumb to stereotype threat and negative environmental factors dictating academic self-concept (Fuller, 2017). In this way, Fuller (2017) was able to explain the multipliable effect of Black male stereotypes and athlete stereotypes on HPBA academic underperformance when athletic identity is the most prominent one. I realized that most of the research explored in this review, particularly in the relationship between Black men and high-profile sport, and the subsequent academic performance, was related to Fuller’s (2017) findings about the controlling power of the athletic identity over the often-related identities of race and gender. I was also taken by avoidance of stereotype threat at the collegiate being connected to having the preexisting ability to combat it, likely stemming from childhood.
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

HPBA Life in Summary

Singer (2005) connected HPBA’s learned academic neglect to racism that trickled down from systemic to institutional to interpersonal between the HPBAs and their advisors. However, research has demonstrated HPBA academic neglect rooted in the effects of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Donnor, 2005; Hodge et al., 2008). Research has shown that HPBA academic underperformance is directly related to treatment grounded in racist stereotypes and implicit biases about the academic expectations and capabilities of HPBAs (see Benson, 2000; Cooper, 2012; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017; Donnor; 2005; Hodge, et al., 2008; Njororai, 2012; Singer, 2005; 2008; 2009). Even scholars who employed anti-deficit frameworks to show successful HPBAs still understood that this group’s academic success was grounded in resisting the systemic effects and cultural influences of HPBA stereotypes (see Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012; Fuller et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2010; Oseguera, 2010).

Scholars have shown that the lived experiences of HPBAs are about the interrelatedness of being Black, male, and a high-profile sport participant, and unfortunately also underperforming academically (Benson, 2000; Bimper, 2014; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Fuller, 2017). This interrelatedness spans multiple environments, each acting on the other and the student-athlete (Donnor, 2005, Hodge et al., 2008; Harrison et al., 2011; Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009; Singer, 2005). Benson (2000), Meyers (2005), and Peters (2013) highlighted the importance of the role of the academic advisor in student-athlete academic lives since they are in the unique position to ensure student-athlete academic success (success defined as GPAs and graduation rates akin to their peers and stronger transition into their post-athletic careers). Nonetheless, advisors are also affected by the same environmental factors that have led to an athletic-centric mindset in student-athletes (Benson, 2000; Cooper,
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

Nwadike, and Macaulay, 2017; Singer, 2005). Therefore, HPBA research has sought to provide a platform for athlete voice to counter the impressions left by history on current public perception (Donnor, 2005; Singer, 2005; 2009). Benson (2000) stated that HPBAs already feel like no one cared about their academic goals, thoughts, and feelings. Therefore, HPBA research should properly collect and share the student athletes’ experiences to advocate for change at all levels. While the importance of uplifting HPBA voice is not debated, there is debate about advocacy methods (i.e. professional vs. public sociology) and this debate affects how needs are addressed.

Professional and Public Sociology

The Russian debate about professional versus public sociology captures the essence of the argument in sport sociology. Zdravomyslova (2008) stated that the overall purpose of sociology is to provide society with knowledge about itself through theories and concepts that “become resources of reflexivity” (p. 410). In distinguishing professional from public sociology, she stated that the former is academic and inherently critical, seeking to uncover social problems, but is intended for scholarly knowledge-creators to maintain distance from the empirical data and a public societal role. Public sociology is closely associated with civic activism since its purpose is to be understandable to laypeople and work with them towards establishing a just society (Zdravomyslova, 2008). According to Zdravomsylova’s (2008) distinction, professional and public sociology differ in their approaches to advocacy. This caused Russian sociologists to consider whether the strength of sociology resided in trust in its research data, with academics remaining disengaged from the politics of the research’s application, or if sociologists should be involved in mobilizing society and defining the contours of data application and policies based on their sociological research (Zdravomyslova, 2008). The dilemma described above mirrors Cooky’s (2017) arguments regarding sociology in sport research.
Cooky (2017) called for public engagement that complemented sport sociologists’ roles as critical scholars. She asserted that there is “a moral imperative to ‘do’ public sociology” (Cooky, 2017, p. 1). This arose from her conflict about whether the real work was the activism and advocacy her scholarship produced amongst like-minded colleagues, or whether the real advocates were those in the streets mobilizing communities (Cooky, 2017). Her conclusion was that professional sociology should not preclude public sociology, nor should scholars have to choose between one or the other (Cooky, 2017). Instead, sport scholars should work with athletes and the related public to make the professional practical, working together as agents of change (Cooky, 2017). Such calls for public sociology in sport often reference Burawoy’s (2005) address to the American Sociological Association. In it, he articulated the foundational necessity of professional sociology, but also the transformational ability towards social change that arises from public sociology when scholarly engagement intertwines with social engagement. Burawoy (2005) made sure to emphasize that there can be no public sociology without the orienting necessity of professional sociology.

**Professional Sociology in HPBA Academic Research**

The research cited in the “Relevant HPBA Academic Research” section above exemplified professional sociology: they presented theoretical and conceptual frameworks, supplied tested methods, and enhanced accumulated bodies of knowledge that further legitimize HPBA research and validate scholarly expertise in the area of study (Burawoy, 2005). The studies that applied race-based theories addressed the effects of race, racism, and hegemony on HPBA development, uncovering themes of multilevel racism, implicit bias, myths and miseducation, exploitation, and underdevelopment (see Armstrong & Jennings, 2018; Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017; Donnor, 2005; Harrison et al., 2011; Hodge et al., 2008;
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009; Singer, 2005; 2008; 2009). Identity theory studies explained the processes that cause many HPBAs to fall prey to an exclusively athletic identity and the characteristics that defined such an identity, uncovering themes of academic apathy, academic neglect, low motivation, stereotype acceptance, helplessness, conflict and coping, and underdevelopment (see Beamon, 2008; 2010; 2012; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Fuller, 2017; Hardin & Pate, 2013; Sailes, 1993; Stone, Harrison, & Mottley, 2012). Lastly, to contrast the acceptance of underperformance as generalizable to the entire HPBA population, some HPBA academic researchers applied anti-deficit frameworks to build upon the three success-despite-the-odds pipelines Harper (2010) established for successful students of color (see Bimper, Harrison, & Clark. 2012; Fuller, 2017; Fuller et al., 2016; Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010; Oseguera, 2010).

Professional sociology has been foundational in fostering understanding of HPBA academic underperformance and challenging researchers to more deeply critique sport systems and recommend changes (see Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017; Singer, 2009). But with HPBAs still disproportionately underperforming their peers academically, I posited that it was time to revisit the words of Burawoy (2005) and push towards acting on them more intensely:

We have spent a century building professional knowledge, translating common sense into science, so that now, we are more than ready to embark on a systematic back-translation, taking knowledge back to those from whom it came, making public issues out of private troubles, and thus regenerating sociology’s moral fiber (p. 261).

Burawoy’s (2005) call was taken up more in the decade-and-a-half after in some ways, but still remained scarce enough that a specific call was restated in sport sociology over a decade later by
Cooky (2017). And considering the continued academic disservice that HBPAs receive, I believed it important to apply that call to the needs of HBPAs specifically.

**Public Sociology in HPBA Academic Research**

Public sociology is intended to complement professional sociology, seeking to translate scholarly findings in an accessible manner (Burawoy, 2005). It is an avenue for the marginalized and has its own processes of translation to amplify the voices of those subject to hegemonic institutional influence and power dynamics (Cooky, 2017). Public sociology should answer Cooky’s (2017) question: “What obligation do we have to translate our research in ways that provide necessary context and render academic legitimacy for those voices that continue to be silenced and for those voices that are dismissed?” (p. 7). This obligation should be part of the advocacy process as supported by Burawoy (2005), who stated that professional sociology should establish the conditions that allow for public sociology.

The research in the sections below attempt to fulfill the public sociology wishes of Burawoy (2005) and Cooky (2017). Public sociology should make sociological research and findings understandable for the people outside of academia who want to be—or need to be—in involved in the conversation (Burawoy, 2005). There are two types of public sociology: traditional and organic. Traditional is intended to create resources for beyond the academy that become “vehicle[s] of...public discussion about the nature of U.S. society” (Burawoy, 2005, p. 264). Traditional public sociologists catalyze public debates most often by authoring books and op-eds or making comments in the media but do not remain in the debates after starting them (Cooky, 2017). Edwards’s (1969) traditional sociology is seminal in Black male athlete research, and Adler and Adler’s (1991) book produced a renowned public sociology study that detailed NCAA Division I high-profile athlete development as never previously documented for a public
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

audience. More recently, Hawkins (2010), Comeaux (2015), Cooper (2019), and Singer (2019) have contributed to traditional public sociology in HPBA academic research.

Organic sociology is designed for researchers to work “in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local and often counter-public” (Burawoy, 2005, p. 264). In organic, researchers remain in the public work for as long as is necessary, advocating alongside the people they study (Cooky, 2017). Organic sociology is informed by traditional (and vice versa) (Burawoy, 2005). For example, just as Edwards (1969) is celebrated in the traditional space, he has also planted his legacy in organic sociology through the Olympic Project for Human Rights (ORHP) (see Edwards, 1979). More recently, Gill (as cited by Salinas, 2014) has made a national name for himself through his organization, the Student-Athletes Human Rights Project (SAHRP). While neither organization explicitly focuses on educational issues, HPBA academic needs are encompassed within both. Regardless of which public sociology approach is applied, it is distinguishable from professional sociology in its intentional and sustained engagement with the public (Burawoy, 2005). In their best forms, traditional public sociology frames organic public sociology, while the latter grounds and directs the former (Burawoy, 2005).

Traditional public sociology. Edwards’s (1969) The Revolt of the Black Athlete (shortened to Revolt) engages with the racism and injustices that exist within sports, and the struggles that led to multiple forms of Black athlete rebellion. His book moves from the beginnings of Black athletes as new forms of labor exploitation, to discussing the rebellions, boycotts, confrontations, and tensions that resulted in the formation of the Olympic Project for Human Rights (Edwards, 1969). The book’s final chapter is a public call to action to continue to interrogate athletic organizations, and the U.S. in general, about their racism and culpability in the exploitation of Black male athletes (Edwards, 1969). The book covers a spectrum of Black
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

athlete history, but its opening chapter outlines the rise and consequences of Black male athletes at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (Edwards, 1969).

Edwards (1969) described how, following World War II, PWIs reassessed their policies that excluded Black students especially Black athletes, as the country turned towards sports to divert from memories of the war. With rising attendance and financial benefits from athletics, big-name PWIs decided to open their doors to Black athletes whose talents were usually taken to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Coaches from big-name PWIs went to the South to specifically recruit Black athletes (Edwards, 1969). This integration movement continued to grow, instigated by the profit that would follow the influx of Black male athletes, especially in football, the most lucrative sport of the time (Edwards, 1969). He captured the strife of assimilation at the individual level, as HPBAs struggled to keep up in their new academic settings, many failing to graduate after exhausting athletic eligibility. Edwards (1969) also discussed how athletes had given years of labor to schools that left them without a degree to show for it. After establishing the context for a revolt, Edwards (1969) gave an example: in 1967 at San Jose State University, 60 of the 72 Black students on campus (out of 24,000 students), many of whom were athletes, used college athletics as a bargaining chip to bring about social and academic change.

The book carries on in a similar format: providing the background that led to revolutionary moments in Black, mostly male, athlete history (Edwards, 1969). The strength of the public sociology is in Edwards’s (1969) delivery. Revolt is written in a narrative, informational format, free from complex theories or frameworks. Instead, Edwards (1969) tells the stories of Black athlete rebellion from his point of view, as someone with first-hand experience of many of the accounts he discussed. In the conclusion, Edwards (1969) asked
readers to consider the past and how much had really changed or failed to, calling for the revolution to continue. Like public sociology should, *Revolt* translated the complex into the accessible to catalyze public advocacy towards change for Black athletes inside and outside of academic settings (Edwards, 1969).

Edwards (1992) continued to provoke calls to action, this time in an op-ed for *Ebony*, a magazine considered an authoritative source in the Black community (Brogdon, 2019; Sharp & Curry, 1996). Edwards (1992) simplified many of the arguments explored in professional sociology research of HPBAs, translating research-based findings for the public most affected by them. He asked the Black community if it was putting too much emphasis on sports, particularly the high-profile ones. Edwards (1992) explained that due to the disproportionately high representation of Black men in major sports, the Black community has placed an inordinate pressure on sports achievement as the main method of upward mobility. He shared that Black parents were four times as likely as White parents to view their children’s sports participation as a career path, and additionally saw it as mobility for the entire family (Edwards, 1992). He stated that this community pressure has led too many Black men to abandon alternative routes of development including educational ones (Edwards, 1992). With conclusions similar to those of Beamon (2012), Edwards (1992) stated that too many HPBAs “emerged from the athletic experience seriously impaired relative to their abilities to compete or to make their way as responsible, productive adults in the broader society” (p. 130). However, in contrast to Beamon (2012), Edwards’s (1992) audience was the people involved in the identity development process, not the scholars who study the process. Following the same digestible format of *Revolt*, Edwards (1992) urged the Black community to be at the forefront of interventions to resolve the exclusive
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

sports focus and expand to develop Black males who believed the same levels of success could be found in medicine, education, law, media, public service, and other non-sport careers.

Like Edwards (1969, 1992), Adler and Adler’s (1991) traditional public sociology contribution to Black athlete research is held in high regard. Adler and Adler’s (1991) book is a direct demonstration of the translation of professional to public sociology. Building upon their four-year participant-observation study from 1985, Adler and Adler (1991) produced a book about the top-25 NCAA Division I basketball team that was the subject of the full ten-year study, making the private public in a way not previously experienced in high-profile sport research. While not intended to be HPBA-specific, Adler and Adler (1991) stated the majority of the participants identified as Black. Each chapter was framed by a specific identity development process (e.g. “The Athletic Role,” “The Social Role,” “The Academic Role,” etc.). Together, the chapters provided a chronological insider perspective of high-profile athlete socialization from recruitment through Division I exit (Adler & Adler, 1991).

Derived from professional sociology, but explicitly designed for public sociology, Adler and Adler’s (1991) book does describe the theories, methodologies, and research-related content that was utilized to bring the book together, but that information is limited to the book’s prologue and opening chapter. From there on, readers are provided a Division I exposé from which to draw their own conclusions (Adler & Adler, 1991). Backboards and Blackboards (the book’s title) explored the backgrounds of high-profile athletes and the early expectations attached to their roles as athletes, followed by the University molding the student-athletes into athletes first and students second. This negatively influenced their academic experiences, and academic failure led to apathy, doing just enough to maintain eligibility (Adler & Adler, 1991). While not as conversational as Edwards (1969, 1992), Backboards and Blackboards managed to share the
same identity theory themes of professional sociology without allowing the complex parts of those theories to take away from the accessibility of the book (Adler & Adler, 1991).

*Backboards and Blackboards* ends as most studies do, with implications based on what was presented (Adler & Adler, 1991). The difference was that the onus to follow up on these implications was placed on everyone, scholar and public, since both groups had equal access to 10 years’ worth of empirical research and knowledge.

In the last decade, some HPBA researchers have worked to increase traditional public sociology in HPBA research. Hawkins (2010) took an infamous concept and adapted it, developing the new plantation model to explain HPBA experiences at PWIs. Hawkins (2010) described his model as positioning “Black male athletic experiences within the broader historical and social context of exploitation endured by internally colonized people in the system of slavery” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 13). While the book covered an array of topics that subscribe to his proposed model, the third chapter discussed the alleged athletic superiority and academic inferiority of HPBAs. Hawkins (2010) placed blame on all of society for allowing the myth to influence social order and dictate the course of HPBAs for multiple generations. He argued that widespread subscription to athletic-superiority-academic-inferiority had allowed the NCAA to exploit HPBAs without substantial public backlash. The myth also affected the athletes, becoming self-fulfilling prophecies of underperformance, making it easier to sustain the plantation model (Hawkins, 2010). *The New Plantation* is not as accessible as Edwards (1969) or Adler and Adler (1991)’s books. Hawkins (2010) interweaves complex themes, theories, and supplemental scholarly research into supporting his model. But, for the public who take up the challenge of digesting the text, they should emerge with recommendations for how to work towards “decolonizing” Division I institutions (Hawkins, 2010, p. 174).
Most recently, Cooper (2019) added to the HPBA public sociology conversation. Like Hawkins (2010), the full text is not entirely accessible for the layperson. But the second chapter translates decades of HPBA scholarly research into, arguably, publicly understandable knowledge, and the fourth chapter, while still technical, should be digestible in the breakdown of the model it describes. The fourth chapter proposes the illusion of singular success model, which adapts multiple identity theories and re-analyzes them in a manner that chronologizes the path towards an exclusively athletic identity and its consequences (Cooper, 2019). The identity developmental process is broken down into four phases: a) the early phase of sport exposure to impressionable Black boys, b) the adolescent phase where Black boys’ promise and skill development begin to receive more intense attention, c) the young adult phase during which continued immersion into the athletic role coincides with attending an athletic-centric high school and/or college, and d) the adult phase where HPBAs have to confront what happens when their professional athletic dreams never manifest (Cooper, 2019). The explanation of the four identity phases is coupled with how a lack of holistic development fosters the conditions for academic devaluation throughout the time period where life overlaps formal education, culminating in academic underperformance (Cooper, 2019). While Cooper (2019) is closer to professional sociology on the professional-public spectrum, these two chapters adapt public sociology well, and his entire book compels the public that chooses to engage with it to expand their views of HPBAs while continuing to recognize and be outraged by the systemic underdevelopment and miseducation the athletes receive.

Different from Hawkins (2010) and Cooper (2019), Comeaux (2015) more clearly shows how traditional public sociology could set a frame for subsequent organic public sociology. As Burawoy (2005) stated, public sociology should promote private-public partnership and such a
partnership was a requirement in Comeaux (2015), who sought to create a tool that could balance athletics and academics. While not explicitly designed for HPBAs, Comeaux’s (2015) work would likely benefit them the most given the professional sociological knowledge available about their academic experiences at Division I institutions (see Adler & Adler, 1985; Benson, 2000; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Hardin & Pate, 2013; Singer, 2005; 2008; 2009). Comeaux (2015) called for the disaggregation of academic data by race, gender, and sport. He believed that both the NCAA and sport research scholars wanted to improve the academics offered to athletes, so he suggested supplementing APR data with components that include robust indicators and evidence-based practices (Comeaux, 2015). He stated that athletic academic centers focus on eligibility, have lower academic expectations for many student-athletes, and rely on anecdotal information to make decisions instead of data (Comeaux, 2015).

The Career Transition Scorecard (CTS) would provide the guidance towards academic improvement (Comeaux, 2015). Comeaux (2015) saw CTS as a bridge between research and practice that would create positive learning environments and desirable educational outcomes for all student-athletes. Academic advisors would conduct research about their institutions to acquire the knowledge to bring about change within their own context and professional researchers would facilitate the research process with the advisors (Comeaux, 2015). In this pairing of advisor with researcher, Comeaux (2015) was designing programming practices for carrying out organic sociology in sport (see Burawoy, 2005; Cooky, 2017). CTS would consist of desirable outcomes in access, retention, institutional receptivity, excellence/high achievement, and engagement. The practitioner and the facilitator would identify strengths and problems; construct goals, measures, and baselines; and set improvement targets for (a) selected domain(s). This would link assessment and evaluation of athlete patterns and conditions to desired outcomes.
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

(Comeaux, 2015). Comeaux (2015) stated this initiative would give athletic academic support centers the tools needed to provide more supportive academic environments for athletes, with practitioners becoming knowledge “makers” as opposed to just knowledge “users” (Comeaux, 2015, p. 277). While CTS is a potential bridge between professional and public sociology, it suffers from placement in a scholarly journal, which are often deemed less accessible to the public. But the content of Comeaux (2015) could have a direct impact on the educational outcomes of HPBAs. His proposed collaboration between professional and private was a strong example of what could be in the future of HPBA academic research.

**Organic public sociology.** Human rights projects have been a primary form of organic public sociology applied to HPBA advocacy (Edwards, 1979; Salinas, 2014, Schere, 2014). While discussing Edwards (1969), I mentioned the last chapter of *Revolt* discussing the formation of the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR). It is the seminal example of organic sociology for Black male athletes. Similarly, in the last decade, the Student-Athletes Human Rights Project (SAHRP), paying homage to Edwards (1979) in name, has become a national student-athlete advocacy organization (Salinas, 2014; Schere, 2014). While not exclusively for HPBAs, it began by advocating for them. However, with only two examples of prominent organic public sociology in HPBA research, it is clear that this is an area of HPBA research in need of further development.

In considering the organic sociology of Edwards, inside and outside the world of sport, the image of Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their fists in protest at the 1968 Olympics is an infamous part of history. However, many are unaware of the connection between their protest and the organization they were a part of, OPHR, housed at San Jose State University (Zirin, 2012). After establishing himself as a scholar of Black male athlete research, Edwards (1979)
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

turned his research to practice, using his professional sociology knowledge to create an organic sociology organization, OPHR. The group, consisting mostly of Black male athletes, was established in October of 1967, and prior to the Olympics, was originally focused on racial segregation in the United States (Tower, 2018). Eventually, its purposes grew as Edwards wanted to expose how the U.S. used Black athletes to project a false racial unity narrative domestically and internationally (Zirin, 2012).

A decade after OPHR’s formation, Edwards (1979) summarized his foundational goals for the group:

1) Stage an international protest of the persistent and systematic violation of Black people’s human rights in the United States
2) Expose America’s historical exploitation of Black athletes as political propaganda tools in both the national and international arenas
3) Establish a standard of political responsibility among Black athletes regarding the needs and interests of the black community, and to devise effective and acceptable ways by which athletes could accommodate the demands of such responsibilities
4) Make the Black community aware of the substantial “hidden” dynamics and consequences of their sports involvement.

Even when their mission grew, Edwards (1979) said it still encompassed the four original issues, always rooted in social justice for Black athletes. The group did see success. For example, South Africa was banned from Olympic participation until 1992 when Apartheid ended and more Black coaches were hired even if only in assistant positions (Zirin & Edwards, 2012). Following the 1968 Olympics—the peak of the group’s work and notoriety—the group faded away (Tower,
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

2018). However, OPHR is important not only in what it did on the global stage, but also in what it accomplished domestically for Black male student-athletes (Edwards, 1979).

OPHR determinedly advocated for the hiring of more Black faculty, coaches, and athletic administrators at PWIs (Edwards, 1979). Alluded to when discussing Edwards (1969), through OPHR, student-athletes at San Jose State University forced the cancellation of a football game in 1967 in protest of racism in its sports program and the lack of student and faculty of color recruitment at the institution (Edwards, 1979). Through their protest and Edwards’s advocacy, “the OHRP established a model by which Black athletes, Black students, and the larger Black community could effectively collaborate for the achievement of mutually advantageous ends” (Edwards, 1979, p. 3). In explaining his call to this advocacy work, Edwards (1979) stated that as a scholar with substantial training in sociology and his knowledge of Black male athletes, he felt fundamentally responsible to undertake this task, which led to him becoming the “principal architect of OPHR” (p. 4). Such a statement is in agreement with Cooky (2017), who stated that more sport sociology scholars should feel called to sustained public advocacy work. A recent scholar to take on this advocacy work is Dr. Gill of the University of Texas at Austin.

Dr. Gill used his expertise in social work for athletes and scandals in college sports as the foundation for forming SAHRP (the Student-Athlete Human Rights Project) (Salinas, 2014). While Gill was working at North Carolina Central University, a scandal broke out at a neighboring institution (Salinas, 2014). Former University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) learning specialist Mary Willingham exposed what she deemed a corrupt academic system for high-profile athletes, many of whom were admitted with the reading and writing levels of elementary school students (Smith & Willingham, 2015). Willingham alleged that for decades, UNC allowed unquestionably underprepared high-profile athletes to take fake courses
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

in order to maintain athletic eligibility and keep the school’s financial rewards intact (Smith & Willingham, 2015). She did not hold the athletes responsible, blaming the administration for cheating the athletes out of a proper education (Smith & Willingham, 2015). However, the scandal still negatively impacted the lives of both former and current UNC high-profile athletes, the majority of them HPBAs (Salinas, 2014; Schere, 2014). In an effort to leverage his social work expertise and advocate for the rights of the affected athletes, Gill formed SAHRP in 2010, describing his motivation as follows: “At the end of the day, there’s no one out there advocating for student-athletes and that’s the void we’re trying to fill” (Salinas, 2014, para. 5).

