Academic achievement vs. athletic triumph: a study of the goal aspirations of African American male student-athletes at a large Midwestern university

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Academic achievement vs. athletic triumph:
A study of the goal aspirations of African American, male student-athletes
at a large, Midwestern university

by

Donnell Lamont Bivens

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Education (Higher Education)

Major Professor: Dr. J. Herman Blake
Dr. Florence Hamrick
Dr. Gary Tartakov

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2002

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This is to certify that the master's thesis of

Donnell Lamont Bivens

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine the goal aspirations of African-American, male student athletes who participated in college football and/or basketball at large, Midwestern institution/Division I. The study focused on issues such as: 1) their perceptions of opportunities related to their futures; 2) identities; 3) cultural isolation, and 4) the academic counseling services provided by the Athletic department.

The research hypothesized that there is a relationship between black, male student-athletes and factors such as: perceptions of opportunities, identity, cultural isolation, and academic counseling which plays an instrumental role in their educational attainment. The study also argues that a perpetual cycle, or phenomenon exists for this same population. Each year thousands of these individuals enter college institutions dreaming of participating on the professional level. Many place much more emphasis on their athletic livelihood, which becomes intrusive to their academic achievement, or college degrees.

The goal for this study is provide a perspective and understanding of the experiences' of Black, male student-athletes who participated in high-revenue sports (e.g. football and basketball). The findings listed in this study are intended to provide recommendations for athletic administration, faculty, coaches, and the student-athletes themselves. These findings may provide a deeper understanding of this population that could result in a much higher matriculation and graduation rate.
CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

In the words of the distinguished African-American author, James Baldwin, "every Negro boy realizes, at once, profoundly, because he wants to live, that he stands in great peril and must find with speed, a thing, a gimmick to lift him out to start him on his way. And it does not matter what that gimmick is" (Baldwin, p.38, 1963). This statement in many ways explains one of the reasons so many African American adolescents pursue the avenue of professional sports with a "blind passion", ignoring their educational possibilities.

Well-known hip-hop artist, Christopher Wallace (A.K.A. the “Notorious B.I.G.”) gained his notoriety as a street poet and hip-hop artists. In this song lyric he demonstrates his ability to clearly articulate the sentiments of many black-male, youth in the urban setting to a melodic beat. In this particular song lyric written by Wallace he states:

“If I wasn’t in the rap-game, I’d probably be knee deep in the crack-game; because the streets are just a pit stop, you either had to sell ‘rock’ (crack cocaine) or have a wicked jump shot.”

Wallace later lost his life in 1996 to gunfire at the age of 25. It is extremely important that educators of all grade levels understand the dismal goal aspirations and mentality of many African-American, male youth who attend America's grade schools, high schools, and universities.

Vast numbers of African American males each year are chasing the dream of becoming sports heroes and becoming economically secure. Some scholars argue that the desire to play professional sports is positive because it requires participation in the college
sports system, which exposes the student athlete to a higher level of education. For many African American men this has not been the case. Sailes (1993a) noted that African American athletes tend to use the educational setting to achieve sports stardom when they should have used sports to achieve an education. Sailes (1996b) also found that many of these student athletes were entering college with no intent of graduating.

This study is an examination of the educational environment that most closely surrounds the student-athlete. More specifically, this study will examine the African American male student athlete and issues related to their perception of opportunities, identities, cultural isolation, and the academic advising or counseling services available to this population. This study will also develop a conceptual understanding of these athletes' attitudes towards and perceptions of academics and the college institution.

The attraction of the athletic scholarship and the ability to possibly play "big time" college sports, in many cases, creates double jeopardy for students who may enter college academically unprepared to handle the course load and a rigorous playing schedule. Many African American male athletes enter college institutions with little inclination toward academics, further jeopardizing their academic potential. For the African American male student athlete, an athletic scholarship provides an excellent opportunity for individuals from humble economic backgrounds to attain a college education and marketable academic/intellectual skills.