Gill, through SAHRP, stayed with the UNC issue for years, filing a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in 2014, alleging that UNC had specifically discriminated against its HPBAs in disproportionately enrolling them in no-show courses for almost 20 years (Schere, 2014). The complaint followed UNC’s refusal to engage with SAHRP over what Gill deemed a lack of academic integrity and unequal treatment of HPBAs (Salinas, 2014; Schere, 2014). From this advocacy, the group became nationally known and has since grown to work with student-athletes across the country. SAHRP starts the dialogue between the student-athletes and whoever their opposition is and remains in the work as conduits of student-athlete advocacy (Salinas, 2014). Like Edwards (1979), Gill was called to organic sociology through a connection to his professional expertise and a drive to fill an advocacy void (Salinas, 2014). SAHRP is still active today, and while not limited to working for HPBAs, their needs were the backbone of the group’s formation (Salinas, 2014).

Gill (as cited in Salinas, 2014), like Edwards (1979), leveraged his professional knowledge to join with the public-in-need and advocate alongside them for a cause, the mutual education that Burawoy (2005) proposed between professional and public sociology. But with
few prominent examples, organic public sociology for HPBAs is an area in need of scholarly
growth especially considering the depth of academic issues HPBAs face. However, while not
fully organic, there are what I would qualify as organic-lite or developing-towards-organic
programs led by scholars such as Collective Uplift, which originated with Dr. Cooper at the
University of Connecticut, Dr. Carter-Francique's and Dr. Dortch's Sista to Sista program at
Texas A&M, and the annual Black Student-Athlete Summit at the University of Texas at Austin.
With more external collaboration with the general public, the push towards full organic is likely.

How to Bridge Professional and Public Sociology in HPBA Academic Research

After reviewing professional and public sociology literature applicable to HPBA
academic research, it was clear that while scholarly research has legitimized the area of study,
there is still a gap in how to translate the academy’s advocacy to sustained public engagement.
Some scholars have produced work designed to raise public awareness about the intricacies and
unfortunate longevity of HPBA academic inequity and underperformance (see Adler & Adler,
1991; Cooper, 2019; Edwards, 1969; Hawkins, 2010). And Edwards (1979) and Gill (as cited by
Salinas, 2014 & Schere, 2014) remain the prominent examples of organic sociology in HPBA
academic research, though Comeaux (2015) proposed an approach for scholars to partner with
athletic academic advisors towards improved academic programming for student-athletes.
Overall, HPBAs require more public advocacy specifically targeting their academic needs.
Therefore, in developing my study, I knew I should not skip right from professional
sociology to organic public sociology, as the traditional approach is necessary for framing the
organic. I researched existing theories that could adapt to traditional public sociology, frame
future organic sociology, and encapsulate a discussion of the HPBA academic experience from
the point of view of those who lived it. I sought a framework that could complement the theories
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

applied and research that exists in the professional sociology reviewed above, while allowing for the insider exploration of HPBA systems in a way that could foster advocacy. From existing professional and public sociology, I understood that the lived experiences of HPBAs was about the consequences of a life built around a singular athletic identity (see Beamon, 2012; Cooper, 2019; Harper, 2018; Singer, 2008). Existing literature demonstrated their experiences spanned multiple environments, each influencing the others, with HPBAs at the center. This conceptualization led me to researching ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Theoretical Framework: Ecological Systems Theory

In seeking a framework that would aid in bridging professional and public sociology as Burawoy (2005) believed was intended, I adapted Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological system theory (EST). With it, I could explain HPA experiences in a way that continued to validate scholarship while advocating by uplifting HPBA voices. EST focuses on the learner at the center of multiple nested environments where seeks to explain the relationships between “the growing human organism[s]” and the environments in which they actually lived and grew (p. 513). I saw this as applicable based on how literature explains HPBA life. Figure 1 shows the relationship between a learner and his/her environments.
Different influences and experiences are emphasized within each environment, but they all affect one another due to the environmental nesting.

**Ecological Systems as Applied to HPBAs**

Ecological systems theory (EST) includes the settings that contain a developing person and the larger contexts, both formal and informal, in which these settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Each system is explained in the context of my study, with Figure 2 representing EST’s modification for HPBA lives.
The chronosystem encompasses the environmental events and transitions that occur throughout a learner’s life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For the population of interest, the chronosystem encompasses the time that overlaps HPBA life: K-16. Athletic identity development dominates this period, leading to stifled academic development (Beamon, 2012; Beamon, 2000; Adler & Adler, 1985). All chronosystem events are led by sport participation.

The first nested environment, the macrosystem, encompasses the overarching institutional patterns of an environment’s culture. It carries the information and ideologies that explicitly and implicitly endow meaning and motivation (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For HPBAs, it refers to the facets of high-profile sports culture that prioritize athletics over academics.
influenced by revenue-sport culture that acts as business model prioritizing athletics over academics in all matters (Hodge et al., 2008; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Singer, 2005). The macrosystem encompasses customs and values, and Black male as athlete reverberates throughout their school settings, neighborhoods, and home environments (see Benson, 2000; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Harrison & Bimper, 2011; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009).

The next nested environment, the exosystem, is an extension of the mesosystem (the following system) that connects social structures that do not contain the developing person but affect the settings in which that person may be found and/or hold influence over that person’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In HPBA life, the exosystem is dominated by the media and its primary positioning of HPBA as the success model (see Beamon, 2010; Edwards, 1992; Cooper, 2019; Johnson & Migliaccio; 2009). During K-12, the outside media presence encompasses both NCAA Division I sport and professional athletes. During college, the exosystem adjusts to professional athletes and sports mass media discussing the college athletes.

Within the exosystem, the mesosystem defines the relationships among the major settings containing the developing person at particular points in life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For most developing individuals, this is their various learning settings. For HPBAs, this would be the relationship between their main academic and athletic settings (e.g., study hall, private tutoring rooms, classrooms, athletic facilities, etc.) (see Benson, 2000; Peters, 2013; Singer, 2008).

The aforementioned layers enclose and influence the microsystem, which in this study is identified as Division I athletic academic centers. The microsystem represents the relationship between the developing person and the immediate setting/environment that contains a person (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). It is the most constant setting, incorporating time, place, physical features, activity, participants, and roles. How groups and/or individuals within the microsystem
interact with the developing person affect that person’s overall development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This study includes discussions of various academic spaces, but the main microsystem explored is NCAA Division I athletic academic centers. They are pertinent to NCAA student-athlete education, especially for HPBAs, including required study hall, frequent tutoring, and regular meetings with athletic academic advisors (see Benson, 2000; McCann, 2012; Menzer, 2014; Meyers, 2005; Peters. 2013; Ramos, 2012).

HPBAs are at the center of it all, influenced by all systems, beginning with the outermost system and its ability to main consistent or engage in frequent transitions that affect the inner systems. HPBAs have the most agency at the microsystem but they bring the baggage of the outer layers with them that stifles academic performance (see Benson, 2000; Fuller, 2017; Hodge et al., 2008; Sailes, 1993). I sought to understand HPBA experiences and uncover what it is about what they carry from outer systems that perpetuate negative outcomes and what could be done about the outer system occurrences.

However, I did not want my findings to just be shared within the academy. In the public sphere, miseducation, myths, and stereotypes dictate much of HPBA perception (see Cooper, 2012; 2019; Fuller, 2017; Hawkins, 2010; Njororai, 2012; Sailes, 1993). I wanted to leverage existing research and translate it through the frame of ecological systems theory, in a mostly chronological format that the public would be able to understand and see the necessity in advocating for change for.

**Summary**

More is publicly known about HPBA’s alleged academic deficiencies than their experiences even though their experiences are key to understanding the systems and programs that have led to their underperformance (see Benson, 2000; Cooper, 2012; Hawkins, 2010;
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

Njororai, 2012; Singer, 2008; 2009). HPBA history, as researched by sports scholars, has explained how post-Brown, the African American Dream strayed further away from academic pursuits towards a singular focus on athletic success (Edwards, 1992; Hodge et al., 2008; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). But the public remains misinformed about why HPBA academic problems really exist and persist (see Cooky, 2017; Cooper, 2019; Hawkins, 2010). To counter these misunderstandings, HPBA research has supported using student voices for counter-storytelling and advocacy (see Armstrong & Jennings, 2018; Singer, 2005; 2009). HPBA voices have been elevated in professional sociology via race theories and identity-based theories with anti-deficit research also growing (see Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; 2010; 2012; Fuller et al., 2016; Oseguera, 2010; Singer, 2005). Professional sociology is foundational to any change efforts, but some scholars argue the lack of change is connected to professional sociology’s advocacy method (see Burawoy, 2005; Cooky, 2017; Zdravomyslova, 2008). For example, empirical research about collegiate HPBA’s experiences critiques why the current HPBA system fails these young men, with studies building upon each other, incorporating more of the underlying issues and direct HPBA perspectives (see Adler & Adler, 1985; Benson, 2000; Cooper, 2012; Njororai, 2012; Singer, 2005). But Cooky (2017) believes sport sociologists need to incorporate more public sociology approaches to problem-solve, not just explain and critique.

Public sociology, whether traditional or organic, is solution-oriented and engages and centers the voices of those it advocates for in a way that forms a partnership between them and scholars (Burawoy, 2005; Cooky, 2017). Decades of professional sociology about HPBA academic inequity is more than enough to support the need for more scholars to sustain engagement with their research in the public spaces that influence the population-in-need. HPBAs deserve more dedicated support in public spaces from people who can validate their
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

needs and concerns. This review of literature exists to summarize what has been studied in recent history to remind scholars of how much is known and how pervasive the HPBA academic miseducation and underperformance issue still is. The latter half of the chapter advocates for why it is now time to follow up on Cooky’s (2017), Burawoy’s (2005), and especially Edwards’s (1969; 1979) calls to action when it comes to public engagement in ways that can do what Oseguera (2010) hoped for and affect the work of “coaches, faculty, student affairs leaders, and others who frequently interact with student-athletes and are committed to creating more equitable educational environments for all students” (p. 297). I believed in the ability to move closer to Oseguera’s (2010) goals through the application of ecological systems theory (EST).

EST, as a human developmental theory, is often employed in educational research (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). It provides context, discussing interrelated nested environments that act on a developing individual, holding all relevant parties accountable and responsible for the development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Applying it critically centers it as a theory designed to examine multilevel power structures and identify areas within the HPBA system that require change and what that change could look like. Next steps in HPBA academic research should be intentionally solution-oriented. Existing research will allow me to support a study that builds upon existing exploration and understanding of how the HPBA system could produce findings towards prevention of negative outcomes.

Otherwise, continuing on the existing path, two-thirds of Black male college students will not graduate within six years, the lowest completion rate for both sexes and all racial groups with the lowest numbers coming from HPBAs (Harper, 2012; Harper & Harris, 2012). To bring about change to curtail such underperformance, I hope this review of literature will become its own call to action for HPBA scholars to reengage with what is known in professional circles and consider
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

what public sociology could look like to move knowledge to action. The next chapters will use this literature review and its insights from public and professional sociology to demonstrate how EST can functions in public sociology and advocate for HPBA academic needs.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This dissertation study exists to more specifically understand what sustains the unfortunate commonplace of HPBA academic underperformance. This study also intends to provide an example of balancing professional and public sociology in HPBA academic research and advocacy. I used the knowledge from professional sociology about HPBA academic experiences and outcomes to engage in traditional public sociology with former HPBAs, hopefully, catalyze future organic public sociology. I chose to carry out my study through an ecological systems theory (EST) framework. Applying EST allowed a group who is not often given a voice to tell its story about what leads to HPBA academic underperformance (see Skinner, Edwards, & Gilbert, 2005). The former HPBAs were placed at the center of the study and allowed to reflect upon the various environments and people that influenced their development (see Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, & Bagley, 2014).

Research Design

Through narrative inquiry, former HPBAs shared their stories about the high-profile sport system, from childhood entry through the revenue-generating period in college, explaining the athletic vs. academic divide along the way. Narrative inquiry allowed me to understand the HPBA experiences from their perspectives; bracketing my beliefs so I could just listen before seeking to analyze. People sharing their stories creates the ability to stimulate discussion and recognize people’s strengths in engaging with their own lives (Fraser, 2004). It also provides the opportunity for more nuanced analysis that considers the whole of a story, which became my experience from what I thought I would hear compared to what I was told.
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

Narrative inquiry is defined by the understanding that people live in a world of stories, and these stories are often how people recount their experiences (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017). It provides a means for collecting data or disseminating findings in a way that engages and makes sharing easier (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017). People “think in story form” to understand daily life (Stride, Fitzgerald, & Allison, 2017, p. 35). Polkinghorne (1988) described storytelling as allowing people to organize life events around a plot. Dowling (2012) added that storytelling enhances information sharing by contextualizing happenings around characters to connect and inform audiences. A storyteller develops a narrative framework that links previously disconnected data in an engaging and explanatory way (Dowling, Garrett, Lisahunter, & Wrench, 2015). Life events are engaged via standard literary techniques such as flashbacks and characterization (Gilbourne, Jones, & Jordan, 2014). In narrative inquiry, during this story-building process, participants build a relationship with the researcher, enhancing security, openness, and story depth, hopefully leaving less room for researcher bias to fill data gaps (Haydon & van der Riet, 2017; Fraser, 2004). Therefore, narrative inquiry supports the understanding of experiences and how they are intertwined with time, space and environment, people, culture, and social influences that reflect the context and understanding of the story’s events (Haydon & van der Riet, 2017).

I deemed narrative inquiry a suitable complement to the study’s EST framework because of the methodology’s relationship with time. EST expands beyond the macrosystem to include an additional outer layer, the chronosystem, that encompasses the relationship between time and environmental events, specifically how constancy and/or transitions affect development. This particular ecological system was important to the retrospective approach to storytelling the former HPBAs would naturally employ in sharing their stories with me. Narrative inquiry is
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

employed when a researcher wants to uncover “hidden” or “subordinated” ideas that are not always exposed in other qualitative interview approaches. And in trying to balance what I sought to uncover about each ecological system, down to what I had believed to be the most directly influential, i.e. the microsystem, narrative inquiry provided a method for the former HPBAs to deconstruct each environment and how interactions among HPBA-related individuals, groups, and systems influenced both athletic and academic development (see Fraser, 2004, p. 181).

Narrative inquiry recognizes people’s strengths in engaging with their own lives and considering them critically, especially around issues of social justice (Fraser, 2004). But as espoused in the second chapter, I was still curious to see what parts the former HPBAs may have interpreted differently from scholars as I considered the relationship between scholarly and personal analysis. I believed that the first-person perception from the former HPBAs would be key to deconstructing each system’s relationships to determine the best avenues for change.

Scheurich (1995) stated that the postmodern qualitative researcher understands that interviewing should embody the “complexity, uniqueness, and indeterminateness of each one-to-one human interaction” (1995, p. 241). There is no one truth since researchers have multiple intentions and desires, some known and some not consciously known (Scheurich, 1995). I agreed with Scheurich’s (1995) belief about interviewing. I had subjectivities coming into the study and public sociology intentions. I chose narrative inquiry to honor the voices of my participants while trying to minimize myself and my intentions, but I acknowledged the potential biases of my interpretations. My preexisting beliefs assumed that all storytelling roads would lead to how NCAA Division I athletic academic services, at the microsystem, would be the key area for mitigating the academic injustices within HPBA education. This was a bias I had to bracket early to remain open to other entry points. Therefore, I chose narrative inquiry to structure an
interview protocol that allowed for the sharing of narratives that encapsulated the entire K-16 athletic academic period.

Specifically, as is common in narrative inquiry, I utilized a topic-based protocol to have “interviewee-oriented” interviews as opposed to “instrument-oriented” ones, the focus being on the “narrator’s self-evaluation, meta-statements, and the overall logic of the narrative” (Fraser, 2004, p. 185). The interviewee orientation resulted in me probing less, only asking for additional details to enhance my engagement with the stories being shared. In narrative inquiry, participants are often sharing past experiences, which influence their present, since they now see things that may not have been apparent at the time of the story’s events and will also influence how they will perceive the future (Haydon & van der Riet, 2017). What is deemed important gets highlighted, and as environments are described, participants establish social and cultural understandings through their experiences within them (Haydon & van der Riet, 2017). The HPBAs in my study often stated in their interviews that they were sharing ideas they had not considered while still K-16 athletes. They also highlighted areas I would not have considered probing in a more structured protocol but were obviously important to them during retrospection.

I sought to capture biographical narratives to “explore the lived experiences and perspectives that people have of their daily lives…focusing on how they make sense of the meanings they give to the stories they tell” (Kim, 2016, p. 125). I more specifically wanted to capture an oral history, which explores the historical memory of those not typically interviewed to show how they make sense of a shared lived experience connected to social context (Kim, 2016). This was to assist with my bracketing since oral histories balance the power between storyteller and story writer. However, this was difficult since my participants were raised in different geographic regions, attended different colleges, and graduated in different years. While
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

high-profile sport history can be broken into time periods, and I was trying to capture the essence of the graduating class of the first half of the 2010s, I knew that in a true oral history, the aforementioned heterogeneous aspects of my study should be homogenous. This allows the story writer to sift through the multiple accounts to craft a relevant whole, illuminating particular historical moments of interest for the shared time period (Kim, 2016). But I needed the heterogeneity to fulfill my public advocacy purposes, demonstrating that similar trajectories and outcomes were produced for many HPBAs regardless of where and when their stories began. So, the biographical narratives I collected, and share in the findings chapter, are inspired by oral history techniques, but differ in presentation in order to preserve my balance of professional and public sociology. Still, their life experiences align in multiple ways due to being centered around high-profile sport as Black men, regardless of time and place nuances. Therefore, to stay in some line with oral history protocol, I did limit the time frame that the HPBAs interviewed could be selected from (see Kim, 2016): the four former HPBAs interviewed were no more than five years removed from collegiate play.

**Sampling**

In qualitative research, the objective is often to apply techniques that emphasize small, information-rich samples. To do this, participants are commonly purposively selected because they represent a well-informed selection based on specific criteria. Purposive sampling maximizes the chances of identifying phenomena of interest sought in research questions (Serra, Psarra, & O’Brien, 2018). In my study, I purposively sampled for full-scholarship HPBAs who were recruited for athletic purposes. Specifically, participants had to self-identify as Black and have participated in basketball or football at the Division I level as a full-athletic-scholarship athlete. These criteria were created from the most common qualifiers, generated from the review
of literature, of high-profile athletes who have historically underperformed academically. Participants had to have had consistent interaction with athletic academic services and could no longer be Division I student-athletes in any capacity. And, as stated in the previous paragraph, participants could not be more than five years removed from college to focus on recent HPBA history that could directly speak to present and near-future HPBA experiences.

I knew I wanted to share the full stories of a small sample of participants. I settled on four after reviewing Singer (2005)'s study in which he stated settling on a sample of four participants to “allow [himself] to dig deeper into...athletes’ perceptions by bringing the voices of these individuals to the forefront of the research process” (Singer, 2005, p. 366). I wanted to, in addition to Singer’s (2005) purpose, also share these rich and thick full stories with the public. Singer’s (2005) study is prominently held in its impact on recent HPBA research, so I believed I could accomplish my goals with four participants, knowing that I also sought to amplify voices, specifically through the sharing of elongated narratives.

In determining who my study participants would ultimately be, I used various networks to find the four individuals who would best represent my study needs (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). This included reaching out to relevant listserv coordinators for posting across the network (e.g. the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport listserv). I also directly reached out to contacts I had within Division I athletic academic services. I accessed extended networks by posting my recruitment flyer (Appendix A, p. 186-187) on social media: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I posted the flyer once a week for four weeks on each platform. From my social media followers, the flyer was accessible to 950 people on Facebook, 306 people on Twitter, and 237 people on Instagram. I encouraged my followers on each platform to share/repost the flyer as well. I did not track sharing but estimate at least 10-15 shares per social media platform per
week. However, recruitment was still slow. Eventually, my network generated my first two participants, one former football player and one former basketball player. Then, in believing in the expertise of these two men to find me suitable counterparts to round out my four participants, I asked each to recruit one more participant from their same sport to be part of the study.

The first two participants were selected after the four-week recruitment period ended. Four potential participants reach out via the specific method I requested to share follow-up information: my email address. Each of the four potential participants fit the selection criteria. I provided each potential participant with a copy of the consent forms (Appendix C, p. 181-185) for them to gain a fuller understanding of the study purpose and requirements, and I shared my timeline for completion. Only two of the original four reached back out to confirm participation via signed consent forms within the one-week period provided to review, respond, and schedule an initial interview. Since I required four participants, I asked the confirmed two to use their own networks to recruit one former HPBA each, preferably from different universities, who they believed would be willing to participate and would align with the needs of my study. The two confirmed participants shared contact information with me for their recommendations through email addresses and phone numbers. I emailed each recommended participant, sharing the recruitment flyer and the consent form. Each former HPBA responded within the one-week timeframe and scheduled time to meet. With that, I had my four study participants.

The final four participants had the knowledge and experiences I sought to answer my research questions. With only four participants and in employing narrative inequity, I was more concerned with thick and rich stories than data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). But because of similarities in many HPBA stories, as shared in the second chapter, I expected many cross-story similarities. Qualitative research does not emphasize generalizability, and though not my
ultimate purpose, I did want the potential for transferability, so I purposefully sought heterogeneity by seeking to have multiple Division I institutions represented by my four participants. This did not negate the potential for two individuals from the same university, but I made two the maximum to continue to foster having a heterogeneous sample.

Chapter Two covered studies with HPBAs from numerous universities, yet the individuals interviewed had very similar experiences and feelings, spanning childhood through collegiate life. Their similarities in HPBA upbringing and development made it easier for me to believe that the HPBA feelings of a few could be transferable to the larger population, school notwithstanding. Cooper, Grenier, and Macaulay (2017) defined transferability as when readers can compare experiences described in a study with their own, “thus transforming the ‘I’ to ‘we’” (p. 46). Accessibility of data improves transferability, which is supported by Morse (2015) who wrote that thick descriptions are essential to transfer original findings to another context or other individuals. Thick, accessible descriptions were a seminal goal of my findings, influencing my methodology choice. And I hoped for the transferability, by limiting the time frame but allowing for multiple institutions to be represented, knowing that Beamon (2012), Bimper and Harrison (2011), and Singer (2008) found parallels in HPBA experiences even though their participants represented different Division I institutions. The full audience for my study varies, but for non-HPBAs, I wanted readers to be able to understand the “we” of HPBA experiences across institutions as easily as HPBAs could understand. I also wanted my narrators, while retaining their individuality, to connect with readers as an HPBA collective (Klaassen, 2015).

Participant Descriptions

My final sample encompassed two football players and two basketball players from three institutions. While each participant contributed to the collective HPBA experience presented in
my findings, narrative inquiry allowed me to highlight individual motivations for joining high-profile sports and the nuances in experiences during and after participation. Some of that personal nuance yet collective history is summarized below in the participant descriptions.

**David.** David is 26 years old and a first-generation college student who began playing football at age five. He came from a football family with a local legacy as excellent athletes. He was raised in the South where he described football as a religion. This football culture catalyzed his NFL aspirations. While he was not a poor student, he only considered school as a requirement for athletic participation: his father required him to keep his grades up to play. In retrospect, he stated that his public K-12 schooling, especially his high school, was much more known for, and focused on, athletic success, so he did not know he was underprepared for the academic rigor of a prominent Division I institution until entry. He was a B student in high school but struggled to be a C student when he began college, attending a Division I FBS university in the Northeast. His academic struggles were exasperated by his football responsibilities. Still, he remained football-minded and determined to play professionally. He was able to graduate from college, but with a major that was not his primary area of interest (Sociology). He was able to play in the NFL briefly, but was eventually let go and had to reckon with what came after sports participation. While he described struggle, he credits his current path with finding a mentor who has been able to help him with his post-sports-life transition.

**Alex.** Alex is 27 years old and attended the same Division I institution as David. Alex’s football career also began at age five as a way to channel his childhood energy and anger. He was raised in a lower-class neighborhood by a single mother in the Midwest. Early on, he realized that football could be a path to upward mobility, and as he put more into his football career, his early academic success diminished by high school. He was instructed by coaches to
do enough to maintain athletic eligibility and stay on Division I radars. Early in his high school career, he was heavily recruited. His athletic dreams were almost sidelined by an injury, but he recovered in time to receive and accept a Division I offer before high school graduation. He described himself as academically underprepared for college and disillusioned by the culture shock of his new environment. Another injury ended his professional dreams and he contemplated dropping out of college since football was the only reason he really attended. After five years, he was able to graduate when he found a campus mentor and group that helped him discover who he was outside of sports. Alex now has a successful career in finance but was very reflective of how much of his life was dictated by sports prior to transitioning out.

James. James, 27, grew up in the New York Metropolitan Area in an urban, “inner-city” environment. He described himself as a multi-sport athlete who eventually settled on basketball from personal preference, but also at the behest of others. Once his skillset became publicly known and started leading to accolades, he became determined to play professionally. He came to see school as a means to an end towards a sports career and treated it as such. He thought himself a decent student until entering his Division I college in the Northeast and being placed into remedial courses in English and Math. He said that he did what he was told to play, even allowing his major to be chosen for him (Sociology). Since he always remained eligible, he knew he would graduate, but the college degree was just part of him staying on the basketball court long enough to generate professional interest. He did not make an NBA team, but had learned about playing overseas while attending his prominent basketball high school. Holding onto his professional dreams, James was able to play professionally in multiple countries before becoming homesick. At a crossroads, he was able to be assisted by his sports network and acquire work that allows him to continue working in professional basketball. He acknowledges
that sport is all he knows, and that he does not know what he would do if he was not presented
his current opportunity to continue working in sport.

Devin. Devin, 25, is a first-generation college student from the east coast. He grew up
with both parents playing specific roles: his mother cared about education and his father cared
about sports. He described his father as the reason he became so focused on basketball,
determined to fulfill his father’s unrealized professional dreams. He originally wanted to
graduate college to make his mother proud, but basketball eventually took precedence. His K-12
life was defined by basketball, attending one of the best private basketball high schools in the
country. Considered undersized, he ignored critics and remained determined to play at the
Division I level and chose the school that guaranteed him the most playing time. Of his
academics, he stated being underprepared and remaining that way throughout college. He even
acknowledged cutting corners to maintain athletic eligibility. His major was disconnected from
his aspirations, as he dedicated as much time as possible to basketball. Regarding college
graduation, he reflected upon not being proud of himself because he was not recruited by the
NBA. Feeling unprepared for post-athletic life, he pursued a career overseas, but it ended quickly
(i.e. less than two seasons played). He is currently between jobs, wanting to work in athletics but
struggling to find something steady. He sounded resentful of how much he gave to athletics,
especially as the Division I level, compared to what it has manifested in his current life.

Data Collection

The strength of my collected data depended on my interview protocol, and in applying a
narrative inquiry methodology, I sought to craft open-ended topic-based statements that invited
storytelling (Appendix E, p. 188). During recruitment, I stated that I would require up to 3 hours
of their time, split across two sessions, assuming this was enough based on previous, informal
experience I had with hearing parts of HPBA stories. I supposed that with such a time limit, they would home in on the parts of their stories that best represented “personal testimony” aligned to the interview protocol (Kim, 2016, p. 135). I hoped to find a common thread within each story towards a collective HPBA testimony to publicly advocate on behalf of. And this hope was just as important in creating my three interview topics.

The interview topics situated the HPBAs in the K-16 time and space to “access...truths” about that specific period related to the intersection of academics and athletics in HPBA life (see Kim, 2016, p. 136). I divided the portion of HPBA life I sought to examine into three segments: K-12, college, and post-collegiate. For the K-12 portion, I encouraged the participants to separate their academic stories from their athletic stories, unless there were natural convergences, so that they could focus on the details within each section. I told them to consider life at home, school, and in their neighborhood, overlaying cultural or social factors as necessary. For college, I asked for stories about being HPBAs at Division I institutions as related to academics in general, and experiences within the athletic academic centers, including experiences with advisors and tutors (if applicable). Finally, for post-collegiate reflection and meaning-making, I asked for reflections related to what the former HPBAs received versus what they expected from their athletic academic centers, how they felt as students transitioning out of their institutions, and their major takeaways for readers of their stories to remember most. This three-part protocol allowed for responses to encompass memories; common myths, misperceptions, misunderstandings, and reflective recommendations for the high-profile sports system and future HPBAs.

Knowing the importance of what I hoped the young men would share and wanting to be able to share it widely inside and outside of academia, obtaining proper consent was crucial. I obtained written consent from each former HPBAs. The consent was acquired through the
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

completion of two forms: the first an informed consent form about the nature of the study, and the second about the ways in which participants would allow their audio recordings from the study to be used. Both consent forms were sent out, signed, and received electronically using encrypted software. To further protect my participants, especially from potential audiences outside of academia who could take issue with anything shared, each participant was given a pseudonym. I also created pseudonyms for their former universities. Additional identifying information shared during storytelling (names, locations, etc.) was also changed during transcription or omitted if not essential to the story’s overall message and/or answering the research questions. Each interview was audio recorded, but I was, and still am, the only person with access to them. The recordings continue to be stored on a secure device.

In conducting the interview, the first two topical stories were always shared in succession, taking between 45-75 minutes. Based on the original recruitment letter, participants had the option to stop at this time and address the reflective final topic on a different day, but each participant chose to continue. My assumption is that they wanted to provide immediate reflections based on the memories they had just shared. Still, I wanted to give them some time to sit with their thoughts, so I gave each participant a 15-minute break to reflect before providing their final retrospectives for the third topic. The third topical interview averaged 10-15 minutes. Each participant was told he still had the opportunity to add to his story if he so chose. The two former basketball HPBAs were open to sharing more, so 30-minute follow-up interviews were scheduled, but neither supplemental interview took more than 15 minutes.

The interviews took place two different ways based on what was most convenient and comfortable for participants. I wanted the participants in a location comfortable enough for them to delve deeply into their memories and recreate the environments and experiences as accurately
as possible. Participants were also instructed to choose a private location where the interviews would not be overheard to remove the risk of potentially, compromisingly, discussing negative experiences about their school within earshot of anyone who could repeat that information. Whether the participant chose to conduct the interview in person or virtually, all I asked was to be able to see them in order to create the intimacy sought when employing narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). Three of the interviews were conducted in person and one was conducted via video chat. For me, seeing enhances my engagement in any interaction. I followed up with participants one-week post-interview to see if they had additional details they wanted to add to their stories.

**Data Analysis**

Narrative inquiry is best paired with narrative analysis, so that is what I used. Narrative analysis focuses on transforming “messy” data into meaningful stories to “develop an understanding of the meanings participants give to themselves, their surroundings, their lives, and their lived experiences through storytelling” (Kim, 2016, p. 189-190). Each participant shared his story as chronologically as possible, but as is natural in storytelling, there were tangents, and the storytellers occasionally jumped backward and forward in time. Therefore, I knew I would have to reorganize data into coherent narratives with beginnings, middles, endings, and clear meanings. To do this, I followed a three-step analytical process, as shown in Figure 3, that guided me through the meaning-making process of narrative analysis. I will use an example from David’s story to demonstrate how I carried out this process.

*Figure 3: Narrative Analysis Process*
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Two original (anonymized) verbatim excerpts, from two different places in David’s transcript, are reproduced below:

[My family] has a reputation in [our town]. Very small town, so everybody knows everybody. They have a reputation for being athletes. All my cousins played football, my uncles played football and basketball. My dad was a prolific football player, really good. It was already inscribed in me that I was going to play football and that it was a weight already all my back. Even at five years old, I remember having just extreme pressure, and it wasn't even from my family. It was the outside. When I first started playing football I was five, but I was underage, so you technically wasn't allowed to play football at five years old...

...I get to high school. When I get to high school, I'm like, "All right, this is—it's all real now." At high school is where it started to become more business than "I'm out here having fun with friends." In high school, I took it a lot more seriously than I did when I was young. That's saying something because I took sports extremely seriously as a five-year-old kid. It was the weirdest thing. Whenever I look at pictures when I was a kid there's a football in my hand. In every picture there is a football in my hand. When I was at family events, I'm the kid that's playing football somewhere in the back while everybody else is playing tag and eating.

These excerpts represent the stream of consciousness in which David, the all four HPBAs, shared his story, trying to be narrative, but freely sharing story details as he recalled them. As I did for the entirety of all four stories, I used the narrative analysis process from Figure 3 to restory David’s sharing without changing the message.

First, I considered the intended function of the excerpt based on Mishler’s (1995) narrative functions typology. Narrative functions look at the “cultural, social, and psychological context and functions of stories” (Kim, 2016, p. 199). I believed that the former HPBAs stories were narrativizations of experiences through the interaction of cognition, memory, and self (Kim, 2016). I came to this conclusion based on the three-part interviewing process I established of receiving early life histories, details of Division I experiences, and reflections and meaning-making based on their HPBA life experiences. This narrativization led the former HPBAs to recall their lives via meaningful episodes, which consist of plotlines, thematic structures, and social and cultural references (Kim, 2016). I deemed the overall narrative function of these
advocating for high-profile black athletes

Excerpts from David’s story to be to share the almost predestined significance of sports, especially football, in David’s life. Culturally, socially, and psychologically, not only did every male in his family appear to play a high-profile sport, but he also stated that that was the reputation of his family. And at two different points in the story, David makes sure to emphasize that his fascination with football—and the pressure to be involved—began at five. I wanted this to be prominent in the context of the restorying by rearranging the order of the details to demonstrate the inevitability of his entry into the HPBA ecological system, David provided the plotline: an unspoken family pressure to keep up the tradition and succeed in sports, particularly football. The thematic structure for him was about family, and the social/cultural reference, particularly for David, was the small town in the South, where if he didn’t play or succeed in football, it would be obvious since “everybody knows everybody.” As he said, his initiation was inscribed before he had a say in the matter. In all four stories, a similar plotline existed of youthful entry by a trusted male figure or figures compounded by community/cultural expectations. All four men’s plotlines continued with school as a means to athletic success.

Thematic structure is a concept from linguistics with three purposes: to a) convey given and new information, b) subject and predicate, and c) frame and insert (Roca, 1992). Like all four participants, David’s most prominent thematic structure was conveying information by framing and inserting. I often had to rearrange to properly subject and predicate the story parts. Social and cultural references often aligned with much of what the literature review in the second chapter revealed about HPBA life and experiences, including, as expressed in David’s excerpt, becoming focused on sport in early childhood through the influence of trusted personnel.

As experiences and life events were shared, I analyzed towards the formation of meaningful episodes that “elicit[ed]...better understanding of the [HPBA] experience” (Kim, p.
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

190). This was important as David often told his story in a very conversational way, so it was occasionally out of order. I analyzed his story after the fact to extract the meaningful episodes and reposition them for better understanding. To do this, I created a coding process that combined Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and Leavy and Ross (2006). I adopted the “what” from the former pair of researchers and the “how” from the latter. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) defined narrative coding as burrowing, broadening, and storying and restorying. Leavy and Ross (2006) analyzed an oral history of a female participant’s formerly life-threatening eating disorder. The researchers used line-by-line to establish codes. Then, transcript excerpts were organized under thematic codes, creating larger categories. And as the storying and restorying took place, Leavy and Ross (2006) focused on interconnections between themes to create a representative holistic story (Kim, 2016, p. 213). Ultimately, Leavy and Ross (2006) stated that thematic meanings that emerged from told stories were more important than how told stories unfolded. I applied Leavy and Ross (2006) to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) to understand that burrowing required line-by-line analysis, broadening created thematic understandings of episodes, and storying and restorying continued until reaching a holistic narrative with a clear meaning. I always considered the final Leavy and Ross (2006) point about prioritizing thematic meaning over how the story unfolded, interpreting this as I could rearrange the unfolding of the HPBAs’ stories as long as I maintained the original narrative meaning of each episode.

Regarding the David excerpts, through line-by-line coding, I created first-round codes of reputation, family, pressure, youth, high-profile sport, and commitment. I broadened this to a general theme of early high-profile sport pressure and commitment. In my holistic restorying, I wanted to make sure that readers understood that from five years old, David felt as though his
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

HPBA story was already prescribed. This required pulling from details shared later in the story to emphasis this holistic theme. This was my reproduction:

Whenever I look at pictures when I was a kid, there's a football in my hand. In every picture there is a football in my hand. When I was at family events, I'm the kid that's playing football somewhere in the back while everybody else is playing tag and eating. I started playing football when I was five years old. Contact football; five years old. My dad was a very well-known and respected football player in my area, and we're from a very small town. He played at Center and then at Main High School, which is where I ended up going to high school. My family had a reputation in our southern state. Very small town, so everybody knows everybody. My family had a reputation for being athletes. All my cousins played football, my uncles played football and basketball. My dad was a prolific football player, really good. It was already inscribed in me that I was going to play football and that it was a weight already all my back. Even at five years old, I remember having just extreme pressure, and it wasn't even from my family. It was the outside. Football, it's a religion down there. It's God, and then football, and then food. Those are the three things that people in the South worship.

I believed the final point about football being worshipped in the South was a pivotal in demonstrating the overarching theme and the construction of David’s chronosystem. Remembering Leavy and Ross (2006), though David did not state this detail about sport as a religion until about an hour into his story, where the rest of the restorying was shared closer to the opening of his storytelling, I believed the detail captured the episodic meaning so well, that the thematic meaning was strengthened by its repositioning. I also repositioned details of his father attending the same high school he eventually would to further emphasize the pressure he felt early in life to uphold the family athletic reputation.

I continued similar work throughout my analysis. During burrowing, I line-by-line coded to identify specific feelings, understandings, dilemmas, and events (Kim, 2016). Many of the line-by-line codes were recorded in-vivo, using the participants’ exact words or phrases. Otherwise, I used descriptive coding to summarize line(s) in a few words or a short phrase. Assessing how the first-level codes influenced and impacted the participants’ lived experiences guided my thematic coding (Kim, 2016; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I broadened towards
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

multiple contexts: characters and values, and social, historical, and cultural markers (Kim, 2016; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Finally, I sorted the thematic codes to enhance narrative coherence while storying and restorying. I did this process to highlight the narrative meanings of each story and then again to find the overall theme(s) I would use to summarize the stories’ meanings for readers, (see Kim, 2016; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Leavy & Ross, 2006). The words in the final stories were majority verbatim from the raw transcript data. Sometimes, I had to “brush off the raw edges of disconnected raw data,” adding, omitted, or editing words, phrases, or sentences to connect pieces of the story (such as with the repositioning of shared details as in the rewritten David excerpt above), but I avoided too much omission, appropriation, and/or transposition, which can occur during narrative smoothing (Kim, 2016, p. 192). Narrative smoothing assists with making participants’ stories coherent, engaging, and interesting to read, but I focused on prioritizing a faithful story over a good one, demonstrated in the two versions of the same David episode above (see Kim, 2016).

Summary

With my closeness to the research area, narrative inquiry kept me aware of biases and presumptions throughout the data collection and analysis process. I was very intentional about the participants I wanted for my study because I wanted storytellers with deep personal knowledge and experiences of HPBA life that supported what is known in professional circles while also providing the opportunity to reveal new findings when just allowed to freely tell their stories, full streams of consciousness allowed. I sought some sense of a collective history within the personalization to balance advocacy potential (via multiple individuals potentially identifying the same systemic pitfalls) with good storytelling (via individualized character stories that could
encourage public reading). I also engaged with each participant’s perspective and make meaning of experiences based solely on what I was told.

I analyzed each participant’s story, line-by-line, to construct themes and meanings based on HPBA athletic-academic history. Then I restoried each narrative to honor the storyteller’s voice while making sure the narrative was conveyed as a meaningful, coherent whole. As the storytelling unfolded, I developed a relationship with each participant through engagement and active listening, probing for more depth to leave less room for me to fill gaps with assumptions, especially when I discovered the fundamental importance of very-early K-12 life to the overall HPBA experience (see Haydon & van der Riet, 2017; Fraser, 2004). Spence (1986) described the importance of background information and context surrounding events and experiences to avoid telling a story that differs too drastically from the original, and I kept this in mind during the narrative smoothing process, repositioning background information when necessary to strengthen different parts of the stories.

Through narrative inquiry and narrative analysis, I was able to create four stories that critically considered HPBAs life experiences as student-athletes from childhood through Division I athletics in a way that honored the individuals while unifying the “we” of their experiences to be understandable to readers unfamiliar with the breadth of professional sociological knowledge. Gathering HPBA perspectives was essential to crafting narratives that fulfilled my purpose of accessibility and transferability to a non-academic public while also centering each story in the high-profile-sport ecological system. The understanding generated from these stories not only solidified, to me, the value of HPBAs as storytellers, but also the wealth of untapped analysis that they can contribute to the field if directed by more broad, topical interview protocols. My goal in employing narrative inquiry, narrative analysis, and in-
vivo story sharing was to allow HPBAs to be at the center of advocacy regarding high-profile systemic change. Hopefully that point is clear in the next chapter when the former HPBAs’ full stories are shared and analyzed from their perspectives and intertwined with my EST analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

My approach to presenting my findings was inspired by Garcia (2013) who presented her dissertation findings as a narrative in the form of a three-act play. She, in turn, was inspired by the words of Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who stated:

The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world.

This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; [individuals] are storytellers and characters in their own and other’s stories. (p. 2)

Considering both Garcia (2013) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990), I sought to present narratives that spanned the K-16 lifetime of HPBA experiences, providing rich descriptions through expanded utilization of their voices in the findings. I hoped to add more targeted specificity to previous HPBA findings and recommendations, especially highlighting the influence of mentoring/guidance. I opted to forego traditional qualitative findings presentation and instead center fuller storytelling, sharing the former HPBAs’ stories as interrelated monologues. First, this allowed me to specifically respond to the research questions, which all asked about the stories that would be received:

1. What are the stories of former HPBAs about their K-12 experiences related to athletics and academics?

2. What are the stories of former HPBAs about their experiences with Division I athletic academic services?
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

3. What recommendations do former HPBAs have for athletic academic services based on their experiences?

The stories that formed the answers to each question became the three life chapters below.

Secondly, presenting the findings as monologues expanded the use of counter-storytelling in HPBA research. While critical race theory (CRT) was not my chosen framework, a substantial amount of research focused on HPBAs utilizes CRT particularly for its counter-storytelling tenet (see Armstrong & Jennings, 2018; Singer, 2005; 2008). The monologues presented in the findings serve as counter-stories, which give voice to members of a traditionally marginalized group, allowing their critical reflections to help readers a) understand life from an insider perspective and b) critique and cast doubt on the normalized perspective (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The monologues, as counter-stories, are intended to strengthen and be a more accessible expression of scholarly findings about HPBAs’ experiences, challenging widely held yet often inaccurate assumptions through longer examples of first-person evidence. The monologues are primary sources, defined as “the raw material or first-hand information source material that is closest to what is being studied” (Hooper, 2020, para. 1). By the definition of counter-stories and primary sources, sharing the monologues, which were converted from audio-recorded interviews, allowed the findings to both counter untruths in popular opinion and provide the most accurate representation of the truth. This presentation adds additional persuasive value to the aforementioned typical format of qualitative scholarly articles (secondary resources), which while fundamental to the development of understanding, including much of what exists in HPBA research, are still “something written about a primary source…[that]…include comments on, interpretations of, or discussions about the original
material” but are still not the originals, so are more subject to researcher bias and/or interpretation (Hooper, 2019, para. 3).

And finally, while CRT was not my chosen framework, sharing the findings via monologue enhanced the lens of my chosen one—ecological systems theory—allowing me to identify the particulars of the HPBA ecological systems during each designated life chapter—K-12, collegiate, and the transition out of and immediately after post-collegiate—that were globally summarized in the model shared in Chapter 2. After narrative analysis, the original HPBA ecological systems model was expanded, including more nuance based on the stories that were shared, and this nuancing became essential to the recommendations generated from analyzing the stories. Figure 4 shows the original model that framed the study’s creation.

*Figure 4: HPBA Athletic-Academic Theory*
Figure 5 shows the nuanced model produced as a result of narrative analysis and frames the findings via monologues.

*Figure 5: Model of HPBA Ecological Development*

The ecological systems are detailed throughout the responses to each research question, interpreted through K-12, college, and post-collegiate. Each research question response created the three life chapters that the stories are organized into. The life chapters are split into two parts, followed by an epilogue that closes out the narratives and provides recommendations. The entire narrative was created to “embrace the stories of [the] participants as the phenomena in the research” (Garcia, 2013, p. 122). Each life chapter title is from a thematic understanding.
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

generated from the narrative analysis of the interviews that summarized the relevant time period. Each part within the chapters is titled using an in-vivo code that summarizes the stories contained within the section (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). In this way, the titles are quick analyses of what will be shared in each life chapter and the epilogue reflects on what has happened in order to consider what should be next.

I begin each life chapter with a summary, weaving the research question the life chapter is responding to into an ecological system analysis of the HPBAs’ development during the associated time period. Then, prior to each part of the life chapters, I provide additional specificity to the developmental processes centered around the in vivo-code the section is named for, showing the direct connection between the greater ecological system analysis that defines K-12, college, and post-collegiate, and the analysis of the specific time period focused on in the subsection. The closing epilogue is developed around the words of one of the participants, hoping to catalyze advocacy and change. Acting as a bridge between professional and public sociology in the epilogue, I tie the former HPBAs’ stories to scholarly understanding, public re-teaching, and recommendations for how to redefine the HPBA ecological system.

The HPBA narratives that follow the analytical framings are reproduced with as much fidelity as possible, including the varying lengths. While this may be atypical for professional research, for public interest, I maintained the stories for those who may not be able to fully comprehend the analytical prefaces. Instead, the public can find the ecological patterns in the overlapping themes within the stories. The maintenance of the original lengths was also to honor the fullness of the voices of each man and maintain individuality. For example, James tended to tell shorter stories while David provided ample detail, sometimes in a circular manner. Outside of the stories they were telling, these narrative approaches help readers define them as
individuals within the midst of four similar stories. Therefore, while the lack of truncation may make some stories redundant in places, particularly for scholars, I believed it important to how I wanted to deliver my public advocacy for the HPBAs and what could be most accessible to a non-scholarly audience. Maintaining the story length differences and variations preserved each story arc as opposed to what could be lost in combined storytelling.

Adapting from the popular Millennial/Gen Z term “Ball is Life,” each of the life chapter titles plays upon this trope, moving forward what was discussed in the literature review and traversing across the conceptual framework in an accessible manner, establishing the major themes. Table 2 summarizes the arrangement of each life chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Chapter Title</th>
<th>Chapter Section Title</th>
<th>Section Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Ball Becoming Life: Introduction, Induction, and Acceptance”</td>
<td>“From a Very Early Age…it was all Revolved around Sports.”</td>
<td>Early childhood into early adolescence, particularly highlighting just how soon athletics starts to take dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“[Sport] was a Meal Ticket.”</td>
<td>Athletic identity fully taking control and the impending conflicts, between athletics and academics, upon college entry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first life chapter, entitled, “Ball Becoming Life: Introduction, Induction, and Acceptance,” delves into the first-person retrospection of identity foreclosure-in-action, presenting the settings, introducing the former HPBAs, and establishing the exposition of HPBA development for many similar athletes, particularly around who brought sports into their lives. Life Chapter Two is titled “Ball is Life,” but with the addition of “…and that Life Comes with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Ball if Life…And that Life Comes with Consequences”</td>
<td>The reality of the dumb jock stereotype and how it is manifested in over-athletic preparation and under-academic preparation coupled with clustering and eligibility-above-all compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What are You going to Major in?” aka “You Should do Something [Easier]”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They [the Institutions] Want You to Play. They Need You to Play.”</td>
<td>The realization of what has been allowed to happen, athletically vs. academically, and how everyone holds responsibility, but particularly the adults responsible for the HPBAs’ development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What Is Life After Ball?”</td>
<td>HPBA responsibility and accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hold Yourself Accountable”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Counselors, Coaches…Be Very Transparent in Who You Are”</td>
<td>High-profile athletic system responsibility and accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Overtime: Still a Chance to Win”</td>
<td>An epilogue that provides an analytical summary and recommendations based on the stories received and the final thoughts of one of the HPBAs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Advocating for High-Profile Black Athletes

Consequences.” This chapter analyzes the circumstances and consequences surrounding an athlete-first life that began in childhood, particularly the various ways in which many HPBAs, and those who are supposed to be responsible for them in college, address this phenomenon. This chapter is very intentional in the depth of its comparison between athletic and academic life, specifically how academics becomes wholly absorbed into athletic life. Life Chapter Three addresses “What Is Life After Ball?” focusing on accountability for HPBAs and the athletic system. The epilogue, “Overtime: Still a Chance to Win” interweaves one of the former HPBAs’ understandings of the capability of HPBAs with my analysis of how their academic development can be better developed for future generations.

Life Chapter One – Ball Becoming Life: Introduction, Induction, and Acceptance

The first life chapter answers the research question, “What are the stories of former HPBAs about their K-12 experiences related to athletics and academics?” This chapter was integral to providing the themes for the new model of HPBA ecological development. Four men share their stories: James, Devin, Alex, and David (see p. 86-88 of Methodology). Each of the young men described an early induction into athletic life, beginning as young as five years old. Motivations for staying involved varied, from wanting to live out the dreams of parents, to finding constructive outlets for emotions, to environmental influences. All of the men discussed a connection that transformed interest into precedence before the end of elementary school. Their early life events established the sport-centric chronosystem, which carried into meso and microsystem experiences. Interestingly, none of the men described themselves as academic slackers, especially not prior to high school when sport really became more of a business. They put in effort because of the connection they all came to realize school had to their ability to
participate on their schools’ teams. However, in reflection, it was not lost on any of them that the majority of their academic motivation was connected to not wanting to lose access to athletics.