The student athlete, at large Division I institutions, exists in a dichotomy of contradicting priorities. A combination of the intense media and fan focus, rigorous practice schedules, and the ideology of becoming a professional athlete perpetuate an environment in
which classroom success is secondary. Academic achievement is treated as rhetoric, while athletic success is a priority that is placed much higher.

It has been estimated that three million black youth between the ages of 13 and 22 are fantasizing careers as professional athletes, with very little focus on anything else. The odds against their success are 20,000 to 1 (Edwards, 1984).

The dream of becoming professional athletes is so alluring that many ignore the facts and statistics that explain the extremely high failure rate that goes along with chasing this dream. Even if they reach the level of their ultimate goal, careers may be short-lived because of injury, and the high turnover rate of new athletes who come into the professional leagues every year.

In high-revenue producing sports, such as football and basketball, there is extreme pressure on student-athletes to perform on the highest levels while pursuing their degrees. The multitude of distractions, rigorous playing schedules, and intense training can be very intrusive to athletes who come from high school settings that are academically deficient. High-school athletes benefit from a system of unethical practice, which allows them to advance to subsequent grade levels, even if it means unjustified grades and preferential treatment. In many instances, teachers and administrators look the other way in order to keep a star athlete eligible (Lapchick, 1986).

"...There are allegations that college and universities are in the entertainment business, that they mold players and their existence to accommodate that pressure and that demand! All of these circumstances raise questions that deal with academic requirements, recruiting abuses, scheduling abuses, the impact of commercial television, ineffective
sanctions, salary excesses and the ultimate abuse--gambling and cheating that we have witnessed." (Lapchick, 1986, p.5)

Most of the attention has been focused on National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I football and basketball programs. Why NCAA Division I rather than Division II or Division III programs? Why football and basketball programs rather than, say, water polo, fencing, badminton, or field hockey? The answer to both questions boils down to money (Edwards, 1984). For the purpose of this particular study, African American male student athletes involved in the high revenue sports (football & basketball) will be examined.

**Statement of Problem**

Within the amateur intercollegiate athletic ranks, a system exists within the academic realm that preys upon the dreams of these youth, exploiting their athletic talents, and their desire to improve their lives economically.

The underlying issue of concern is the fact that graduation and retention rates are so low for many institutions, whose athletic events are frequently televised, while potential student-athletes enviously watch these high profile sport events.

In 1984, Dr. Harry Edwards estimated that the odds of attaining a professional career in sports are 20,000 to 1 and 65-75% of athletes may never graduate from college. More recent studies indicate that the trend has shifted, 37,500 to 1, that these males will reach the professional level (Barbalais, 1994).
To meet the academic needs of this student-athlete population, many colleges have established an academic counseling system or “Academic Counseling Centers” geared toward the student-athlete. The academic counselor’s intent is to meet the needs of each athlete from an educational standpoint, while trying to develop a personal, working relationship with the athletes.

The responsibilities of the academic counseling service seem to center on finding different ways to acclimate the student athlete to the university setting, while providing tutorial services. In some cases, they take on the same responsibilities as the academic advisor. The academic counselor has a very unique relationship with the student athlete, because of the daily commitment required in many cases. This commitment sets the advisor and counselor apart.

An academic counselor is exposed to the student-athlete much more often, and therefore has the opportunity to have the greatest impact on these individuals. A counselor that is trained to be more aware of the unique circumstances of student-athletes, and the African American males in this case, are more likely to connect with these individuals in an academic setting.

For many African American males receiving athletic scholarships to participate in high profile intercollegiate sports, hope comes in the form of dreams and promises to reach the professional level. This unreliable hope has created a perpetual cycle or "phenomenon" where they ignore other potential career paths. Those who do not attain their dreams to play ball, in some cases, leave their institutions without receiving an adequate college education or a degree.
Several scholars in this area believe this phenomenon has been perpetuated since black athletes were integrated into the college institutions, and more specifically college sports. "This cycle has become pathological and redundant, and continues to attract these black youth" (Edwards, 1984c). Youth spend a large portion of their adolescence dreaming about professional careers and the attractiveness of its superficial nature. Only in the United States are college sports unable to escape the charges that are inherent to marketing and entertainment value, making their presence detrimental to educational goals (Bailey & Littleton, 1991).