As they transitioned into high school, developing for NCAA Division I athletics meant less focus was on academic success, just what was needed. Adding nuance to existing scholarly understanding, athletic identity foreclosure began for these men as early as late elementary school and was in place by freshman year of high school. The earlier development for these men was aided by assisted entry into sport and the sustained athletic mentorship that defined all of their ecological systems, particularly the foundational chronosystem. But foreclosure did not mean instant academic failure; all four men maintained overall academically, but the signs of just doing enough were becoming present, strengthening the closer they came to high school graduation, which foreshadowed collegiate academic issues. Academics beyond what was required could not compete with an exosystem of media exposure showing predominant models of successful Black men within athletes and holding up Division I schools as primarily examples of athletic excellence. And while some of the men questioned their GPAs, it was not about their intelligence but rather the caliber of academics their schools provided to high-profile athletes.

Before entering college, school was already a sport-first setting. That was corroborated by K-12 academic experiences that let the young men know failure was not an option but was still only related to academic eligibility/minimal performance.

Part One – “From a Very Early Age…it was all Revolved around Sports”

Analytical summary. One of the first things James shared was that his early entry into sport tied into the fact that “basketball was everything” where he grew up. This sentiment extended to all of the men. Devin was also from a basketball environment; David explained in the South, football was like “a religion down there;” and Alex became engrossed in football due
to his neighborhood. Interest in a particular sport was influenced by environment, and initiation into its culture was guided by a respected male athletic figure. Extrinsic motivators, like being favored in the community and/or school, were also present and crucial parts of athletic identity development; all four men made reference to these factors. Countering a common narrative, no former HPBA demonstrated having parents who did not care about academics at all. Devin and David shared having a parent who was strict in academic expectations. But even for these two, the part of parenting that emphasized athletics was most prominent in their development.

Additionally, Devin and David’s motivations connected to wanting to live out their fathers’ unrealized athletic dreams. The other two former HPBAs were also motivated by adults in their lives. Alex found father figures through football coaches, and James discussed his gym teacher who “saw [his] potential and wanted to be able to showcase it.” These moments initiated each former HPBA into the high-profile sport life. They came to understand that keeping their grades up was necessary (David stated, “I took academics seriously just so I could play football.”) because now sport participation was a mandatory part of their existences; school was a means for sports. Each former HPBA reached a level of acceptance with his athletic identity prior to high school, and things only intensified after.

James’ story. I was always interested in basketball from really young. I grew up in the New York Area, so basketball was everything. I was a multisport athlete but did give the most time to basketball. Then, when fifth to sixth grade came along, I really started to excel in it. I understood how to play, and I grew, and because of that I started—, that's when AAU started, traveling started, the real games started. And people started to notice. I went from being like 5’8”-5’9” to like 6’3” by the time I hit eighth grade. In like seventh grade, my grammar school decided to build a basketball team, mostly around me. My gym teacher, Mr. Dorsey, saw my
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

potential and wanted to be able to showcase it. From there, AAU came along and I got noticed even more. St. Religious was the big basketball school around me. But like, also the whole country knew about them as a basketball program. Because of my coach and AAU, they started to notice me. At this time, I also got a sponsor. His name was Fred. It was weird. He introduced himself at one of my AAU teams and said he wanted to see me go far. I didn’t know this man, but he was well-connected. Between him, my grammar school coach, and my AAU coaches, these people made me invest in basketball. And like, I loved it so there wasn’t a problem. And it kept me out of the streets. That was because my days started becoming really long because basically every day after school I was practicing if I did have a game. And on weekends, it was practice or games. In school, everyone started helping me to make sure I could go to one of the state’s big basketball schools. Because it looks good for them too. We didn’t even have a team before me. So, I felt like this made everyone like me. They all noticed and helped.

Devin’s story. For me, see, my mom was big on education. You probably can consider her as an educator even though she wasn't working for the education system. My mom used to be the tutor of the family, so when it comes to me and my sister, in the summer, we would read books, and do summaries, and all this stuff before we even get a chance to go outside. She just constantly made sure we had our head in the books. I was a B student. I rarely got Cs. But my dad was more on the athletic side from really early in my life. He really didn't care about the school. A lot of times, my dad, when I used to get progress reports and they weren't up to par, because he knew my mom, he would hide it. He would hide it and she would go through stuff and find it. Then now they're arguing and she's like, “Why are you hiding it?”

He was the one that was training me for sports. My dad had me in everything. I played baseball; I ran track. I was like a year-round athlete. The crazy thing is that basketball is my
worst sport. I was good in basketball, but I was better in baseball. “You are a standout baseball player.” Everybody told me that. Football was the next in line and then it was basketball. I chose basketball because my dad, he had got a tryout with the Nets. Had a great workout, they told him to go overseas for one year, work on your jump shot to improve his skills, and come back to them and they’d work him out and see where things go. Unfortunately, he couldn't go overseas because my mom got pregnant with me. So, basketball, it was it for him. I always felt like that's what he wanted me to do. He never pushed it on to me, but just hearing that story just made me like, “All right, I'm going to fulfill his dream through me.” So, I decided to play basketball. I did AAU. Traveling. We used to be going to Florida, Tennessee, North Carolina, everywhere traveling. My dad, he started the whole Instagram, with the filming and everything, that was my dad before it even was a thing. We had a basketball room. He would have me do drills inside and outside. One time, in like the sixth grade, he had me doing basketball drills and it was hot outside. My grandmother yelled at him that he was going to kill me. She made me come inside. But I know him, so it's like, “All right, you're not going to do outside drills, you're going to do inside-the-house drills.” I used to be training. Which, I didn't have a problem with because the goal was the NBA.

You got to really have love for it to understand it and to be able to go through that type of— I don't want to say punishment, but just to go through that type of training, that development. We’re at the park from 1 at night till 1 in the morning, just working out, and it was just like—. My summer was like, I get up, schoolwork, I go train in the midday, then I go outside if I want to hang out. Coming back home at night and going back training. It was just a cycle.

Actually, I repeated a grade because of my dad. Coach Harrison, a big-time high school basically coach around me, advised my dad that I stay back because I was younger. I was too
young to be in the eighth grade going into the ninth. Thinking athletic-wise, he said it would be much smarter for me to just stay back instead of going into the ninth grade with the older guys. But even when I graduated, there was a lot of doubt. I was one of the top eighth graders in the state of New Jersey yet there was a lot of doubt going around about me going there. People would tell my dad like, "Don't send him to Basketball High. He's not going to play there," because coach Harrison was always getting, wanting the best players, the best players.

So, the talk was, “He's not going to play for coach Harrison until he's a senior, he's too small.” I was really short. So, my dad, he asked me, “Do you want to accept the challenge and go, or do you want to go somewhere else?” I had other top schools in the state wanting me too. I could have went anywhere I wanted. But I was like, “Let's take this challenge.” I ended up going to Basketball High, and Coach Harrison had a lot to do with it. I used to go to his camps since I was around like, eight, nine years old. He's seen me play since I was little. He was also, not physically there, but he was part of my development. By me just going to his camps, I was learning from him. It wasn't like an individual training session, but just by me, through the years of growing up, going to his camps and his clinics. He helped me get better. I decided to go to Basketball High. I knew I had to have good grades, but that was because of basketball. I don't even remember what my dream school was, but I knew I wanted to go to a high D-I school.

**Alex’s story.** I'm from Big Town, Ohio. I first joined sports at the age of five so very young, I know. Sports for me came about because it was an escape for me to allow myself to express my microaggressions, release some built up anger, some built up tension that a mentor of mine, Coach Steve, saw. He lived in the complex with my grandmother, and that's where I used to frequently visit after school until my mom got off work at seven o'clock since she went in at 5AM; she worked more-than-twelve-hour days. My home life didn’t really have much
involvement in sports. My mom worked tirelessly just to make ends meet. She didn’t really have much time to come to the games or make sure I was going to practice or stuff like that. The home life was totally separate. *I don’t even think we ever talked about sport at home.* I grew up in a single parent household, so my dad was on the outside. But I will say that my dad was around for the sports. Of course. But *Coach Steve, he saw a group of young kids, energetic, just running around, but we were misbehaving.* He saw us fighting, destroying property. *He created a football program in the neighborhood for us to play, for us to use our energy toward something that was positive.* *He actually recruited me at the age of five.* He recruited my brother as well, but my brother is a pretty boy, so once he got hit once, he quit the sport. But for me, that began a journey of my athletic career.

I would say *at five years* old I didn't really understand what school was. I thought it was like a social gathering to see my friends and everything. At that age, *I didn't really understand that those two are a balance, sports and school.* Most of the people who I did play the sports with, they were also in my class. When we went to school, we talked about practice, and we went to practice, we practiced. Everything pretty much was about football, or basketball, or baseball, or something of that sort. I would say for the grades of K through four, *I was using school as a place to also discuss sports.* The academics as far as what they expect of you wasn't really that high. They allowed us to play around and do whatever we wanted. Teachers, to me…it was a glorified daycare. And once I became nine, 10, and I had some success in sport, that's when grades…Most of my mentors, my football coach at the time who was my middle school coach, he said, “You'll be in seventh grade here pretty soon. Once you get in seventh grade, your grades have to be at a C level for you to be eligible to play.” I was in fourth grade at this time, but I was like, “*Wow, I didn't know that grades had anything to do with sports.*” I didn't know that you
had to have a certain grade average, or that your football coaches received weekly reports of your grades, or they checked in on you. For me, I lived K through four completely thinking that those two things were separate. Then around fifth, sixth grade is when I started to realize that you need school in order to play sports. But I didn't understand that I didn't just need to make the bare minimum. Because that's what they coach you on. Your teachers and your coaches, they say, “You need a C to play,” and that was their focus. It was, “Make this C.” If I got a D, I was begging my teachers just to give me a C. It wasn't like, “What can I do? I really want to be an A student.” It was, “I really want to be eligible. I just want to play.” It kept me at least passing all the way up until ninth grade. My middle school years, I would say, I had a good balance to maintain a C as well as progressing in sports. Then ninth grade hits, that's when I was a freshman, and I played varsity, as a freshman. And things changed.

David’s story. Whenever I look at pictures when I was a kid, there's a football in my hand. In every picture there is a football in my hand. When I was at family events, I'm the kid that's playing football somewhere in the back while everybody else is playing tag and eating. I started playing football when I was five years old. Contact football; five years old. My dad was a very well-known and respected football player in my area, and we're from a very small town. He played at Center and then at Main High School, which is where I ended up going to high school. My family had a reputation in our southern state. Very small town, so everybody knows everybody. My family had a reputation for being athletes. All my cousins played football, my uncles played football and basketball. My dad was a prolific football player, really good. It was already inscribed in me that I was going to play football and that it was a weight already all my back. Even at five years old, I remember having just extreme pressure, and it wasn't even from
my family. It was the outside. Football, it's a religion down there. It's God, and then football, and then food. Those are the three things that people in the South worship.

When I first started playing football, I was five, but I was underage, so you technically weren’t allowed to play football at five years old. But given the influence that my dad had in the community, in his athletic background, the coaches let me play. I think the initial starting age is like six to seven, but they let me play. I just remember my first hit ever. My dad told me it was going to be one or two things. He said, the first time you get hit, you'll love it and you'll love football for the rest of your life, or you'll hate it and you'll never touch a football again. He told me that one or two things was going to happen. I got hit and loved it. I loved the thrill. I love the competitive nature. I love lining up on a field, going against another person. It's me versus you, who is a better player, who's a better athlete and who's tougher. I love that aspect. One thing, my dad never forced me to play football and I think that that also might have had a great deal on how much I loved football. He always gave me the option. He would tell me, “Do you want to play football? Yes or no? I’m not gonna be mad either way.” I picked football. After the first practice, I remember he asked me again. He was like, “Do you actually want to play football, or do you want to leave it alone?” “I want to play football.” That's when I became very serious.

Again, my dad, again, he told me two things. He said, “This is what we can do. I can push you—.” My dad didn't have a dad [physically present], so he didn't have anybody to push him. He didn't have anybody to tell him what to do, what not to do, how to make a decision later on when it comes to college football or something. My dad's path wasn't what he wanted because he made a couple of bad decisions when he came to college. He didn't want the same thing to happen for me. So, he told me two things. He said, “I can push you and I can train you and I can prepare you and I can teach you everything that nobody taught me,” and that he learned
on the way or he can be a supporter. Help me when I ask for help and letting me do my own thing. I picked the ‘‘tell me what to do, train me, and get me ready so I don't make the same mistakes you made.” It's crazy because I remember a lot of this at like five to eight years old. This is what I want to do. And I know he can set me up. When I was, I'm going to say maybe 11, I've been playing football for six years by the time I'm 11. I was doing well. People knew—they already knew the family name, so they knew who I was. We're in a very small town, so word travels, and football is huge in South. It's huge when you get to the southern region. When I was 11 years old, our local news station came out. They wanted to do a story on me. At 11. Maybe 11 to 13. It was in there, somewhere between 11 to 13. They wanted to do a story on me. We did a story, and I remember the news came out and they filmed a little bit of practice and then they were interviewing me. I still have this interview to this day. They were interviewing me, asking me, “What do you want to do?” “I want to play in the NFL.” That's my goal. That's what I wanted to do.

It was cool because they would have these comparisons between me and my dad. My dad was a really good football player. I was a decent football player, but we were very different football players. It was always interesting to see the comparisons because he was a bigger. He was a shorter, stockier guy, so he was going to run you over. I was going to run around you because I was pretty—I had speed. Didn't have size, had speed. He had the speed and the size. He was running through you. He's always cool, so they would have his old highlights, and they would put my highlights, and then they would just—. It was just this cool comparison between father and son.

In the interview, they asked where I wanted to go to college, and I told them. Clemson was my dream school. I wanted to go to Clemson. That's what I told them. Looking back on it
from a very early age, I knew what I wanted to do. I knew where I wanted to go, but it was all revolved around sports, all of it. Anything, if you asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, sports. If you asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up, it was the NFL. It was just sports. I was a decent academic student just growing up because I knew that I had to have good grades because my dad wasn't going to let me play football if I was bringing Cs and Ds home. So, my academics started so I could play football. My dad was very adamant about it. School was first because he understood that without school, without academics, you can't play football. As much as you would like to play football, you can't. I took academics seriously just so I could play football. I was a decent student through grade school. Then when we got to middle school it became a little bit tougher and football became more serious. I would focus a lot more on football. My Dad pushed me extremely hard when it came to football, but just as hard as he pushed me with football, he pushed me with school. If I brought a C home, I was grounded for three weeks. He understood the football aspect of it, which I really didn't at that time because I'm like, “If you're good, you're going to go play.”

Part Two – “[Sport] was a Meal Ticket.”

Analytical summary. This section details athletic identity foreclosure in action during high school when the former HPBAs concluded that their athletic talent would be key to their future success as professional athletes. Each former HPBA felt confident in having the talent to acquire college scholarships. Three of the four had their athletic recruitment start early in high school, so the alternative (i.e. no scholarship) was unfathomable. Alex described only seeing success for Black men as rappers or athletes; David described everyone at his school assuming the tall Black kids played sports or should be playing a sport. Devin and James both attended high schools with a coach known to send basketball players pro. Alex began being recruited
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

early, and David attended a high school with a strong football reputation known for sending athletes to Division I institutions. With this messaging, school was seen as a means to an end.

So, while K-8 can be defined as the process of athletics gaining primary importance, high school is the time of developing the understanding of sport “as a business” (as stated by James). In high school, failure was not an option because a college scholarship was on the line. Grades stayed at passing, but the real focus was on becoming athletic scholarship worthy. With that pressure came tests that confirmed each man’s foreclosed athletic identities when incidents occurred that could have spurred turns back towards academics, but development towards NCAA Division I still remained key. Each storyteller expressed understanding the business of sports at this point and its “meal ticket” potential. Each man leveraged high school as an athletic proving ground primarily. Even Devin and David, who excelled academically, concluded that their GPAs were unimportant because they attended “athletic” schools. No matter how well they performed in the classroom, all four submitted to internalized academic inferiority. Instead, each man had mentorship that continued to primarily promote athletics. All four of the men gravitated towards coaches that could help “set [their] future up,” as David said. Sport also took precedence because of the opportunities it presented for the athletes’ families.

**James’ story.** With sponsors and coaches and stuff, that’s when *I learned that one of the ways you get to the NBA was you have to go to college.* So, I started putting all of my time into basketball. Fred helped me. He got me training gear and training time in gyms and with professional trainers. My parents didn’t complain because I wasn’t failing at school and they saw it as a way for me to go to college for free. My AAU stuff was sponsored, so all they saw were benefits. They didn’t push me, but they definitely encouraged me to pursue it once everyone else
started telling them how good I was and my potential. I would also end up being the first sibling
to possibly finish college. Two of my brothers had already tried but dropped out.

I played, I got better, and I went to a great basketball high school. I was never really a—.
I never really excelled in the classroom, but I was always, I think, good enough to keep teachers
and parents at a good radar and off my back. I knew exactly how I wanted to go to the NBA, and
I figured that I had to go to school to do it. By the time I got to be a junior and senior in high
school, it just all came together. I met this guy through AAU and high school, Kevin, and he
really began to teach me about basketball as a business. My parents were a little weirded out at
another White man taking so much interest in me, but he told them the right things, and he took
all lot of financial responsibility off of them for if I needed to travel or to help me visit schools.
All of this just convinced them more that I could go to the NBA. He also made sure I stayed out
of trouble. If that meant giving me money for the things I wanted so I didn’t try to get them other
ways, he did what he had to do to keep me on track for a college scholarship. Now that I think
about it though, it was never, like, academic help. I was a decent student, like I didn’t fail
anything. So, no one worried about that. They assumed I’d meet the minimum academic
requirements. So, all of the focus was on building me up as a basketball player worthy of an
athletic scholarship.

And my high school coach was the same. Actually, he was more intense. He was used to
winning. As a matter of fact, he didn’t even pretend that we were in that school for any other
reason than basketball. We practiced all the time; he pushed basketball at us. During meetings,
he would bring in a lot of his former athletes who had succeeded in college and went pro. He was
how I found out that the NBA wasn’t the only professional league. He would bring in former
players who were in Spain and Germany playing basketball and making good money. So now I
became less worried because if I didn’t make it to the NBA, I knew I had a lot more options. So now I really wanted to get that scholarship. I put everything into basketball. My family used to make fun of me that they never saw me because I was always out doing something for basketball. But again, I wasn’t failing. They were supportive. Because basketball, it actually probably helped in my school. It held me a little bit accountable. They didn't make it to many games. They both worked a lot, left really early and came back in the evening, my mom first and then my dad even later. But they were happy with what I was doing. I had a lot of outside support, but if I needed to make sure I got to an AAU rendezvous point where we were picked up or going on a different trip to go play a game, they helped out when they could there. My siblings saw me happy and doing good, so they supported me. They came to my games and stuff. My parents couldn’t that much because of work, but they came when they could. My mom came more than my dad because she had a little more time. They both loved sports. My mom had played basketball in high school. But my dad loved it too. As a family we had watched basketball and football my whole life, so I knew they loved to gloat about me.

In my neighborhood, I went from a guy who was a pretty good basketball player to the basketball player. If you’re going to go to one of the best high schools in the country to play basketball—. People in the neighborhood were watching me, they knew me even if I didn’t know them. Like, in high school, that was where I had my basketball friends, like the real ball players. Because it was kids from all over the city, the state sometimes. My neighborhood was just regular people, kids who played ball but weren’t, like, ball players. So, my neighborhood was just about encouraging me because I was the one who was successful from it. They came to my games. Some even kept following me when I got to college.
I do think I felt pressure. Even from my elementary coaches, there was pressure. But especially my high school had such a good reputation of making basketball players and several guys playing in the NBA. That was another factor, the location and history of the school. And that I think affected recruiting for me. It was interesting. Because I was highly recruited at first. Our school was winning. Like, undefeated seasons and national championships. But then as I got into like junior year when it really should pick up, two things happened. One, I wasn’t growing anymore, so there was some worry about whether I was undersized. And then I got injured, so I lost like a whole year worth of highlights. So, I wasn’t getting as many looks from coaches as I did as a freshman and sophomore. But, so, our coach said all of his kids get DI scholarships so not to worry. He was really confident in that. So, I just tried to rehab quickly and stay in contact with coaches. By the time I could play again, I saw my coach was right. It wasn’t all the same schools that used to call, but they were back on me. Showing up to my house to talk to my parents and tell them what they could offer me. My parents just cared that school would be free. They didn’t care if I graduated really as long as it meant I was leaving to go pro. My mom called me her NBA son. I mean, she wanted me to get a degree, but NBA? Yeah, she would trade the degree for that. Same for me. I just wanted to play. I saw college as the route to professional play. If I got a degree, cool, but that just meant I kept staying to help with my professional recruiting, you know? So, for me, it was just who was coming that would give me the best chance to stay in basketball. Because I was leaving my community regardless. And especially after getting injured, I was just happy to know I could still get a scholarship and keep playing. So, I wasn’t as powerful in the process as I thought I would be when I started high school, but I was still a pretty sought out recruit just because of the high school I was coming from. And my coach
was great at promoting us. And he really cared about us as people. I kept in contact with him through college. I even invited him to my wedding.

Devin’s story. It’s a little different for me [to separate athletic from academic success] because from freshman year to my senior year, I ended up having a 3.7 and was in the National Honor Society. But I would always get criticized with “This isn't a good educational school so that don’t mean anything.” Or I would get discredited like, maybe they were doing it for me because I was a basketball player. But I felt like I was really going hard at this school. And then when I got the opportunity to start in my sophomore year, for those who said that, “He's not going to play you till your senior,” I went from playing on the freshman team as a freshman and then that following year, I beat out a senior and a junior to be the starting point guard. I got the opportunity to win two state titles, and national title. Yes, it was good.

I'm getting recruited by high D-I schools as a sophomore. I had UConn, I had Texas Tech writing me. I'm getting schools where you want to be. As a Division I basketball athlete, one of your goals is to play in that March Madness Tournament, so you want to go to a program that's familiar with going there. I ended up getting, not a great SAT score but it was good enough for me to qualify. Yes, so I had a couple of injuries my junior year, going into my senior year, and so, it kind of messed up my recruiting. Long story short, I ended up going to a mid-major university. I decided to go there because I had a great relationship with the coach that recruited me. The head coach, he played in the NBA, so I felt like, “Okay, he was a point guard. He can prepare me,” because, at the end of the day, it didn't matter where I went, I just knew that I was good enough to go to play in the league. So, I graduated from Basketball High. I did what I had to do and then I turned the light switch off. Because now my mindset was, “I'm going to the NBA.”
Alex’s story. As a freshman in high school was when I was exposed to collegiate sports. My football coach, Coach B took me to my first collegiate football game at Big U and just to see that atmosphere, they're running out of the tunnel, fans, the cameras, all of the cheers and stuff. I was like, “Whatever this is, I want it.” Of course when you think about the story of most minorities, specifically Black athletes, we all come from a similar Black background, whether it was a single parent household, being financially disadvantaged, having behavior issues, or not really having an escape or venue to express what you're going through to certain people, just being caged in. That was also me. When it came to ninth grade, I saw the fortune and fame that football—Going to that first college football game, I was like, “Okay, now it's serious,” it became serious me. That's when I started to shift putting football ahead of school again like, a little bit more. Remember, middle school, I had a balance; I actually cared to pass. But when ninth grade came, I just fell off because, I'm not afraid to admit it, I would skip class just to go to the gym or to go to the weight room. In ninth grade, I did a lot of things that contributed towards my sports but not necessarily my academics. I put a lot of energy into my diet, my strength training, going to training camps and all these other things, but I neglected after-school programs, or tutoring, or asking for extra assignments to get on top. I would say ninth grade was my worst academic year ever. And this is the thing. When you correlate the two, there was a lot of things that happened outside of school and outside of sports that just allowed me to get by. Because, how could you play failing four classes? Because I was a freshman playing varsity, and I had a huge following which obviously sold tickets to the games and all these other things. So, they would say things like, “Do this easy assignment and we'll swap grades.” If I failed a test, they would have me just take some easy one then switch the grade. Football was big in my city. And when you're young and just like, “Look, I want to make it to college,” okay I'll take it.
Going into my sophomore year, I wasn't even a C average. That's when a guy came into my life, he's still in my life, Coach Hail. He became our defensive coordinator. He was saying, "Look I know that you're good at your sport, but you're not going to do anything." He was Black and big on Black empowerment. He shares his story of going to Pop U and how actually playing in college is difficult and totally different than what people see on TV. How you wake up in the wee hours in the morning, stay up late hours, you got to study hard and all these things if you're not eligible and all this good stuff. I really started to focus on school because of him. But he also told me some tips as far as be likable to your teachers because if you are likable, they'll be more willing to give you that extra attention you need. Because in school, I was the athlete. I was the school's meal ticket. We had a recognition board for “academic excellence” and another one for “athletic excellence,” and I was always on “athletic excellence” and was happy about it.

Because, again, football was a meal ticket. When I was young, the people I saw who had a lot of wealth, and were my skin complexion, were athletes, entertainers, or rappers. I always wanted to have money, so I was like, “That's the only way I can do it.” I wasn't exposed to Black lawyers, Black doctors, or engineers. I never knew that those careers, one, existed, and two, existed for me. So culturally, that's it. That's the way you make it. If you score a touchdown, you get, “Man, you’re going to make it. You can go to the NFL. You'll be in money,” and this and that. Which one do you support more? And as an athlete, my mindset was whoever or whatever is in my way of getting to my goal is against me. So people who tried to get me to not go to practice or people who tried to—quite frankly speaking, people who tried to get me to focus more on school. People who were like, “You can give up a day in the weight room to go to tutoring.” I'm like, “You don't understand. You don't understand because you're not an athlete.”
Especially because I began to get recruited in my freshman year, which is why I didn't care about school. I figured that they wanted me my freshman year no matter what I did or how my academics were, and they would still want me. Freshman year, my very first recruiting experience was Big U, the home college. They brought me into a spring game, let me experience the campus life and different benefits of being an athlete. From there, it was like, “I can only imagine what the rest of the big-time Division I world offers.” I was a highly sought recruit most of high school. These coaches come into your house. If you don't have a father figure around, they try to serve as that. They come in; they sit next to you. They never sit next to the parent. While they're speaking, they'll give you a hug if they want to show that they're close to you. They really embrace you. Black parents see that and they're like, “Okay, I'm sending my child in good hands.” They sit in your living room and try to put you recruit at ease in your most comfortable setting. That's how they get you. That’s how they got me. Especially because I got injured. So, I was excited to get an offer.

**David’s story.** When I got to high school, I was like, “All right, this is—it's all real now.” *At high school is where it started to become more of a business than, “I'm out here having fun with friends.”* In high school, I took it a lot more seriously than I did when I was young. That's saying something because I took sports extremely seriously as a five-year-old kid. *But when I got to high school, I said, “All right.” Now this is—. I'm enjoying it; I'm going to have fun, but this is to set my future up.* I went to a predominantly white high school and we were okay as a high school. *It was not a great high school.* I went to a public school. It was okay. *The academics were okay. You could get into college, but also, not many were ready for college. The Black students at my school either played sports or they were getting suspended.* There really didn't seem to be a kind of middle ground where we would have just academic scholars who
were Black. There's a lot of factors to that, especially if you see a Black high school kid who is six foot, you automatically assume that he plays basketball. If he doesn't play basketball, our coaches were pushing him. It was never like, “How are your academics?” It was always, “What sport did you play?” That's just ingrained in society. Then growing up, that's all we saw, football players, basketball players if you wanted to play sports. If you didn't do that, well, we had one black teacher in elementary school. I didn't have a black teacher until I got to college. I wasn't represented in those areas. I never saw black business owners, I never saw black teachers, I never saw black professors, but I saw a lot of black athletes. I was like, “Well, if I'm going to make it somewhere and make money, this is what I can do.” This is the only way that I see everybody else doing it.

But I loved football. Freshman year, I'm playing JV football. My high school was very competitive. It was extremely rare for you to be a starter freshman and play. Not even to start but just to play varsity football. Very rare. My junior or my sophomore year, we had almost 12 guys go D-I. We were pretty good at football, and we had a defensive end that went to Alabama. Our quarterback went to Virginia Tech. Our tight ends went to Virginia Tech. We had a lot of athletes, so it was hard. In those first two years as a freshman and sophomore, it was demoralizing for me because everything so far has been going according to script. My first actual adversity when it came to football hit my freshman year when I'm the third string running back. I played running back at the time. I'm third string running back, and I've never experienced that. It was tough. The starter running back was a guy named Chris. He's a white boy. I had been MVP every age group, so at that time, I didn't see JV as, like…I'm like, “I'm not a JV player. I'm varsity,” but I was not a varsity player. But I stuck to it. Then after talking to the coaches, they gave me a fair shake. They told me, “All right, regular season starts in two weeks. Whoever
plays the best in these two scrimmages will be the starter running back.” We both got to play each game. He got the first half; I got the second half. I beat him, and they gave me the starting position.

That was my first experience with adversity. Overcoming adversity and just building that confidence that I needed to continue to go forward because at the time I'm still not the biggest person that you would see. I was 5'9, 5'8, 140 pounds, like soaking wet 140 pounds. I needed that adversity early, and I'm thankful for it. We get to my 11th-grade year and now this is where you start to get recruited. This is where you start to actually figure out where you're going. If you're going Division One, if you're going D-II. If you're not really suited to play college football. A lot of these questions start to get answered. My head coach always believed in me. Always believed in me. The only thing he was concerned about was my size because I wasn't big, but he really believed that I could play college football at the Division-One-level. He and my parents and my brothers were the only people that thought that. Everybody else? I'm too small, I'm not built to play Division One football. I'm this and I'm that. That was interesting talking to coaches who've coached you since you were five and now they're telling you, “Maybe we should look at Division Three.” There's nothing wrong with Division Three. But to me, I didn't work that hard to be a Division Three football player. I have two younger brothers, there's three of us. My parents, my dad didn't grow up in a wealthy household. My mom didn't come from a wealthy household. We didn't have a silver spoon. When you tell me D-III, what I hear is I have to pay for college. My mom had me when she was—she was 19 when she had me. We can't afford to pay for three kids into college.

It's tough. I'm the first person in my family. I'm a first-generation college student. I'm the first one to graduate college. That's all I heard. When you said D-III, I heard I have to pay for
school, so that means I can't play football. I was very adamant that I was going to play Division One football. \textit{I remember that that was tough for me because I'm slowly starting to see my division one dreams fade away. At this point, it is all sports. There's no academics involved in it.}

If you asked me what I wanted to major in at that time I could not tell you. I would just tell you something that sounded good. I'll study law. If you asked me, I didn't have an actual answer, but if you asked me about football, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. \textit{I still kept my grades up. I graduated with a 3.6 GPA, 3.7 in high school. I knew I needed the grades.} I had a couple of Division Three teams and Division Two teams and a couple one Double A teams. Those were talking to me like in my 11th-grade year, but nothing that actually sparked any interest.

10th grade, I play JV. I suited up for varsity, but I didn't play. 11th grade, I'm actually playing, and I'm a starter. I'm a starter and a wide receiver at the time. We're playing a scrimmage, and the last play of the scrimmage, I'm on defense, and I get blind-sided. I try to catch myself. When I put my hand down to catch myself, \textit{I snap my wrist like that. As soon as that happened, to me, everything is gone. No scholarship, no college football, no anything} because I'm already behind because I don't have varsity film for the 10th grade, I was a JV. I'm 5'10 at this point, 150, soaking wet. \textit{Now you're telling me I can't play football for the next six to eight weeks, and that's a huge recruiting point. That was where a lot of the dread came from that I potentially won't play Division One football.} I had the cast on, and I'm just—. They told me six to eight weeks before I'm healed. I'm sitting there, and I'm talking to my dad. “Dad, I don't know what to do at this point. I don't know where to go, what to do because everything rides on me getting a scholarship. \textit{My academic career rides on me getting a scholarship, my professional career relies on me getting a scholarship.}” \textit{I don't think other kids had the same type of mentality because they didn't take football that seriously because they knew they were going to college,}
regardless. They got a scholarship or not, they were going to college. Some kids, you're fine, you don't have to go to college. Your dad owns a business, you'll be good. That, it just ate me up. I didn't become depressed; I became mad, very mad. I was extremely mad all the time. I'm trying to write with my left hand. There's a lot going on. To me, I'm never going to college, I'm never playing football again. There's a lot going on. I was snappy.

I go to the doctor's office like a week after I had the cast and stuff, and I still have everything on. They're saying, “It's healing well. You still have another five to six weeks at this point.” I told him, “What if I was to wrap it up, could I play football?” He said, “I strongly do not recommend you play football a week after breaking your wrist.” My wrist wasn't fractured, it was completely broken. Then another week, so this is two weeks in, and I told my doc, “All right. I'm going to wrap it up, and I'm going to start playing.” He was very adamant about me not playing, and he would continue to push that, that he didn't think that I should play, but I wasn't hearing that. We're going into the third week. I have it wrapped up and I'm just playing football with this cast. I'm playing football with this club, it's a huge club, and so I play. My first game back, I get the hand-off and I broke for like a 60-something yard touchdown and I'm like, “All right. There's still a chance. There is still a hope.” Now, I'm trying to earn my starting job back. I'm just trying to get a scholarship.

Now we get into my senior year, and I see a bunch of guys from other schools that are “I'm committed to ODU. I'm committed to West Virginia” or Marshall or NC State. I'm sitting there with a Division Three school, an hour from my house. It's not where I thought I was going to be. We start playing the year, and I'm having a great season. I'm playing running back, I playing quarterback, I'm playing receiver. My main position was receiver, and I'm playing corner on defense. Punter returner, kicker. I'm doing everything I possibly can to get a college coach to
notice me. I'm having a really good season. October comes around, and University of the Northeast is scouting another guy that I played against at another high school. They asked for this guy's game film, and his best game happened to be the game that I had my best game, and so that's the game film he gave them. They ended up noticing me, and they came and talked to me the next day. University of the Northeast. I've heard of them. At the time, the football was good. They were in bowl games, winning their conference. It was awesome. They came and talked to me, and they said, “Yes, we're interested. There's a couple of other guys we're talking to in this area.” The coach was very honest, and he was like, “We're probably only going to take one.” I was like, “All right.” I just kept working, praying, and just playing.

A month goes by. I'm working at McDonald's at the time because if I wanted any type of social life or any type of money to have, I had to work for it. I'm working at fast food, and I get a call from the coach at Northeast, so I go in the bathroom. He tells me, “Hey, it was a pleasure meeting you. We watched your film, we talked, and I want to be the first one to tell you that we want to offer you a full scholarship.” I lost my mind. I'm in the bathroom at McDonald's losing my mind. I'm in the stall just going crazy. The biggest thing was relief. There was a sigh of relief. It was just euphoria. I felt like all my hard work actually paid off, and my plan was still going in motion. I was going to play Division One football. Still didn’t think about academics. I go home, and I quit my job that day. I haven't done too much, but my biggest regret is I. That's my biggest regret. But I left, quit, went home, told my parents, and it was the best feeling. Mom's crying, Dad's excited. He's already talking about NFL, and I'm like, “All right. We have to relax.” My brothers are happy because it just was like it’s possible. After that, that’s when the other offers start rolling in. But I stuck with Northeast because they were my first offer. Now, everybody back in school was, “He's going to D-I.” I was the only one from my class to actually go D-I, which
was a rarity, but it was cool because I actually did. But at this point now, my academics started to take a turn. For me, I'm like, “I'm already in.”

I went from A's to B+’s, to B’s, to C+’s. It was just a variety between the A's and the C's. My guidance counselor, before I had actually graduated, she sat me down and she's like, “You're going up there to play football. You're not going up there to get a degree. They want you to just play football.” I was like, “I want to get a degree anyway.” She was like, “It's not the same. It's not the same.” She tried to explain it to me, but I'm 18. I'm like, “Yes, okay. I hear you.” That was the first time somebody sat me down and explained to me the systemic issues that were at play, especially in collegiate athletics. That was the first time somebody explained it to me. I should have listened, but I didn't.

Life Chapter Two – Ball is Life…and that Life Comes with Consequences

The second life chapter encompasses the former HPBA collegiate careers, and, due to their admission via athletics, “Ball is Life.” But from the findings shared in the athletes’ monologues, “…that Life Comes with Consequences” since so much hinged upon Division I preparation athletically but not equally academically. The former HPBAs were asked about their life experiences during college to respond to the research question, “What are the stories of former HPBAs about their experiences with Division I athletic academic services?” The question was created based on the hypothesis that athletic academic services was at the center of HPBA collegiate academic experiences.

The chronosystem defines the importance of mentorship in maintaining athletics’ precedence in HPBA lives. Though designated as academic counselors, the advising the former HPBAs described receiving aligned much more with athletic mentorship. Generally, the advisors suggested majors and course loads based on what would promote athletic eligibility rather than
an assessment of the athletes’ academic interests and needs. Any chance at an academic experience counter to the previous K-12 mentorship was dismissed after hearing multiple versions of advisors telling athletes to choose academic pathways based on sport first. While the previous mentorship, even if it supported athletic identity development, was perceived as coming from a place of caring, the athletic academic services mentoring was generally described as steeped in the business of high-profile sport. And at the macrosystem, adapting from a March Madness (the annual NCAA Division basketball tournament) popular term, academics was about “survive and advance.” Once the athletes were exposed to the precariousness of balancing a full-time athletic load and a full-time academic load, they started to “figure out there were loopholes to it” as Devin shared. Many times, due to the requirements of Division I athletics, academic focus was circumvented. However, the athletes were clear that it was lack of time and college preparation that stifled their academic performance, not cognitive abilities.

Either way, over-association of academics with athletics had negative consequences that the media had not shown them. Lack of prior knowledge about college, especially the load that comes with being a high-profile athlete, led to academic struggles. More intensely than in K-12, college was so much a sports setting that it interfered with school. But through it all, failure was still not an option, so advisors worked to keep the athletes eligible while professional play felt within reach since the Division I goal had been attained. In reality, only 1.2% of college basketball players and 1.6% of college football players make it to the professional leagues (NCAA Research Staff, 2019).

**Part One – “What are You going to Major in?” aka “You Should do Something [Easier].”**

*Analytical summary.* Little effort appeared to be put into personalizing athlete schedules or trying to help them establish an identity separate from athletics; this was seen in all four
monologues. It was either leave or follow the advisors’ recommendations. Alex was lucky and eventually found a helpful counselor, a positive exception that many HPBAs do not get to have. David broke down how major clustering works: “You have Communications, you have Psychology, you have Sociology.” He wanted to do engineering, but counselor said, “Okay...We’ll think about that, but in the meantime, consider other avenues.” Eventually he submitted: “‘How about political science? I like politics.’ She was like, ‘All right. That's better.’” The major, to him, seemed irrelevant because “[sport was] going to work out.”

**James’ story.** The basketball team had our own *academic advisor* who led our study halls and helped us with our books, got us tutors when we needed them, *made sure we knew what we needed to stay eligible* and what we were getting in class. She kept a file for progress reports and attendance, so *that was pretty much my entire career as a college athlete. She pretty much put our entire schedule together and you would just go and fulfill that schedule.* For me, I think I was—it worked well for me because I didn't have to do probably as much as I have probably should have done, but at the same time, I think it probably wasn't the best for a lot of us personally. I don't know. *I majored in Sociology. I guess it worked out. Yeah, she picked it.*

**Devin’s story.** Coming into college, everybody asked me, “What are you going to major in?” I'm like, “Business.” Business was the hardest thing ever. But before that, me and a couple of other players, we entered this program before our actual freshman year college started. We took what, two classes? A math class and a writing one. I ended up getting A’s in both of them. I was like, “Yes, college isn't nothing.” *But then practice hits and all of the real class stuff hits.* We had study hours, two hours in the library, from 7AM to 9AM. I don't remember if it was every day or if it was every other day. But it was mandatory for freshmen. Maybe the first month, I was faithfully there, and it was like I had to be there. I had to be there; this is what I
have to do. Then as the year started to go on, you figure out there were loopholes to it. They would have a person there, sign in, you had to put your sport, your name, and they would end up giving it to your coach or your advisor, whoever is your advisor. But soon I would be there two hours late, not doing any work, it was just—. I am nowhere near serious about this, so I'm talking to the girls and I'm just wasting time not getting any work done. I'm like, “Man, I'm just ready to get out of here and just go in the gym and get shots off.”. We had access to the gym 24/7. I was just like, “Man let's just hurry up and get up out of here.” I'm not really taking school seriously. I went from the summer getting As and being happy about it, then once season started and everything, it was just like, “Man, please.” Because we had 5AM workouts. We're up at 5, work out. After we work out, we would go to breakfast to eat and then there's a class after that. You're looking at class maybe 8, 8:30. If I'm not mistaken that class was a huge class. Nobody is taking attendance. I won’t lie, a lot of times, I'm back in my dorm catching up on sleep. I ended up passing that class with like a C+ or something like that. That’s pretty good for not really showing up.

It would be that one class then another class. Then we have workouts again at maybe like 3. After workouts, sometimes we'll have a lift afterward and then go eat, get ready for study hall. Some days it was two class, some days it was three classes. After study hall, I would be in the gym until maybe 12. But as a student? Lights were off. I didn’t give it my full effort. I was taking Financial Economy and I was on the verge of being ineligible. That's when I decided that Business is not the major. I was just struggling in that class. It was not only that. It was also accounting, and a business marketing class and I was struggling in. Three classes. I was on the verge of being ineligible. I came in and I was the starting point guard. Now, their mindset is like, “He's a major asset to us.” 38 minutes, we can't lose that 38 minutes. Now they're scrambling
like, “What do you like, what do you want to do?” I was like, “I'm into music.” My sophomore year, I ended up switching and going to Audio Production. The classes were much easier. But I chose my major because it was fun. It had nothing to do with what I wanted to do.

**Alex’s story.** I came into the engineering program because they ask the question, “What do you want to be?” Me, not knowing much about careers, I knew I was good at math. I figured engineering had a lot with math and numbers, so I chose that. I decided civil engineer because I like to use my hand to build things. I was like, “Okay, maybe I'll be great in that.” I came into the civil engineering program. Lord, have mercy.

What they don't tell you is that when you come as a freshman, you enter right into the major. They expect you to know a lot of the foundational topics, so they don't really cover those in full detail. They'll just touch up on it and say, “We're moving right along.” When I came in week one, and they were just like, “You should know how to use MathLab and you should know how to write a loop and do this and do that,” I'm like, “Hold on, Professor.” I don't own a computer. I'm like, “I don't really get it.” As a freshman, I was on academic probation. My counselor asked me, “Are you sure you want to go into engineering?” She's like, “Not many football players graduate the program. There was only one, and he was a walk-on.” She was just like, “You should do something—” She didn't use this word, but she basically said “easier.” She was like, “The schedule is demanding.” I just was like, “How demanding could it be? I want to go to class. I take the class. I think I'd do well enough to pass then I'll be an engineer. That's simple.” You see the mindset, the bare minimum mindset? I'm like, “All I need is a C. Give me a C and I'll do it from here.”

There were some classes to where the professors were— They didn't get through their lesson completely, so they will say things like, “Come back this afternoon.” Obviously, I can't
because of practice. They'll say things such as, “Work in a group, meet at the library, do a project.”, “I can't because I have practice.” I would say half of me struggling my freshman year, one, because I just wasn't capable. Two, I just didn't have the time to put into the majors. What I want to say is, coming from the inner city and going to a predominantly White institution in itself was hard for me to transition. Small things—and I say this to people all the time, that cheese being a different color. I've never seen white cheese so, I promise you, when I go—when I went to a restaurant and they asked, “What type of cheese do you want?” I said, “American.” They came back with white, I said, “Sorry, this is Swiss, this is mozzarella. I asked for American.” They were like, “No, it is.” I was like, “What?”

Just small things like that. I was like, “This is not for me. This is tough.” That in itself affected my energy. I just wasn't feeling the area. I wasn't feeling the school because it was too demanding, and it was too tough. I actually wanted to transfer, and I tried to transfer after my freshman year, but of course, my GPA was too low so no other schools would accept. I had to make the choice, “What do I do next?” My first counselor said, “Okay. We're going to put you in soc.” I said, “I don't like soc.” She said, “You could choose soc, communications, things like that,” all these simple majors. I was just like, none of them fits me, who I am. She said, “We're going to have to do something.” I was just like, “Aren't you here to help me?” Then she assigned me to Mr. Garret. He actually sat down with me, and he's like, “Okay. You like math?” There was actually a conversation about who I was, my personality, what I like to do. He said like, “Your GPA isn't high enough to get into the business school, but you could do economics. Economics serves similar to a business degree where you can go into any financial industry.” I took some classes, liked them, and started to do better in my sophomore, junior, and senior year.
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

Shout out to Mr. Garret, right? Because they don't all do that. In fact, once he left, here came the soc and communications majors all over again.

David’s story. When I first got to college, I wasn’t 100% sure what I wanted to major in but I always liked working with my hands. I grew up doing that, and engineering seemed like one of those majors to do that. I can remember it: “All right. Have you been thinking about what you want to do?” I told them I would love to major in engineering. She just said, “Okay. We’ll think about that.” She was like, “We’ll think about that, but in the meantime, consider other avenues.” I was like, “All right.” Football players all basically major in the same thing. You have Communications, you have Psychology, you have Sociology. Some do English, not many of them, more so the local ones like guys who have more time. So, you get to the majors that are basically set around those three: psychology, sociology, and communication. Basically, there's no way that I could be a Divisional One football player and major in engineering. I just couldn’t do it. Your class schedule won’t allow you. You have to take these labs. It won’t permit you. There is no way with my football schedule that I’d have enough time to do what I needed to do to be an engineer major. I was like, “All right. How about political science? I like politics.” She was like, “All right. That's better.”

I'm getting closer. Then I took a couple of poli-sci classes and my academic advisor recommended I do communications. She asked me what I wanted to do and I said I wanted to play football in the NFL but besides that I don’t know, because growing up as an athlete and going to college as an athlete, when you talk to somebody, most of the times when you have a conversation it is about football; it's about sports. Very rarely did I ever have a conversation that was like, “What do you want to do when you get older?” “I want to be a football player.” “What else?” Very rarely did I have those conversations. This is football. I never legitimately sat down
and thought, “All right. If football doesn't work out,” I was like, “what would I want to do?”
because to me it's like, “Football's going to work out.” It never crossed my mind that it wouldn’t.
She recommended communications. I knew I didn’t want to do communications, so I'm just
doing communications because of the fact that everybody was doing communications. But that’s
not what I wanted. I was interested in were sociology, because just as a Black man I'm interested
in how society works. I’m interested in figuring out the systemic institutional problems and why
is it happening, how do people think, how come Black neighborhoods have a liquor store on
every block. Just stuff like that that I noticed just throughout life. When I heard what sociology
was, that was interesting. Later I would ask, “Well, what kind of job can I get in sociology?” The
crazy thing was that I never picked a job in a major. I could never say to someone, “I want to be
a doctor next year.”

Part Two – “They Want You to Play. They Need You to Play.”

Analytical summary. Alex reminds readers “School is just another part of the sport.
Being in class on time, being present, not really fully grasping the material.” Academic
intervention came in the form of tutors and “a little bit of leeway as well,” according to James.
Advisors were not afraid to intervene because the university “need[ed] you to play.” It is how
Devin got out of a plagiarism issue by just having to admit it and rewrite the paper with no other
punishment. Athletic necessity, and the business of NCAA Division I sport, was prioritized over
academic integrity.

Alex summarized that “The athletic academic center, it was strictly a place to attend
study hall, and to check in and to make sure that you were eligible because they're hired by the
[athletic] program.” The reality is different from how the advisors were introduced during the
college onboarding process. None of the former HPBAs really believed study hall was the
answer, especially not Alex, who analogized study hall and advisors to probation officers.

HPBAs are the majority of the high-profile athletic system. In the criminal justice system, over two-thirds of probation officers are white compared to the 30% of Black people (disproportionately higher than any other racial group) they police under probationary supervision even though Black people are only 13% of the U.S. adult population (Census Bureau, 2017; Jones, 2018). Such policing feels necessary to the NCAA institutions when they have brought you in as an athlete first and foremost. It is indoctrinated to do enough to stay eligible because above all else, HPBAs must be able to play.

*James’ story.* As a player, I think you always understand what the academic qualifiers are, what’s going to keep you eligible. At least I did, and they explain that to you too. So, you know the minimums. I think I was slightly interested in school, but I knew what I needed to do to stay eligible. I also think that I was given a lot of help. Given a little bit of leeway as well. Because of that, I was able to get through school, but I knew what I needed to be eligible and to keep—stay off of any probationary list or anything like that. For me, I figured if I can get somewhere above a 2.7, 2.8, the closer I was 3.0, the better off I’d be. So, I took all the help I could get to keep me there. The coaches preached good grades: “Take education seriously.” But it was more about making sure you did what you had to do in the classroom to be able to perform and provide on the court. For me and my coach, even academic advisors and people like that, it was more…not really asking about the class. More about, “Hey, what do you think you're going to get in this class?” Not really asking how the class is but, “Hey, is this class going to be a B? Is it a C? Is it an easy A? Need help?” What have you. If you did need a tutor, they would get you a tutor. If I was struggling in a class, they would try to figure out a way to get into contact with a professor, or have me get in contact with a professor to see if there was something the professor
could do. It was okay. I was slightly behind in Math and English when I came in, but I guess I was willing to do the work I needed to do to get where I needed to be, at least get a good enough mark to get me where I needed to be.