This cycle presents the problem of conflicting interests for African American male athletes. One of the primary concerns that surround this issue is that many may be enrolling in college with very little scholastic intent. It can be argued that there is a direct relationship between retention and graduation rates, and scholastic intent. Many of these youth have conditioned themselves to eat, sleep, and breathe their sports in order exceed athletically.

Once more, athletic administrators and NCAA officials acknowledge the fact that the high attrition rate of African American males is an issue of serious concern. Therefore, efforts must continue to be made to improve the status quo for all student-athletes in regards to the academic achievement and graduation.

**Purpose of Study**

The goal of this study is to provide insight, knowledge, and understanding to college institutions and administration, as well as the NCAA, which governs the academic standards and compliance for athletic programs around the country. This study will also reveal
compelling evidence that African American, male student athletes' attitudes and their perception of their opportunities may be directly related to the attainment of their goals and academic success. A continuance of research and awareness surrounding college athletics will also promote the need for adequate assessment in the academic structure and programming for the student-athlete population.

Continuing to build on research and scholarship involving the institution and intercollegiate athletics will hopefully invoke reform towards student-athletes and institutional accountability.

The author's interest in this subject stems from two opposing perspectives. One perspective is derived from personal experience as a student-athlete at a large, mid-western, Division I institution. The second perspective is derived from experience as a graduate student working in academic counseling services within the athletic administration system. The opportunity to develop an understanding of this environment will be instrumental to this research study. Working closely with academic counselors to address the academic needs of the student athlete population gave me a perspective that was very different from that of the student athlete. Observing institutional and administrative side of college sports provided the 'behind-the-scenes' perspective of college sports few student-athletes will ever experience.

This study is a priceless opportunity to examine research and scholarship surrounding my own experience; growing up believing that someday there would be an opportunity to become an important person, after feeling so very unimportant as a youth. Like most children, I spent hours in front of the television, watching my favorite "sports heroes". It would give me chills when I imagined myself in their shoes. Most of my sports heroes were
individuals who looked like me and came from the same background I had come from. I could identify with these individuals because their stories resembled my own.

All children enjoy playing and getting involved in some level of sport. But my motivation was simple. I did not want to be poor anymore, and I believed at an early age that professional sports could help my family financially. As a child, I watched my mother struggle to take care of my sister and me. She would often remind me that I was the man of the house. In my particular case, I simply wanted to provide for my family and show my mother the appreciation I had for her sacrifices.

**Research Questions**

In order to focus this study, the researcher organized themes from the literature to inform research questions to address the issues stated in the problem statement section. The research questions were listed as such: (1) what are some of the main issues or factors that influence African-American, males student-athlete's perceptions of opportunities beyond their college experiences? (2) Is there a relationship between these individuals' identities and how they each view their career paths? (3) As student-athletes, does the isolated, student-athlete culture hinder the educational attainment and achievement of black, male student-athletes? (4) What are some of the views held by these individuals of the academic support system and counseling provided by the Athletic Department?
Significance of Study

This study was designed to guide and inform all those directly or indirectly involved in the educational attainment of the African-American, male student-athlete; those in particular are the Athletic administration, faculty, coaches, student peers, and the student-athletes themselves. The administration may utilize this information to implement adequate policies that directly affect this population. Faculty may use this empirical perspective to improvement student/faculty relationships. Coaches will be equipped with knowledge that will allow them to mentor and monitor the academic progress of each person as an individual. Student peers may be more understanding, and less likely to stereotype these individuals who are still considered minorities on large mostly white campuses. Most importantly, this study will result in an environment that provides all black, male student-athletes with a support system geared toward their achievement beyond sports.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A large portion of the research on African American male student athletes focuses on their alleged academic inability and the need for reform within athletic programs. Researchers (Anderson & South, 1993; Lederman, 1989; Sellers et al., 1991) have centered their studies on retention, attrition and graduation rates of Black student athletes. These studies have examined how Black student athletes are highly recruited for their athletic talents, while exhibiting low graduation rates and high attrition.