**Devin’s story.** *My senior year, I got caught for plagiarism. It was a 25-page paper and around this time we’re in conference playoffs, so I didn’t want to do no 25-page paper. I’m like, “Come on.” My junior year we went to the NCAA tournament. We won our conference championships. My senior year, I’m like, “We're in the mix of this.” My focus is like, "Yo, we're going back to the NCAA tournament, I ain't got time to be doing all this 25-page paper. I ain't have anyone to help me with it.” I just made the worst decision. I just was like, “All right man forget it.” I just copied and pasted, copied and pasted, copied and pasted. Then I got in trouble for it, and now, my coach is trying to figure out how to get me out of trouble. My advisor is trying to figure it out. Basically, I had to admit to it, and then rewrite the paper. I ended up getting help. I thought I was going to get kicked out, but they said it was my first offense or something. Really? It was the first time my university ever went to the NCAA tournament, and everybody was just loving me. I walked around the campus and people would know who I was.*

**Alex’s story.** The athletic academic center, it was strictly a place to attend study hall, and to check in and to make sure that you were eligible because they're hired by the football program. Their main goal and objective is to keep you on the field, and they go about it just like that. They make sure you have an average grade. If you have a below average grade, they keep you in study hall for hours and hours on end just to get to where you're eligible. Not much more to say about it. As sad as that sounds, it's just a place where you go you say, “Hey, what’s up? I don't have to be here shout out to you all.” Because the program there’s maybe four or five counselors, and at least 120 plus athletes and most of them were assigned, the ratio was very high. They just do
enough to keep you going. I think I would go in there, I would check in. If I have study hall, I would go to study hall, and that was it. If I was failing in a class, I needed a tutor, they will just assign us a tutor.

Now, they are a part of the onboarding process. We do meet with them when we visit the school. It was, “We're here for you. We’re to help you. We're going to find classes that suits you. We're going to support you in whichever major you choose.” All those good things. Then you get there, and they have a list and then they go down and check a box. “Do you have a C?” “Yes.” “Do you attend class?” “Yes.” We have different rules that we had to abide by. For example, sit in the front of the class. We had coaches who would check our class to make sure we weren’t late. School is just another part of the sport. Being in class on time, being present, not really fully grasping the material in my opinion. I think that they just aided in making sure we were disciplined in the classroom, and not really excelling in the classroom. The service we received from them is strictly just to keep us eligible. If you can't do it or if you're failing, their whole idea is study hall. If you bring me to study hall, I'm just going to sit here for two, three hours because I still don't understand the material. There's nothing changing for me in study hall. There's this resentment from them sitting you to study hall, and not really working with you. They're never at study hall. But if you're struggling in class, they say, “Okay, you're assigned study hall.” What does that do for me? That's detention. The counselors? I just feel as though they were just the disciplinarians, like going to see your P.O.

**David’s story.** I came to major in sociology, and then I just went through it. I still wasn’t yet serious about it. I was just going through the motions to play football. Everything I did was just so I could continue to play football. When I declared my major, I didn’t redshirt as a true freshman. First of all, going from high school academics to college academics was challenging.
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

Then you put on top of that I have a full-time job being a football player, it was football first. They would always do the little—I hated it, but it was very true. They kept doing these little—"Go to school first. Football is second," but they would put up two fingers when they said “first” for school, and they would put up one finger when they said “second” for football. The little hand thing. Every athlete knows it. I mean, a playbook is unreal and the little nuances that go into a playbook are a lot. Sitting there trying to manage football, which obviously was above academics because that’s why I was there, trying to manage football and academics, and playing as a true freshman. When I got to college, the first thing, when I had to pick whether its academics or athletics, I picked athletics. And my academics dropped.

I was on academic probation in my first semester year. Taking those college classes and then on top of that there are 300 people in my classes, or 150, whatever it is. There's over 100 people in my classes. The professor doesn’t know if I’m not there, and I just had a 5AM workout. It goes I have a 5AM workout and then class at 8:30 AM, so as a freshman in college I’m like, “She won't know I'm missing. She won't notice me missing.” I'd go back to my room and take a nap before my next workout at 11AM. That was my mentality, and it was tough, mentally challenging, and then being a collegiate athlete, just physically demanding. I was going through a lot of new things. So, my first year, my first semester I’m on academic probation, struggling in classroom but also too prideful to seek any type of help because I got it altogether. I can’t make it look like I’m struggling in classes or whatever the case is. And then your academic advisors are just like, “You need a private tutor. That's all you need, a private tutor.” It becomes this mentality to stay afloat and not succeed, not exceed expectations, not to be successful. “Stay afloat so you can play football.” It's hard to be an advisor, in my opinion. “My only thing is I need you to be eligible. I need you to stay eligible and at least a graduate.” It becomes like the
bar setting is very low, let's just maintain. So, you don't think about what’s going to happen after football. “If football doesn't work out, if athletics don’t work out, what do you do?” I'm like, “Well, that's not going to happen.” That was the mentality.

**Life Chapter Three – What Is Life After Ball?**

According to the former HPBAs, sport maintained its precedence throughout the HPBA pre-professional period along with some form of mentorship/guidance from athletics-focused figures; that was the crux of the ecological system. But when that guidance ends and/or is exposed as detrimental, the ecological system that was previously invisible to HPBAs becomes visible, and they are left questioning the high-profile system, seeking to hold individuals accountable. The final research question asked, “What recommendations do former HPBAs have for athletic academic services based on their experiences?” But their recommendations could not be made without problematizing the high-profile system first and, interestingly, the HPBAs did not reckon with the missteps of their precollegiate mentors. These individuals introduced the former HPBAs to sport and initiated them into athletic identity foreclosure and the character traits that they were now taking responsibility for. Instead, athletic academic advisors, who the former HPBAs believed did not promote academics as they should have, were the main figures criticized. The missing blame of K-12 mentors and the compounded blame placed on collegiate guidance defines the analysis of “What is Life After Ball?”

The blame was expressed when the former HPBAs considered the microsystem that posited failure as not being an option, yet had indeed failed them, training them to place sports above all else and not prepare for life holistically. James stated, “When I wanted to try to go to grad school, I realized how much I didn’t know how to do by myself.” There was a lot of personal accountability taken for systemic issues: “You can figure out how to stay eligible and
play basketball, but for the most part you are going to have to learn.” That sentiment explains why part one is titled “Hold Yourself Accountable.” The second part, “Counselors, Coaches…Be Very Transparent in Who You Are,” blames later guidance figures who, while deserving of blame, are all part of the same system earlier guidance figures are absolved from. Still, the second part is important in that it asks for Division I transparency and accountability as the macro through micro systems are critiqued in the midst of recommending changes.

Part One – “Hold Yourself Accountable.”

**Analytical summary.** The level of accountability that the four men take in this part of their stories can be summarized in these four excerpts:

1. James: “I felt like school was always just a kind of means...to find the other. I needed to get what I had to get done in school to be an athlete. I don't think I went into school looking for the best experience as a student versus my best experience as an athlete.”

2. Devin: “I didn't even study for anything. I just always had help the wrong way. Not doing what I was supposed to do... my focus was just getting ready for the league.”

3. Alex: “I wanted to call my mom to tell her that I was graduating, but I was more embarrassed to call her and tell her that I wasn't getting drafted. So I never made the call...I felt like I let myself down...”

4. David: “I can't get to graduate school, and I have no experience...To me, I didn't feel like I flourished academically, or got everything out of it academically that I could have where I'm at now.”

The self-blame was targeted towards the collegiate portion of the high-profile sports system but is actually an indictment on the fuller K-16 system. They were blaming themselves for being a way that was not their fault, but that of misguided precollegiate guidance outside of athletics. But
such a level of reflection requires understanding that those who helped athletics attain prominence—i.e. their first mentors and coaches from the K-12 ecological system—are just as worthy of blame as those who later sustained the primary importance of athletics in their lives even when a post-collegiate athletic future was a longshot. Yet with the HPBA-determined distinction between the two versions of the same system, the young men generally advised future HPBAs to be their own advocates and seek out their own academic assistance and resources in college. This advice is difficult to follow for a group of young Black men who are developing very similarly to how the advice-givers did. “Hold Yourself Accountable,” in its self-blame and advise, demonstrates that in not holding everyone accountable, especially early mentors, the system will maintain.

**James’s story.** I think as I’ve matured, I now understand what you need to do in a classroom and how you could use to help the right way. But then, I guess when you have an opportunity to kind of just let things happen, you let them happen. *I guess it wasn't until later that I realized how much they—my advisor—were doing or she was doing. I never learned to do anything for myself in college really. They did everything. When I wanted to try to go to grad school, I realized how much I didn’t know how to do by myself. It was tough because the only time I’ve kind of been outside of the sport was like briefly and it was like—I guess it was tough because even in grad school or like when I worked in a nonprofit, about like six months, it was a little more difficult because I guess you’ve always had somebody to rely on, like there was always some type of support there. This was the first where I didn't have the same level of support. And I had to grow quickly. I don't think I went to college completely ready. And you know what? I’ve been asked whether I feel like I missed out on academically. But unfortunately, personally, I don't think at that point I was intrigued with the school enough to be looking for
something to know what I missed out on. I felt like school was always just a kind of means for
one just to find the other. I needed to get what I had to get done in school to be an athlete. I don't
think I went into school looking for the best experience as a student versus my best experience as
an athlete. I think I’ve always known that. And I don't know how much it can be controlled, but I
would hold myself more accountable today. You can figure out how to stay eligible and play
basketball, but for the most part you are going to have to learn.

Devin’s story. I was always at the C-range with my grades. The last months of school
because, in my mind, I'm getting ready for NBA workouts. I'm about to make millions of dollars.
I was known in the NCAA world. I was getting attention. I'm thinking, “All right, let me get
ready for this NBA stuff.” School was over. And it’s sad to say but I got what I expected because
I didn't really expect anything. I always knew. You hear stories like, “Oh, yes, they'll pass you.” I
always knew in the back of my mind that no matter what, I'd be good. At the end of the day,
you'll have someone write your paper for you or do your homework, or you just copy and cheat
on the tests. I didn't even study for anything. I just always had help the wrong way. Not doing
what I was supposed to do. And it’s sad because I ended up becoming the first one in my family
to graduate from college. But my focus was just getting ready for the league.

Alex’s story. Another injury happened at my senior year in college. I'm telling you senior
year injuries. Now this one was big because this actually affected the dream that I pursued my
entire life. I would make it. I was there. My junior year there were articles written: “He's
projected to go third, he's versatile, he's this, he's that, and then there's an article that says he's
injured. Once that article—. I didn't know how to feel. I remember for me, the draft is so big.
When I received the news that I finally completed my credit hours to graduate, I also received
the news the agent who was supposed to represent me had backed out. Then I got another agent
and he told me straightforward. He was like, “If anything, you might go undrafted or they might give you a trial out, but the likelihood of you getting drafted is very low.” So, I had those two pieces of news in the same week. *And I remember, I wanted to call my mom to tell her that I was graduating, but I was more embarrassed to call her and tell her that I wasn't getting drafted. So I never made the call. Just imagine the identity crisis that I experienced. For me, it was like I let my family down.* That pressure, we place it on ourselves because of what society tells us is successful. From growing up and seeing the pro athletes on TV and going to the games and seeing the fans cheer for you, we just tell ourselves that we have to make it in order for X, Y, Z to be proud. *So, I felt like I let myself down, allowed all the people who had a hand in getting me to where I was down. It was very tough for me to transition. My entire life I've been governed by bells and whistles, but once I graduated no one blew a whistle to tell me where to go. No one gave me a schedule to tell me what I was going to do, and when it was going to be done, so I had freedom, freedom that I was afraid of.*

To all of this I say hold yourself accountable. By that I mean, don't expect for your success to be driven by others. Don't expect the academic center to tell you the resources on campus. Go out there on your own and befriend people who are not athletes. Befriend people who are part of different programs and learn more. Go into the library and venture out one day when you have time. See what's around. Don't just wait for a list to come from your counselor. *Remember that as a student-athlete, coaches get paid, the university gets money, and they're getting out of you what they want so get something out of them.* Take more responsibility in your education, go to class and go to class not to make, not because your parent tells you to or because coach is checking if you are late to class, go to class to actually learn.
David’s story. To me at that time, everybody goes pro. If we're going to lose, I’m going to go pro. It doesn’t resonate with me that only 2% of football players go pro. I sat down by myself one day and was like, “All right. Listen. Let's say I graduate with—” at the time, I have a 2.6 GPA. First, I'd graduate. I have a sociology degree. There's nothing that I was going to sit there and be able to do with a Sociology degree with no experience. All I did was play football and I have a sociology degree with a 2.6 GPA. If there was anything that I wanted to do with this degree, I’d have to have an advanced degree. I'm looking at my grades and I'm like, “All right. Let's say I don't go pro. Which grad school is going to take me?” No grad school is going to take somebody with a 2.5, 2.6, GPA. It doesn't matter if they play football. At grad school, it doesn't work like that. I ended up finishing a lot better than most of my classmates. That wasn't saying much. I had classmates who finished 2.2 in Communications. What do you do with that? Because by the time you realize, “Hey, the way the world is working now, a bachelor's degree isn't what it used to be. A bachelor's degree is a high school diploma at this point.” What if it doesn't work out? In my junior year is when I actually started realizing grades matter, and also you start to understand where you're going to go, if you're going to go pro, if you're not going to go pro, and if you have a small shot. I knew that I had a shot, but I was not guaranteed at all.

Guys just don't know. They think they're getting this degree with a 2.2 GPA majoring in communications. When they graduate and they don't go pro, that's when they start to realize this degree doesn't mean anything. I can't get to graduate school, and I have no experience. You don't even know what to do with a communications degree. To me, I didn't feel like I flourished academically, or got everything out of it academically that I could have where I'm at now. It's very restricting, and it's survival mode. That's all it is. It's survive. Remain eligible to play football, that is it. Athletically, considering everything that happened, I got what I wanted out of
it. In the end, I went pro. I got what I wanted out of it in the end, but amidst everything that happened, I think it just shows that there are issues with college football. The main thing I would want somebody to understand is how valuable education is and how valuable the knowledge is. Don't take that for granted. There are resources at colleges. There are ways to do stuff. It's just you don't know it. They don't provide that for you. They're not going to sit here and tell you, “Hey, these are all our resources,” or give you the time. When you're in it, that 45-minute nap, it is way more appealing than meeting with somebody in the writing center, or meeting with a professor to pick their brain. It's a lot more appealing to play football and go home, go to sleep, wake up, repeat. I would recommend taking the less-traveled road, to take that more difficult—. Sacrifice that 45-minute nap for the greater good of your future.

There are resources. You have to go find them, and you have to take advantage of them. I would say, connect with your professors. That's the biggest thing. Educate yourself, be knowledgeable, and have a plan. Don't do what I did, or what any other college—What a player does is just goes in, “I'll major in this and I'll figure out my job thing later. Right now, I'm going to focus on going to the NFL.” Use like, the way that they use you, you can use this system as well. It’s a very broken system, but you can find a way to use it. And there are people in campuses that want to help.

Part Two – “Counselors, Coaches…Be Very Transparent in Who You Are.”

Analytical summary. In the previous section, Alex and David began to state some of the failures of their institutions—and the NCAA in general—in advising future HPBAs on how to be more personally accountable. But in “Counselors, Coaches…Be Very Transparent in Who You Are,” all four former HPBAs delve into the accountability, or lack thereof, of the collegiate high-profile sports system. Their critiques separate K-12 from college as opposed to acknowledging
that they are both part of the same system. The “tunnel vision” (as James refers to it) of athletic goals are already known to advisors. And this is clear in Devin stating that he feels like he was used. The NBA did not work out and now he has a degree he has no intention of applying. He sees collegiate athletics as a business and seeks to educate the high school students he coaches about it as such, but still does not promote academics, just providing more transparency about Division I athletic intentions.

Alex discusses all of the things he was not told about such as the academic resources available outside of the athletic academic center. He discusses how his college coaches exploited the pressure he was putting on himself. Interestingly, he states that coaches should just come to recruits houses and say that their objective is for the athlete to just excel in sports. It appeared that what these men sought was not necessarily change, but honesty from the outset. David did not critique his counselors, believing they did the best they could with the job they had. He acknowledged that they were just cogs in the system and connecting to the ecological system foundation, so the real goal is to better prepare HPBAs for what is to come. David stated, “[The universities] could say how much they cared about academics,” but that proves to not be the case. But that is not just the case in universities, but the overall business of high-profile sports.

**James’ story.** When you're a kid, they tell you you can't go outside unless you do your homework. But as an athlete, especially by high school, it becomes you're not eligible unless you have a certain grade in high school. Then in college, you have to start strong like your freshman year so by the time you're a sophomore you'd know exactly what you needed all times. You know exactly what— or at least someone's telling you what you need. You find out about it through school and you just go along with the process. But it shouldn’t be that way. And I want them to know that it might not be all the kid's fault. The kind of environment, the culture they came up
in, led him that way. Be patient and try to engage him enough so he might really be able to respond. *I guess trying to have him see the importance might be tough because a lot of us have tunnel vision on what their goals are.* It's really just if you are an advisor trying to understand where and why this kid is where he is. Somehow, you get the kid to understand he should learn in school, not just get a 2.7.

**Devin’s story.** Yes, but then it’s, okay, you graduate. You get a degree, and it's not—. You get that whole image of you are automatically getting a job. That's not how it works. For athletes, prepare us. *It's sad because I really feel like we are being used.* Like I told you, my school had never been to the NCAA tournament. I'm one of the reasons why. *I played 39 minutes; a thousand points scored. I was the first one in my conference’s history to have over a thousand points and over 500 assists. I was Rookie of the Year; I was Player of the Year.* My former university, if you look at their arena when I was there, and look at their arena now, it's totally different. I'm part of the reason why your arena is more attractive. *Where's my fair share?* I got a degree that everybody asks me like, “What degree?” “Audio production.” “You don't want to get into it?” “No.” It was just something for me to do because I always thought I was going to be an NBA player. I just felt they got to prepare us better; they have to. I'm a high school basketball coach now, and that's what I try to do with my kids now because I know they're not going to get what they deserve. My advisor would work for me to stay on that court and got me out of the plagiarism trouble, and that's basically it. *I realized it’s a business. It's a business, and you're being used. All that money you bring in, and most of us won’t make it. After that, we struggle. We're bringing money into the program. At least have something lined up for us after we graduate. Because after you walk that stage, what do you do financially if you don’t make it?*
Alex’s story. You came into my house and you told me that I’m in good hands, but when’s the last time that coach embraced me the way he did when he recruited me? No one told me about the learning center or that they have designated spaces for you to do career exploration and stuff like that. The athletic academic center didn’t connect us with anyone when we were battling depression or going through mental issues, that we have a place to go to or a number to call. You know? Like where’s my shoulder to cry on? Not afraid to admit that there were nights when I was in tears because you just feel ostracized, and outcasted, and you don’t belong.

And then I feel as though the NCAA and these institutions exploit the pressure we put on ourselves. Thinking back, there were several times where coaches would use it as a scare tactic to say, “Hey you’re not going to play. You’re not going to make it. You’re not going to last here long. You’re not going to be here long.” If you hear that over and over, you don’t want it to be true. Now you’re conditioned to do what the coaches want. And I was conditioned to believe as a student-athlete, I could only be one at a time, and I have to be an athlete so I can't focus on school which is what I did my entire life.

Counselors, coaches, I will say be very transparent in who you are, you are a coach and you go to a recruit’s house and your main goal and objective is just for them to excel in sports, then say that. Say, “Listen, I’m a coach who only cares about football, who only cares about basketball, who only cares about track and field.” Because at least then they would know to say, “Okay well if my child does choose this college, I can't blame the school if he doesn't succeed academically because they told me.”

David’s story. I don't get to go to career events. I don't get to go connect with people from different backgrounds and different career opportunities. We would have this random, for
football, this random meet-and-greet, where former Northeast football players would come and you would talk and try to network, but it really wasn't networking. It was just like a show, like, “Hey, we're doing this for you guys.” I mean, they did everything they could, I thought, with what they had there. It's hard to advise somebody with very limited options and help them to be successful. But it's not that we're not that smart. Football players don't have the tools, the time. You have an academic center and they put you in their first study hall in your freshman or sophomore year for two hours. You're telling me that I got to wake up at 5AM to go workout and then I have three classes that day, and then I have film study, and then I have football practice, and I got to wake up and do it all over again? The guys there at 10 o'clock, the last thing they're worried about is trying to figure out how to study for a test. They have to study the playbook.

There's not a lot of help when it comes to academics. Tutors were offered. But you're in a system that it's like it's just football. That's just what's ingrained. It's like, “Hey, just stay above 2.0 and stay eligible.” If you have that, there's not many guys who want to go seek tutors. I thought my academic advisors were great. To me, they did everything. I had two academic advisors. I thought that they did everything they could to keep me on track, because not only do you have to manage a student-athlete at 18 years old who thinks he's going to the NFL, not only do you have to manage his ego, you have to think how to manage his academics and athletics. You've got to manage a kid that's 600 miles from home. I have a lot of respect for them. I just think the system that we're in is very, just it's corrupt. It's messed up. It doesn't give the student-athlete the opportunity to advance himself outside of football. We can't make money. We can't do all majors. It's just very restricting. So, they—the academic advisors—did everything they could within their restrictions that they have. The academic center, it was good, but it wasn't utilized. There was no real structure to the academic side. You had one academic advisor trying to
manage 22 freshmen. Good luck with that. It was different, and it was tough, but I think, I mean, they deal with it. Was it cultivated for learning, or to actually help you? It is a very tough place to actually sit there and try to study.

I think that student-athletes, they're not given a fair shake at an education. You don't even get to pick your degree. It's not fair to you. Your academics is fit into an athletic schedule. Football is a full-time job; it is 24/7. You can't even get a couple weeks off. Maybe during the summer, maybe two, but you're back on campus. You're taking summer classes, and the whole time you're training. Back then, I had no clue what I was getting into. Back then, I'm like, “Any degree is worth it,” because at that time, it sounds like such a great offer when you're 18 and they're like, “Hey, we'll give you money. We'll provide you a degree. All you need to do is you need to play college football.” At that time, it sounded great. Now, looking back on it, I was broke. We couldn't make money. We couldn't work. We couldn't use our name. We can't do anything. We can't do anything. You were broke making this university a ton of money, didn't get the academic support when it came to just figuring out what I wanted to do. It's just academics is second. They could say how much they cared about academics, but all they wanted—. It's every university. Out of all the universities and guys that I would know. During is the best thing, but you don't realize it afterwards when you're back at wherever you came from with some random degree from a university that won't try to provide you with a job, won't connect you with people, won't reach out to anybody on your behalf. You don't get any type of mentoring. There's no, “Hey, this is what you need to do to be successful after football.” There's none of that. It's like, “This is what you need to do to help me with what I need right now. When you graduate, hey, here's your degree. We're even.”
Overtime: Still a Chance to Win

James stated, “You can figure out how to stay eligible and play...but for the most part you are going to have to learn.” While this is another example of the former HPBAs placing the onus of change on themselves as opposed to the HPBA system that led to undermining academic importance, James’s point can be contextualized as the importance of all HPBA-related parties needing to learn the ins and outs of the system before it takes over. When I asked James to clarify his recommendation, he provided a supplemental monologue. It was advisory in a critical way, still mostly addressing the collegiate part of the HPBA ecological system, but also the psychological development that creates an HPBA. That level of understanding was critical for me to consider what the alternative could be.

James’ final analysis. We are capable. It's a double-edged sword for me. Because I went through the entire system, and I see that there is some good in it, but then I also see that there's flaws. Maybe you guys caught us when we were 18, but we have been trained since early childhood. And although sport is a business, we still really need a college experience. The college experience when you're a student-athlete is the athletic part of your experience. You have to fight to have any part of the regular college experience because of practice schedules, game schedules, study hall times, meetings, tutors, and honestly, just being exhausted. You try to open up a book after a three-hour practice. That is a tough one. The body's sore. You had three classes and a three-hour practice; it's bedtime. It's not time to open a book. “I'll do that another time.”

Advisors, they are not blind. They know that they're trying to keep us eligible. The core of them, they're probably good people and they really want to help us, but they also understand that a kid who's eligible isn't necessarily where they need to be. But the numbers might say he's trying in a classroom, so that's enough. I think for advisors, they're in on it, but I know the
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

advisors that are worth their salt are trying to help us really get something out of the classroom experience, not just show up and try to pass and stay above a 2.0. The grades should mean something, so try to help them get that. I started basketball at a young age, and I figured out how to stay within the sport. For me, basketball is something that I was always passionate about. If I was in another career, even though I could be doing well, I don't know if I'd still find the same level of my own personal satisfaction or feel success. And that’s problematic. Do something about that.

**Analytical recommendations.** James’ assertion that his continued satisfaction in life only exists because he has been able to remain in basketball is very telling about the lasting effects of the high-profile sports system even after one is no longer a participating athlete. He continues to operate under an athletic identity because nothing has caused him to have to relinquish it. He is what could be considered a successful example when the system works in favor of HPBAs. However, as existing research supports, James is an exception to the common reality since most HPBAs will not go pro and/or be able to maintain a career in athletics post-college. What makes his “overtime” reflection important (named this way because he was able to stay in the game and continue towards a longer-term “win”) is that even though he does not feel as exploited as the other HPBAs, he is still aware that the HPBA system was not designed to provide the best overall academic experience for HPBAs, particularly those most susceptible to the effects and athletic identity foreclosure. After years of training at the K-12 level, college continues the trend instead of trying to provide something different and make school “mean something.” His belief in advisors wanting to be good people, like David’s statement in the previous section, suggests that they could be the key to change, and I agree with him, but expand that belief to individuals who engage in the earliest mentoring of HPBAs.
Whether post-collegiate sport works out in some capacity (as it did for James and David) or does not (the case for Devin and Alex), there tends to eventually be the struggle to HPBAs defining themselves outside of their athletic identity. That takes additional interventional mentorship. Devin unfortunately did not mention receiving any and James has not had to seek any out since he is still benefiting from high-profile sport. But Alex and David both mentioned post-athletic-career mentorship that assisted them in learning to understand that there is more than one ecological system they can thrive in.

It took a senior-year injury for Alex to be forced to find another way and an end to a professional career for David to forcibly exit the system, but new mentorship helped them re-establish their footing. They are examples of holistic mentorship having the capacity to establish multiple identities in HPBAs (see Cooper, 2019; Cooper et al., 2018). The revised goal should be for such mentorship to occur before the athletes are absorbed into the high-profile system. In presenting these narratives and this final request from a former HPBA, I hope that the power of mentorship is clear, and that all of those who will assume some form of that role, particularly childhood coaches can be compelled to integrate the importance of academics as a similarly important entity to sport. Alex stated that his new mentor helped him realize that “all the strong suits, and the characteristics, and the things it takes to be successful [outside of sport] I already had...Switching the story from a story of defeat, to a story of triumphant and success, accomplishment.” The recommendation is that the story no longer has to be one of defeat first, but one where triumph in and out of sport not only always seems possible but is just as much an expectation. If this new type of mentorship that Alex received can have such an effect that late in HPBA life, one can only imagine its potential impact and systemic redevelopment if introduced and sustained from athletic participation inception.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

While the NCAA mandates the availability of supplemental academic support for all student-athletes, especially high-profile men’s basketball and football players, the academic performance of the latter sub-groups continue to trail their peers. With the majority of this high-profile population identifying and/or classifying as Black, this leaves high-profile Black athletes (HPBAs) as among the lowest academic performing population at Division I institutions (Harper, 2018; Hawkins & Nwadike, 2018). With such widespread underperformance, researchers came to a consensus that something was wrong systemically, looking to the high-profile sports world for reasons behind the academic inequities they observed (see Beamon 2012; Cooper, 2019; Harper, 2018; Hawkins, 2010; 2017; Oseguera, 2010; Singer 2005; 2009). From existing literature, I discovered a wealth of scholarly information that provided insight into potential causes for the underperformance of HPBAs. Then I embarked on an exploration into the timeline of HPBAs’ lived experiences that could pinpoint a convergence in stories around when and how athletic and academic commitment fully diverged, and/or could no longer be properly reconciled, in a way that led to the sustained underperformance. I hoped that identifying the potential source, whether a person and/or time, could point towards how to specifically advocate for change at the various ecological levels. Connectedly, I wanted my study to be accessible to those outside of academia, including HPBA parents, coaches, K-12 teachers, athletic academic advisory staff, and casual fans who have an investment in high-profile sports to establish a collective responsibility.
Discussion of Findings

My findings chapter contained a collection of four unique-yet-common former HBPA narratives. In receiving and organizing these stories, I sought to balance scholarship with storytelling by finding a common thread. I found that thread in each narrative connected to mentorship, and how prominent and consistent athletic mentorship became the driving force behind the ecological system that determined their athletics-first lives. Listening to how mentorship and coaching, whether from a parent or a trusted male figure, guided their initial paths, I considered what similarly strong academic mentorship, early in life, could have done to counteract the high-profile athletic ecological system’s negative academic effects on HPBAs; there is already evidence of its positive effects even post-athletic identity foreclosure (see Cooper et al., 2018). So, in hearing the retrospectives from the young men as they reconsidered their lives and what could have been, the importance of the outermost ecological system level became clear when considering the consistency of mentorship throughout each HPBA life transition.

Through the former HPBA narratives, I concluded that the chronosystem, the outermost ecological level that upholds all environments and directs all life transitions and stages of development, is shown to have operated in a reciprocal manner with the macrosystem, the level that many people—and other theories—consider the outermost environment. The macrosystem holds the overarching institutional patterns of an environment’s culture that provide meaning and motivation to a people (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). And if a people are led to believe that athletics is the most likely way for their men to succeed, which ended up being the resulting assumption for Black people from the Brown decision (Hodge et al., 2008), then the people could unconsciously form a chronosystem that sustains this ideology across life events and transitions in hopes of securing their young men’s success. The narratives revealed that because the initial
chronosystem was formed from a genuine place of wanting the best for HPBAs (from trusted male figures), the negative impacts of its existence at that time continue to be overlooked. This finding expounds upon Johnson and Migliaccio (2009), who found no negative reactions from the children ushered into high-profile sports, just a general sentiment of believing this was the American Dream that could benefit them and their families. My study demonstrates that this sentiment carries into adulthood, with Alex, for example, lamenting being embarrassed that he was not going pro even though he was graduating from college.

When sport participation moves into high-profile status, by high school and especially college, its exploitation becomes visible upon exiting the system, as was demonstrated in the former HPBAs’ responses to their teenage and early adult phases of development within the HPBA ecological system. Examining the chronosystem that established the HPBA system—and is reinforced within the nested levels—created a different way of re-conceptualizing existing HPBA research while also deepening the understanding of the four I’s (internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and ideological) that many theories apply to this area of research. These four levels, when considered together, can all be related to the causation that starts at the level they are all actually nested within: the chronosystem, the oft unexplored but critical level to development according to Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) EST model. The original model did not contain this time dimension, but Bronfenbrenner (1977) determined that the influence of change and/or constancy in environmental occurrences determined the consistency of the application of macro-level beliefs within all other nested-level occurrences.

I found that most HPBA research stopped at ideological discussions, which I assert is closest in relation to the macrosystem of EST, and therefore there is not a full discussion of a key part of the developmental process that considers how time interplays with environmental
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

occurrences, especially when considering the constancy of high-profile sport training upon its introduction. The HPBAs studied unknowingly centered all of their development around the introduction and continued presence of athletic mentorship, and therefore athletics as the primary path to success. Their narrative delivery also promoted my implicit secondary goal of making the scholarly more understandable outside of academia, transforming the EST deconstruction into stories delivered via life chapters to represent the theory’s various levels. I hoped to demonstrate a method for bridging professional and public sociology through the unique interpretation and delivery of this theoretical framework. A similar narrative approach was recently undertaken by Singer (2019). His book shares the stories of 12 HPBAs via reflective vignettes about their experiences in the high-profile system. However, it still differs from my approach in a) its form as a case study that applies critical race theory (CRT) and b) its goal towards macrosystem reform that I believe still does fully engage the chronosystem as the initiator of the nested systems he/we seek(s) to reform.

Each research question, responded to in the findings via life chapters, can be oriented within the race- and identity-based theories and studies that defined the second chapter’s review of literature. EST also demonstrated the capacity to combine sociological and psychological HPBA development as well as unearth new findings when applied to preexisting research.

Life Chapter One Discussion

The first life chapter addressed the first research question, “What are the stories of former HPBAs about their K-12 experiences related to athletics and academics?” The HPBAs shared the early emergence of athletic dominance in their lives. The literature review section about HPBA life in the Black community outlined the relationship between high-profile sports and Black males. As this dominance unfolded, the conflict between athletics and academics grew,
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

particularly in the nested sections of the K-12 ecological system, resulting in an under-preparation for college academics and a focus on athletics as the “meal ticket” (stated by Alex) to the future. Such findings aligned with the identity-based theories explored by HPBA researchers especially, athletic identity foreclosure (see Beamon, 2012; Bimper & Harrison, 2011), role engulfment (see Cooper & Cooper, 2015), and socialization (see Beamon, 2012).

Identity foreclosure was closely related to the socialization HPBAs received from the Black community into high-profile athletics, leading to the role engulfment described by Cooper and Cooper (2015). I recognized signs of this when James discussed how growing up in the New York Metro, basketball was everything, and David described football as a “religion” in the southern U.S. With Alex’s description of the most typical examples of Black male success being athletes, mentors were given a clear indication to focus solely on athletics in these young Black male’s lives. While both Beamon (2012) and Cooper and Cooper (2015) discussed the repercussions of these identity decisions, these theories only implicate how the macro and exosystem influence the developing individual and, therefore, do not identify a more specific “who” for how these roles become singular. At best, the theories implicate the entire Black community. There is truth to this: Donnor (2005) described the impact Brown v. Board of Education had on educational opportunities for Black youth and how desegregation actually resulted in educational inequity. Hodge et al (2008) followed that from the Brown decision “divergent realities in education and sport” brought about the rise of the HPBA, seeing it as the most likely path to higher education (p. 928). Beamon (2012) and Cooper and Cooper (2015) did not identify (a) specific human target(s) but did implicate a time to focus on: early childhood since Beamon (2012) stated that athletic foreclosure typically solidified by early teenage years.
Johnson and Migliaccio (2009) narrowed the scope to immediate family and/or close community members as the catalyzing push into high-profile athletics. The young men in the four narratives of my study isolated a specific individual early in life who sought to actualize their athletic potential. Johnson and Migliaccio (2009) explained how the Black community and media embrace the HPBA-as-success narrative. But to be able to play at an elite level required more than just a want but the presence of, and coaching from, a mentor to realize one’s ability to become part of that narrative. That is what each man shared in their story: James through a high school gym teacher, David and Devin through their fathers, and Alex through a trusted male figure in the community. Beamon (2012) and Cooper and Cooper (2015)’s work connect internalization, where learners are centered within EST, with ideological beliefs about where Black men succeed, akin to the exosystems and macrosystems of EST. Johnson and Migliaccio (2009) strengthened the assertions of the aforementioned researchers, and the narratives of the four men I studied expounded upon those researchers with a specific person and time.

The four HPBA narratives revealed how the chronosystem, which encompasses life transitions aligned to time—which includes the eventual identity foreclosure of HPBAs as they progress into high school—begins formation when a trusted individual provides guidance toward the actualization of the ideological beliefs espoused in Donnor (2005), and upheld by the communities per Johnson and Migliaccio (2009), about how to succeed as a Black man in the U.S. For example, David could have just remained a fan had it not been for the influence of his father: “My dad was a prolific football player, really good. It was already inscribed in me that I was going to play football.” That statement was key to his pending chronosystem creation. The chronosystem then works reciprocally with societal expectations, as espoused within Beamon (2010; 2012) and Bimper and Harrison (2011). Not only was David mentored through football,
but all subsequent nested environments reinforced this as the correct path, particularly the socialization that Beamon (2010) described. She described an overemphasis on athletics that affected HPBA attitudes related to education (Beamon, 2010). The success of such macro and meso occurrences were dependent upon the chronosystem stability to make such socialized beliefs achievable. Another example existed in Alex’s description of the most typical examples of Black male success being athletes, which was also identified as socialization tool by Beamon (2010). This exosystem representation of Black male success was corroborated by his mentors via advice that provided a clear lane to focus on athletics (see Donnor, 2005; Edwards, 1992).

From such guidance, as the young men prepared for college, the inner systems solidified to uphold chronosystem directives, with school becoming primarily a sports setting, and as each young man shared, academics being reduced in value to requiring eligibility by high school graduation. The participants’ stories expounded upon the contextualization of identity foreclosure and socialization as they pertain to HPBAs during the youth, adolescent, and young adulthood stages of their lives as requiring a stable chronosystem to operationalize.

**Life Chapter Two Discussion**

The second life chapter was a response to the second research question: “What are the stories of former HPBAs about their experiences with Division I athletic academic services?” I found that the ecological system created during early adolescence persisted into college through a modified form of mentorship/guidance. When studying the collegiate time period, many HPBA researchers apply critical race theory (CRT) due to its macrosystem scoping for critiques about the systemic racism and exploitation of Black bodies at the hands of the NCAA and its member institutions (see Beamon, 2008; Cooper, 2012; 2019; Hawkins, 2010; Njororai, 2012; Oseguera, 2010; Singer 2005; 2009; for examples). One of the main CRT tenets applied in such studies is
counter-storytelling. The HPBA narratives function as counter-stories and the young men shared life details that aligned with another CRT tenet common to HPBA exploitation: interest-convergence (see DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

The focus on eligibility is the primary example of interest-convergence, defined as when White allyship only converges with Black interests because the matters at hand are explicitly beneficial to Whiteness/White interests, especially financially (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hawkins & Nwadike, 2018). In the narratives, James stated that his basketball team had its own advisor to handle all of their academics needs and make sure they knew how to stay eligible. Cooper, Nwadike, and Macauley (2017) shared that almost 90% of collegiate academic advisors identity as White and these advisors are often functioning in accordance with the wishes of head coaches who, according to the NCAA Research Staff (2018), identify as white 75% of the time for men’s basketball and 89% of the time for football. Alex believed the advisors were “hired by the [athletic] program...to keep you on the field,” upholding white financial interests.

All four young men implicated the larger system implicitly, but without prompting, the meso and micro environments determined their day-to-day lives and were directly influenced by modified but still consistent athletic-first guidance. Interestingly, they did not apply a racism lens to their nested interactions with their advisors, but instead to peer interactions, as was exemplified in anecdotes from Devin and Alex. Stone, Harrison, and Mottley (2012), Donnor (2005), and Sailes (1993) all focused on the impact of racist stereotypes and the threat it caused for HPBAs. And Cooper (2012) also described the racism that exists within the NCAA. However, without being prompted to talk about race in this way, the support typically used to form CRT arguments about the NCAA system were instead spoken about from the perspective of being a high-profile athlete. I believe researchers have been able to make the correlation to race
because the majority of these men do happen to identity and/or be classified as Black and therefore, at a systemic level, are being exploited the most, as espoused in Beamon (2008) in the men describing themselves as “used goods” post-athletics. But internally and interpersonally, the reflections of these young men were about a system that fails high-profile athletes in general.

Singer (2005) and Benson (2000) put forth that institutional racism does permeate academic services, which I do believe to be true, but I suppose their conclusions were derived from how the interview protocols were delivered to the athletes, in ways that made the conversations explicitly about race as opposed to their own analysis. The athletes in my study not directly isolating race makes sense when considering that both Fuller (2017) and Bimper and Harrison (2011) stated that HPBAs who are able to participate at the Division I level of competition cannot and do not separate their racial, athletic, and gender identities. All of those are compiled into the unique identity of being a high-profile athlete who happens to be Black.

Moving on, I received mesosystem confirmation of school as the sports setting that allowed the continued timely mentorship of focus on sports. This came from the coaches and trickled down to the microsystemic advisors creating academic programs founded on doing just enough to pass classes and maintain positionality on teams. CRT research can implicate advisors as willingly part of a corrupt system, but David discussed the difficulty of the advisory position, and not believing them to be bad people but beholden to the system above them. This contradicts interest-convergence arguments and instead aligns with Meyers (2005), Busch (2007), and Schneider, Ross, and Fisher (2010), who all pointed to the advisors in the athletic academic centers as having one of the most difficult jobs in their institutions, having to balance institutional integrity against the competing demands of athletic requirements that often jeopardize HPBA academic welfare. All of the men described advisors who knew they needed to
provide the athletes with flexible and easy-to-pass schedules for the sake of athletic institutional demands. These advisors realized many HPBAs were unprepared for more rigorous course loads, and the athletes confirmed this as opposed to being fully offended by it. Alex entered college wanting to be an engineering major and realized he was academically underprepared and would not be able to maintain the schedule needed to succeed in the major. David’s attempts at engineering led to the same fate. This understanding helped me separate the advisors from the coaches. The advisors were at the microsystem; the coaches were chronosystemic forces at the collegiate level, sustaining the precedence of sport first.

So, while institutional racism within the NCAA is undeniable (see Cooper, 2019; Hawkins, 2010), the young men’s perspectives were that what was happening was connected to the high-profile athlete world that just so happens to have a Black majority. This does not deny the importance of CRT in this area of research but does suggest that there tends to be an all-in-one race-based response to what these men are connecting to the intersection of being Black, male, and part of a Division I high-profile athletic program. This also implies that the racism of the system is not fully clear until college competition, likely connected to increased awareness of the revenue generated as members of high-profile teams (see Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016).

Alex and David explicitly tied their experiences to systemic limitations NCAA coaches put in place, via the chronosystem, that influenced advisors and sustained the coaches' practices. The chronosystem handoff from K-12 to college mentors began at recruitment when Alex explained the process of coaches coming into HPBA homes and, especially if not seeing a clear father figure around, exploiting that gap to convince the remaining parental figure(s) that, “Okay, I'm sending my child in good hands.” The HPBA at that time believes this too, and therefore, will continue within the chronosystem with this new mentor figure. Now, uncovering the
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

interest-convergence intent, the former HPBAs understands the “new plantation” as described by Hawkins (2010) in linking to systemically racist intentions at the collegiate level. But that was not the young men’s view of their advisors. They still implicated their advisors in not providing them with the proper college academic experience to prepare them for post-college non-athletic life but attributed that to advisor directives about upholding the business of high-profile sports in college (Knights Commission, 2010; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). CRT is then used to nuance the argument to reveal Black male exploitation (see Beamon, 2008; Cooper, 2019).

For a final example, consider, as shared in the literature review, O’Shaughnessy’s (2011) survey of Division I high-profile athletes that found that basketball players and football players spend an average of 39.2 hours and 43.3 per week, respectively, on their sport while in season, and Lederman (2003) finding multiple athletic programs that clustered high-profile athletes into the same majors for simplicity, flexibility, and competition eligibility. Neither of these studies were exclusive to HPBAs. However, when racial saturation is considered, exploitation of Black bodies is obvious (see Harper, 2018; Hawkins, 2010; Lapchick et al., 2018). This level of dedication and time commitment started with earlier mentorship, especially highlighted in David and Devin’s stories with their fathers and Alex’s additional time in the weight room in high school. Working in tandem with the macrosystemic beliefs, it is possible that it is just easier to maintain such an identity and dedication in Black males.

Life Chapter Three Discussion

After uncovering K-16 experiences, the final research question asked, “What recommendations do former HPBAs have for athletic academic services based on their experiences?” The HPBAs were instructed to respond to this question only after reflecting on their life once they were removed from the high-profile sport system. The assumption was that
post-college, the HPBAs had the distance necessary to become aware of the ecological system that had unknowingly defined their formative years. Instead, it seemed that they were still unaware of the childhood chronosystem formation. I purport that this is due to the continued positive relationship they have with the original men that established their chronosystems compared to the more negative perceptions they have of collegiate mentorship when it comes to their experiences in the nested systems. This contextualizes the findings of Hawkins (2010), Singer (2009), and especially Beamon (2008; 2012) in recognizing miseducation once removed from high-profile sport. But they missed that the collegiate chronosystem was a continuation from childhood that maintained stability via the K-12 to postsecondary life transition via new mentorship. With their families, there was no interest-convergence, but collective thoughts toward upward mobility (Edwards, 1992). I believe such was an unfair pressure to place on children. Edwards (1992) identified Black parents as four times more likely than white parents to view sports as a career path and the family pressure directly correlated with under-prioritizing of academics. Beamon (2012) then explained how this re-prioritization made athletic identity foreclosure virtually inevitable. So, while the macrosystem is promoting the HPBA ideology to Black men, it is time for athletic mentors of Black youth address Edward’s (1992) question, which I relate to initial chronosystem development, about whether the Black community is putting too much emphasis on sports.

Until then, K-12 mentorship will remain positively viewed while postsecondary mentorship will continue to be seen as exploitive even though the handoff to the exploitive system requires the positive one first. And it remains successful: at no point did any of the former HPBAs ascribe any blame to the male mentors of their youths who introduced them to sport, but they could easily see how the collegiate coaching staff that they may have once seen as
mentors were now examples of the individuals, described in Hawkins (2010), who subscribed to the athletic-superiority-academic-inferiority belief when recruiting HPBAs.

Without implicating the chronosystem initiators, the HPBAs instead increased their personal accountability. I find this to be the great success of the HPBA ecological system. If the foundational chronosystem can stay hidden and/or continue to be viewed positively, then the rest of the system can be upheld. Calls for reform are usually found in anti-deficit research, such as the studies of Oseguera (2010) and Bimper, Harrison, and Clark (2012), to identify paradigms that successful HPBAs follow in order to instill those values in the HPBAs that are most susceptible to athletic identity foreclosure. But I found that even the success stories were motivated by trying to not be examples of macrosystem stereotypes. And when mentorship is discussed in research, it is from a positive lens, such Cooper’s (2019) Purposeful Participation for Expansive Personal Growth model (P2EPGM) or the holistic development support program described in Cooper et al. (2018), because mentorship should be positive.

So, I agree with such programs instilling the confidence and skill sets in HPBAs that they can change their circumstances, even from within the system. But I still argue that the foundation of the system must change, and I believe that to be how mentorship occurs at the chronosystem. Otherwise, the task will remain as it is now: undoing the level of personal culpability that HPBAs feel as was reflected in their recommendations. Devin put the onus on himself to figure out how to have never let the lights go out on caring about academics instead of making that at least partially the responsibility of his father who brought him into the sport and placed practice above schoolwork, countering his mother’s wishes.

This line of discussion is not to blame or shame, just to implicate all parties, because his father was in a reciprocally responsive relationship with the placement of Black men in
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

American life. Hodge et al. (2008) expressed this sentiment in the below-50% high-school graduation rate of Black men. Sailes (1993) found this ideology to be so strong that white peers believed in the intellectual inferiority of their Black classmates. Edwards (1992) described how such beliefs were so instilled in the Black community that too many of the males felt compelled to abandon education towards athletic routes to success. Acceptance of Black male placement at the bottom is integral to the success of interest-convergence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). And that macrosystem depends on early HPBAs mentors initiating the young men into this route in life (see Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). So, while the former HPBAs were eventually able to see NCAA faults, they remained unable to see how early athletic mentorship keeps the NCAA system active in a relationship between K-12 and postsecondary chronosystems. This left them presenting recommendations such as learning to hold themselves more accountable for not being students (James, Devin, and Alex), being more proactive about finding on-campus resources (Alex and David), asking advisors to learn to mitigate HPBA athletic tunnel vision (James), and asking coaches to be more transparent in their intentions from the outset (Alex). No advice went to childhood mentors because HPBA life was and is seen as part of Black culture (see Donnor 2005; Edwards, 1992; Hodge et al., 2008; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009).

“Overtime”: Implications for Future Public Sociology

In the findings chapter, “Overtime” was generated from an analytical summary of an HPBA recommendation after considering life experiences. Therefore, it feels appropriate to continue that conceptualization by considering recommendations based on what was discussed above. I ground my beliefs in the need for more public sociology, since it is essential to change, particularly at the outermost ecological level that starts at home/in the community. I wanted my findings to serve multiple purposes. I sought to deepen scholarly and public understanding of the
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

HPBA experience towards how the system remains as is even though it continues to fail these Black men academically. The presentation of the findings intended to blend scholarly and narrative writing in a way that demonstrated the possibility for more accessible academic writing that contributes to the field while informing the public of pertinent professional knowledge. This purpose was in response to Zdravomyslova’s (2008) general tension between professional and public sociology, with the former intended to uncover social problems while allowing scholars to stay at a distance from the public they are explaining while the latter requires civic engagement to not only instill understanding in everyday people, but also facilitate justice for the problems that sociologists have a research-informed understanding of. Cooky (2017) called public engagement of sport sociologists a “moral imperative” (p. 1). Burawoy (2005) nuanced how professional and public sociology are both necessary and should complement one another.

Cooky (2017) asked, “What obligation do we have to translate our research in ways that provide necessary context and render academic legitimacy for those voices that continue to be silenced and for those voices that are dismissed?” (p. 7). Some sport researchers, particularly those studying HPBAs and understanding the dire need for change, believe there is a strong obligation, including Adler and Adler (1991), Comeaux (2015), Cooper (2019), Edwards (1969; 1979; 1992), Gill (as cited by Salinas, 2014 and Schere, 2014), Hawkins (2010), and Singer (2019). But the productions usually lean more one way or the other—professional or public—as opposed to the complementary balance Burawoy (2005) put forth. In producing HPBA research that combines the two approaches, the theoretical validation and empirical support should strengthen belief in the counter-stories and steadfastness in the advocacy needed. In Salinas (2014), Dr. Gill, a prominent HPBA researcher, social worker, and activist, stated that, “At the end of the day, there’s no one out there advocating for student-athletes and that’s the void we’re
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

trying to fill” (para. 4). There are people advocating, but when it mostly exists in scholarly circles, those who could benefit from the knowledge are excluded from its receipt. And public sociology without the professional credentials can be written off as unsubstantiated opinion. Together, the case for change is stronger and more widespread. It maintains scholarship quality while opening up the much-needed advocacy partnership to a broader audience.

Examples of this type of partnership are cropping up more in public-yet-reputable forums such as CNN and the New York Times, particularly when considering 2019’s “The 1619 Project,” an ongoing project developed by The New York Times that counters the normalized narrative of American slavery by re-examining its legacy 400 years after the first enslaved Africans arrived in Virginia (Hannah-Jones, 2019). The counter-story’s inclusion in The New York Times Magazine exemplifies its intention to be publicly accessible, yet the magazine ensured its scholarly quality, confirming that the project was deeply researched and that presented arguments were verified by a team of fact checkers and historians (Silverstein, 2019). Such a project shows the value of the professional-public sociological marriage, with “The 1619 Project” recently becoming a mandated part of the English and Social Studies curriculum for grades 7-12 in Buffalo Public Schools in Buffalo, NY (Buffalo Schools, 2020). This adoption reflects research being transformed into storytelling, advocacy, and tangible action. I recommend for HPBA researchers to believe in the same effects for tangible change. After writing about the same issues for years and seeing little change, it is time for a bolder step.

The profession-public balance does not only have to be delivered in written form. There are examples of HPBA-centric documentaries that one could argue attempt the combination of professional and public sociology, such as Schooled: The Price of College Sports (2013) and State of Play: Trophy Kids (2013). I would argue that both of these lean more towards public
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

sociology, and therefore could have detractors argue against what is portrayed. A stronger, though non-HPBA, example would be *13th* by Ava DuVernay (2016). The documentary explores the intersection of race and mass incarceration in a way that demonstrates not an end, but simply an evolution, to the enslavement of Black people in the U.S. Balancing professional and public sociology, the film includes interviews with well-known public, political, and scholarly figures such as Angela Davis, Bryan Stevenson, Van Jones, Newt Gingrich, Cory Booker, and Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr., who provide the validation required to defend the arguments that DuVernay makes without them being relegated to her opinions. Like “The 1619 Project” (2019), *13th* (2016) was a collaboration between scholars and public figures who rallied around sharing a counter-story to promote change. So, whether in writing, film, or another source, I recommend the HPBA research community join in on similar collaborative work towards producing critiques the public can engage with as we continue to promote change.

Regarding my study, my recommendation for the professional-public sociology approach would be to focus on the importance of mentorship that was uncovered as a prominent aspect of the HPBA story. In promoting advocacy and maintaining the integrity of why I chose to share narratives (i.e. to counter what is commonly believed about HPBAs), I would recommend the professional-public research entail an anti-deficit lens, focusing on what mentorship could and/or should look like if performed in a way that leads to academic success. Anti-deficit research is based on understanding academic achievement, despite opportunity gaps, for students of color by exploring three major pipelines: a) precollege socialization and readiness, b) college achievement, and c) post-college persistence (Harper, 2010). These are the same three pipelines that encompasses the life chapters covered in my narratives and would be prime for creating anti-deficit companion pieces of athletes that persevered because of early mentorship that highlights
and demonstrates how to actualize academic success in K-16 (and beyond). There is anti-deficit research that exists in the HPBA field (see Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012; Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010; Oseguera, 2010), but in the vein of the communal effort of “The 1619 Project” (2019) and 13th (2016), I recommend a collection of HPBA researchers and high-profile sports figures (e.g. professional athletes or commentators) investigate the childhood guidance that successful HPBAs had and share that widely to define an HPBA model that would promote academic success and can be used in mentorship as an intervention en route to systemic change.

**Conclusion**

Within the findings chapter, the synthesis of the four HPBA stories provided more specificity to the original HPBA athletic-academic theory model, helping to differentiate how it is experienced during K-12, postsecondary, and post-collegiate life. The general construction of the ecological system remains the same throughout their lives, but as the men moved through the three main life chapters, there are chronosystemic modifications, especially as high-profile athletics takes on greater revenue-generating possibility at the post-secondary level. Early in their K-12 years, the young men were introduced to the sport that would eventually dominate their lives, at least through college. They became inducted into its lifestyle by the end of middle school and accepted it as a main facet of their identities early into their high school years, foreclosing on athletic identities before college entry. By the time they entered their Division I institutions, athletic involvement not only defined who they were, but also how they would be seen, treated, and handled. As a result, their college experiences were replete with academic injustices that exacerbated any preexisting under-preparation for college.

By the conclusion of their collegiate athletic eligibility, they had internalized some of the systemic beliefs as personal blame, holding themselves accountable for certain misgivings that
could have been avoided by earlier academic intervention/redirection. Post-HPBA life, the young men became aware that they had been engulfed in a exploitative system and there were individuals and institutions at fault for their mis- and under-education: miseducation via limiting ideological beliefs about ways to be successful as a Black man and under-education as K-12 students who were ushered through the eligibility-focused high-profile-athlete way of education. With this new insight, they had hoped things may not necessarily change quickly, but that there at least should be more awareness-raising for incoming HPBAs. However, the narratives explicitly made it necessary to increase attention to the overwhelming importance of mentorship in establishing and maintaining athletic-first paths.

Very early during K-12 education, all four former HPBAs discussed athletic initiation via an important male figure or figures in their lives and either that same or similar figures influenced their steadfastness in high-profile athletics. The influence of this mentorship was consistent without an equally sustained academic counterpart and consequently, the young men were primed to succumb to athletic identity foreclosure and the HPBA ecological system. The negative effects of the system were often unnoticed by the young men until the post-collegiate period, leaving feelings of confusion at best and resentment at worst. But there was some hope found in two of the athletes who were able to find strong academic mentorship towards the end of their athletic careers. While still confused and hurt, the two HPBAs’ transitions were eased by the academic mentorship as they prepared for post-collegiate life. This led to my consideration of the potential to upend the current ecological system with such academic mentorship throughout HPBA life. The mentorship just mentioned happened at the meso and micro levels (Cooper, 2019); what I have discussed in this chapter is to hope for such mentorship at the foundational
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

chronosystem level. As Alex stated in his narrative, this could “[switch] the story from a story of defeat, to a story of triumphant, success, and accomplishment.”

The last several decades of HPBA research have led to the conclusion that despite student-athlete specific academic resources, the fact that HPBAs continue to post the lowest academic performance must be considered a systemic injustice not the fault of the young men themselves. These young men bring in the majority of the high-profile sport revenue and therefore HPBA researchers believe the HPBAs are owed more from the system they uphold financially than it currently provides them. As the high-profile system has seemingly remained immune to the widespread change necessary to improve the academic outcomes for these young Black men, I considered whether part of the stagnation was in the typical approach to the research. Therefore, I sought to explore opportunities to bridge the professional realm of academia with more publicly accessible advocacy, hoping that a larger reach could catalyze the widespread change, including that needed from future chronosystem initiators.

I employed narrative inquiry in order to share four narratives representing individuals from three different institutions, curious to see where and how their life stories would converge between K-12, college, and post-college life. From this, I uncovered the core influence of guidance figures and how they are the crux of the HPBA ecological system. The system was interpreted through connections to the major theories and research relevant to the HPBA population. From my interpretations, I concluded the uniqueness of the HPBA experience must be shared in ways that increase public awareness of HPBAs’ truths via full stories supported by scholarly validation. This approach would also give the men the opportunity to share their analyses of their experiences in ways that suggests a path forward, which I synthesized into a call for a change in early mentorship to redefine the HPBA ecological system before being consumed
by the one currently in place. What this should look like, I ask other HPBA researchers, and former HPBAs, to consider in future work.

Professional-to-public sociology has a place in HPBA research, but it is not yet the norm, arguably because of the tension between upholding the academic value of high-level empirical research versus a need for social partnership that would require adapting scholarship for the layperson. There are examples of this to varying degrees of success in HPBA research, but the most promising approaches I have seen are outside the field in the forms of the New York Times Magazine’s “The 1619 Project” (2019) counter-narrating the story of American slavery and its continued impact and 13th (2016) providing a counter-narrative about the evolution of the American slavery system, as opposed to its abolition, through mass incarceration. Both examples required the partnership of public and expert. The success of “1619” has led to it beginning to be adapted into public-school curriculums and 13th has helped re-conceptualize the public view of what mass incarceration is and who it serves, with the conversation continuing several years later and increasing the number of prison abolitionists. Both examples required a vision to turn research to advocacy. The opportunity is there, and I hope for the stories I shared to be part of a collective effort to do more of the same towards a level of change that can shift the athletic and academic experiences of the next generations of HPBAs towards sustained positive outcomes.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Subjectivity Statement

I am a product of public schooling for K-12 in an urban environment with under-resourced schools. I understand the strength of environmental influence, and I cannot pretend that I was always immune to this, but I was blessed with mentors to keep me on an academic track. This was especially the case of my relationship with my AP English Language teacher. He became more mentor than teacher and is the very reason I believe in the impact of mentorship on a student’s life. He shaped not only the student I became, but the type of mentor I strive to be.

As someone who has worked as a teacher in public schools and a collegiate athletic counselor, I also understand the systemic barriers that affect the levels of success for many students of color, especially those who identify and/or are classified as Black. There is no cultural responsiveness in the way the current system is set up. It is based on a White hegemonic view of education which often relegates Black students to not as worthy of the same levels of success, especially Black men. That is, unless, they decide to pursue athletic careers. This leads to guidance to just do well enough in school to be eligible for athletic scholarships. Higher education in and of itself is not the goal; it’s a way towards professional play. I have five older brothers, and the athletic path was imparted upon all of them. The one brother who had, and still retains, his primary athletic identity was guided by early sustained athletic mentorship and athletic success that supported continuing along this path. While he was lucky to be able to make it professionally, he does speak to being regretfully at times now, wishing he did more in school. I was bothered by the self-blame, knowing that it was a systemic issue, not his fault.

I knew this because while I worked as a college athletic academic advisor, I became almost as jaded as I was while teaching high school seniors. Though I tried to impart innovation into my advisory methods, I was still confined to the expectations and directives of the high-profile athletic system. But as one of the only certified educators (because of my teaching certificate) who worked with the football team, I had a different perspective compared to the rest of my coworkers. I saw was a cracked system with people either having gotten used to the cracks and/or refusing to repair them. Just like in high school, students are blamed instead of the system that was set up without their input or without their true academic success in mind. And the blame belongs to all parts of the system, including the adults who have succumbed to accepting it.

With this in mind, when I read, research, or study anything involving Black male education, especially the education of HPBAs, I know I approach the texts with inherent biases related to my experiences. Outside of the academic bubble, I feel like an anomaly in my faith in the academic capabilities of HPBAs. But even in academia where HPBA research revolves around critiquing the system and empathizing with the population, I still feel as though there is a gap in what to do to create tangible systemic change.
Appendix B: IRB Approval

DATE: January 22, 2019
TO: Joseph Cooper, Ph.D.
    Educational Leadership
FROM: Akuoma Nwadike
    Student Researcher
RE: Pamela I. Erickson, Ph.D.
    Chair, Institutional Review Board
    FWA #00007125
    Protocol #: H18-282 “Leveraging their Stories: Uncovering the Academic Needs of
    High-Profile Black Athletes”
    Funding Source: Unfunded
    Approved: January 22, 2019

On January 17, 2019, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that the protocol required
modifications to secure approval. Those requirements were met and the IRB approved this protocol on
January 22, 2019. The research presents no more than minimal risk to human subjects and qualifies for
expedited approval under category #7 - Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior
(including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language,
communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview,
focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Enclosed please find the validated consent form. A copy of the approved, validated consent form (with
the IRB's stamp) must be used to consent each subject.

All investigators at the University of Connecticut are responsible for complying with the attached
IRB “Responsibilities of Research Investigators.”

Modifications: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent
forms, the investigators, or funding source, or any other change that may affect risk to participants,
please submit the changes in writing to the IRB using the Amendment Review Form (IRB-3). The
IRB must review and approve all modifications must prior to implementation.

Audit: All protocols approved by the IRB may be audited by the Research Compliance Monitor.

Please keep this letter with your copy of the approved protocol.

Attachments:
1. Validated Consent Form

Office of the Vice President for Research
Research Compliance Services
438 Whitney Road Extension, Unit 1248
STORRS, CT 06269-1248
phone 860.486.8602
fax 860.486.1044
compliance.uconn.edu

An equal opportunity employer
2. Validated Audio Release Consent
3. Validated Recruitment Material
4. Validated IRB-1 Study Protocol
5. Validated IRB-1 Expedited eForm
6. “Responsibilities of Research Investigators”
Appendix C: Validated Consent Form

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

UCONN
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

Principal Investigator: Dr. Joseph Cooper
Student Researcher: Akuoma Nwadike
Study Title: Leveraging their Stories: Uncovering the Academic Needs of High-Profile Black Athletes

Overview of the Research

You are being asked to provide consent to participate in a research study. Participation is voluntary. You can say yes or no. If you say yes now you can still change your mind later. Some key points to consider are summarized in this overview, but you should consider all of the information in this document carefully before making your decision. This research is being done to figure out the academic needs of high-profile Black athletes (i.e. the young Black men who participate at the highest level of Division I revenue-generating sports of men’s basketball and football) by exploring the factors underlying academic underperformance. Sought out stories will predominantly focus on interactions within their former athletic academic center. To address this purpose, we seek insights from those who can represent the population of interest but also have the time and distance to provide a retrospective understanding of their former circumstances.

Participation will involve approximately 3 hours of your time, over the course of two interview sessions (approximately 90 minutes per interview), one per week for two consecutive weeks. You will be asked to provide your story in three areas: your life history as it pertains to your identity as a student-athlete throughout your K-12 years, detailed experiences of your collegiate academic life, especially as it relates to athletic academic services, and your reflections and takeaways about these past experiences from your current point-of-view. You will be interviewed one-on-one by the student researcher, either in-person or via a video chatting platform. Your interview will be audio recorded for transcription and adaptation in the study.

There are no severe risks associated with participation in this study, especially because of your anonymity. The most common minimal risks are discomfort when detailing some story elements, which may bring up memories thought to be forgotten, or lead to understandings and reflections not previously encountered; some of the topics may cause you to feel upset. This is a new study, so it is possible that there are unknown risks, but it is unlikely that they will get any more severe than what is mentioned.

While you may not benefit directly from the study, incoming and possibly even current high-profile Black athletes may benefit from the research’s outcomes. It is geared towards building their direct educational needs into the supplemental services they receive. This could affect the
NCAA policies that guide how recruiting and Division I athletic academic services are carried out. A more detailed description of this research follows.

**Introduction**

You are invited to participate in a research study to provide the data that can lead to understanding the academic needs of high-profile Black athletes while they are enrolled in college and prepare them for post-collegiate life outside of sport. You are being asked to participate because you are a former high-profile Black male athlete who can speak to the academic happenings within Division I athletic academic centers including experiences, relationships, and expectations vs. realities.

**Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this research study is to uncover the academic needs of high-profile Black athletes by exploring their relationships and experiences within their athletic academic centers and what these uncover about their overall academic outcomes. We are conducting this study because as current educators and researchers, and with the student researcher also as a former athletic academic advisor, we are intimately invested in uncovering the best ways to improve academic outcomes in the high-profile Black athlete community. We believe the answer lies within the community, within your stories, and we want to utilize a bottom-up approach to catalyze and sustain academic change.

**What are the study procedures? What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to tell your story in two parts guided by topic-based questions. During the first interview, you will focus on your academic life history prior to entering college. We want to know about you as a student-athlete during your K-12 years from two standpoints. First, we want you to guide us through your story from a school-based perspective; then we want to hear about your experiences during this time period as it relates to your home life and neighborhood. The second topic of the first interview focuses on the college years, particularly your experiences in the athletic academic center. After a week of reflection time, we will revisit your story to reflect and look into the deeper meaning of your narrative. To recap, here is the interview structure:

- **Interview 1:** summarized life history as student-athlete in and outside of school during K-12, and detailed experience of your student-athlete life at the collegiate level, specifically with the athletic academic center in mind
- **Interview 2:** Reflect, make meaning, and consider desired takeaways for your audience

Each interview should not take more than 90 minutes of your time. They will be conducted preferably via video chat. Nonverbal communication is important to a story and assists with its telling, so seeing you is important. If video chat is unavailable to you, audio alone (via telephone call) is fine as well. Either way, only audio will be recorded. You can be wherever you want when you tell your story, as long as the location allows for privacy, and it will take place at a time that is mutually convenient. The desired time between the interviews is 7 full days, but ultimately, they just have to happen in different weeks, e.g. a Thursday of one week and a
ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES

Tuesday of the next. Interviews will take place from the beginning of February until mid-March. Sign-ups will be required as no more than two interviews will happen in the same week.

In order to participate, there are a few screening requirements. You must:

- Self-identify primarily as Black and be able to explain how and why you identify this way; your reasoning does not have to be elaborate or in-depth, just understandable
- Have participated in men’s basketball or football at the FBS level (exceptions may be made for men’s basketball players from certain FCS schools)
- No longer be a Division I student-athlete in any capacity
- Not be greater than 5 years removed from college
- Have been admitted specifically for athletic purposes on a full athletic scholarship
- Have been designated as a special admit and/or a “C” student upon entry
- Had steady interaction with your athletic academic center

Your stories will be audio recorded for me to personally transcribe with pseudonyms and fake location names that do not contain any parts of your real name or school’s name for confidentiality. Your audio recordings will be rerecorded by volunteers so that clips may be used for research and/or presentation purposes without impeding on your privacy. The rerecordings will use the transcriptions that include the pseudonyms and fake location names. When data is coded for analysis, your privacy will again be protected by avoiding the use of numbers that may reveal your identity (e.g. no parts of your phone number of former jersey number).

You will be contacted three times after your interviews:
1. To review your transcription for accuracy (no more than 4 weeks after your final interview)
2. To review my analysis and findings for general understanding and agreement (towards the end of February)
3. To ask if you want a copy of the completed study (towards the end of April)

You are free to contact us, and expect a response within a reasonable time period, any time between your initial signing of the consent form and our final contact with you in April.

What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?

This is not a study intended to be accompanied by risks or inconveniences. The most common risks are discomfort caused by retelling parts of your story if they are sensitive; you may become emotional during storytelling and/or reflection. While we cannot know all of the potential risks, we feel confident that little to no outside inconvenience or risks should come your way. Any potential negative backlash is minimized through pseudonyms, fake location names, and having volunteers rerecord your transcriptions to avoid any vocal recognition from outside parties.

What are the benefits of the study?

You may not directly benefit from this research. However, we hope that your participation in the study may lead to the improvement of the supplemental academic services offered to high-profile
Black athletes within the athletic academic centers in the future. It should also inform recruitment and needs upon student-athlete entry.

**Will I receive payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?**

There are no costs and you will not be paid to be in this study.

**How will my personal information be protected?**

The researchers will keep all study records on a secure drive of the student researcher’s personal computer that is password protected in a password-protected folder as well as in a password-protected external drive; only the student researcher have access to both of these. The coded data will be stored in a separate password-protected folder on the student researcher’s personal computer as well as secondarily on a password protected external drive. The coded number(s) assigned to each participant is the way we will match original to coded data. The original files will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study. Only coded files will be retained indefinitely, and that is the only way data will be shared with others not on the research team. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations.

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

You should also know that the UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Research Compliance Services may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, but these reviews will only focus on the researchers and not on your responses or involvement. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

**Can I stop being in the study and what are my rights?**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. Additionally, during interviews, you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer. It is also possible to be withdrawn from the study if you do have a strong adverse reaction during your storytelling.

**Whom do I contact if I have questions about the study?**

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, (Dr. Joseph Cooper, 860-486-0204) or the student researcher (Akuoma Nwadike, 201-344-9042). If you have any questions.
concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 860-486-8802.

**Documentation of Consent:**
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Signature:</th>
<th>Print Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature of Person Obtaining Consent</td>
<td>Print Name:</td>
<td>Date:</td>
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Appendix D: Validated Recruitment Letters

Participants Wanted for a Research Study

Leveraging their Stories: Uncovering the Academic Needs of High-Profile Black Athletes

This research study seeks to uncover the academic needs of high-profile Black athletes (i.e. those who participated in men’s basketball and football at the highest level of NCAA Division I play) by exploring the relationships and experiences they had within athletic academic centers and see how those stories connect to academic shortcomings.

To address this purpose, insights must come from those who can represent the population of interest. Participation only requires about 3 hours of your time: 2 60-90-minute interviews spread across 2 weeks. You will share your story relating to your history as a student-athlete in K-12, your experiences in college as they pertain to the athletic academic center, and your reflections on these events now that you are removed from the setting.

Participation requires all of the following:

- **Male who self-identifies as Black**
- Previous participation in men’s basketball or football at the FBS level (exceptions may be made for men’s basketball players from certain FCS schools)
- **No longer a Division I student-athlete in any capacity**
- Not greater than 5 years removed from college
- **Have been admitted specifically for athletic purposes on a full athletic scholarship**
- Have been designated as a special admit and/or a “C” student upon entry
- Had steady interaction with your athletic academic center

To learn more, contact Akuoma Nwadike at akuoma.nwadike@uconn.edu

*This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Joseph Cooper, Department of Educational Leadership, Sport Management Program*
Facebook/Twitter friends, I need your assistance!

Are you a former (graduated within the last 5 years) Division I (FBS) men’s basketball or football player? Do you identify as Black? Are you acquainted with such individuals? If so, this message is for you!

I am recruiting participants for my dissertation study about the academic needs of high-profile Black athletes in FBS Division I institutions. The detailed criteria for participation and a brief summary of the study are listed in the attachment below. If they apply to you, and/or you are acquainted with anyone who fits the criteria, contact me and/or share with them before the end of January. I’m looking to get started at the beginning of February. If you have any other questions about the study, contact me as well. Thanks!
Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Principal Investigator: Dr. Joseph Cooper
Student Researcher: Akuoma Nwadike
Protocol Version # and/or Date: E18-763
Study Protocol Title: Leveraging their Stories: Uncovering the Academic Needs of High-Profile Black Athletes

Sample Interview Protocol

Narrative inquiry if often guided using topic-based questions in order to focus on interviewee-oriented responses. Each question starts with some variation of “Tell me your story of...” The questions are semi-structured at best, but mostly unstructured, with probing questions guided by story details. With that in mind, there isn’t a static interview protocol. But, adapting Seidman’s (2005) method for in-depth phenomenological interviewing, I will generally seek to retrieve stories around three topics.

Topic 1: Life Histories
- Briefly tell me your student-athlete story as it relates to your K-12 life. If it helps, you can separately focus on your student/academic story and your athletic story and bring them together when relevant.
- Briefly tell me your student-athlete story as it relates to your pre-collegiate life at home and in your neighborhood. Include any other relevant cultural or social factors.

Topic 2: Details of Specific Experience(s) of Interest
- Briefly tell me your story of being a student-athlete in your Division I institution, particularly as it relates to academics.
- In as much detail as possible, tell me your stories around your experiences within the athletic academic center. Include stories as they relate to your relationship with your athletic academic advisors and your tutors when applicable.

Topic 3: Reflection and Meaning-Making
- Tell me your story and reflections about how you felt as a student as you transitioned out of your institution.
- From all of the stories you have shared with me, what are your major takeaways and/or what would you want your audience to hold onto the most?
REFERENCES


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ADVOCATING FOR HIGH-PROFILE BLACK ATHLETES


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