However, in this study emphasis will be placed on more specific areas to develop a clear understanding of African American male student athletes and their experiences within the academic institution. One area will focus on how some African American male athletes view potential opportunities, beyond sport. Depending on how student athletes perceive these opportunities, there may be a connection that exists between their perceptions of potential opportunities and identity development. An examination of their levels of identity and self shall bring forth further understanding of the path many have chosen. The phenomenon of cultural isolation will also be examined. Several researchers argue that the environment at many of these large predominantly white institutions, in no way resemble the environments in which many of these African American males are socialized. Finally, research on academic advising for this population will also play a major role in this study.
Perceptions of Opportunities

Sailes (1987) theorized that the economic conditions of individuals from the lower class have a direct impact on their socialization. Because of this socialization, many times these youth pursue dreams of athletic success rather than academic success. Financial success can come very quickly for athletes who advance to professional levels.

Approximately two-thirds of African Americans playing NCAA Division 1-A football or Division I basketball come from impoverished backgrounds (Sailes, 1987). With the idea that professional sports may financially preserve the family structure and positively alter grim economic conditions, many of these youth are socialized in a manner very different from other economic and social groups.

Sailes (1996b) found that social class impacts on the quality of education a person receives and their development of educational values that, in the end, influence educational achievement. Crouse and Thrusheim (1988) found that economically disadvantaged African Americans were educationally disenfranchised as a result of their economic class. They also found that for every increase in family income of $18,000, SAT scores increased by 200 points.

Economic class is a variable that impacts specifically on the sports socialization and value development of African American males (Sailes, 1984). This level of socialization becomes the catalyst that ultimately creates their educational dilemma.
In urban communities, heavily populated by African Americans, many times there are small portions of basic necessities and an overabundance of "poisons" that are readily available to youth, ensuring poverty, imprisonment, and complete failure (Whitman, 1987).

Black families with questionable economic circumstances also perpetuate this phenomenon. Richard Lapchick claims that the black family is seven times more likely to push a male child into sports, than a white family. Many times socio-economic factors and unrealistic goal expectation impacts this form of channeling of black males into sports (Lapchick, 1986a).

"Parents recognize the potential avenue to success and mold their children in the cast of an athlete. Unfortunately, such a course hampers the educational development of these children. When a professional career does not evolve, the cast is taken off revealing an atrophied individual who is ill prepared to survive and vulnerable to breaking under pressure" (Barbalais, 1996, P.2).

For these same youth, an athletic scholarship poses as an excellent opportunity for those who otherwise would not have considered college. Maintaining an above average grade point average and attending college classes for several years is much less attractive than the possibility of playing professional sports.

College athletics, in many ways, becomes a disservice to the African American male student athletes who do not always take advantage of educational opportunities by attaining a college degree. Many researchers have concluded that sports can contribute to educational development among many young student athletes (Harris, 1993). There is evidence that student athletes, overall, perform at higher levels in the classroom than their non-athlete counterparts (Coakley, 1994).
In a study conducted by Harris (1989), it was found that high school student athletes believed that participation in athletics could possibly deliver educational, social, and life-skill benefits and opportunities that would facilitate the transition to purposeful productivity and full-employment later on in their adult lives. Also, high school student athletes recorded higher level of interest in attending college than their counterparts.

For future generations of African American youth in higher education, it becomes very important that education be viewed as an attainable goal that provides meaningful professional careers and economic empowerment. The devaluation of education by members of lower economic status further contributes to lower educational attainment (Hacker, 1992). African American male student athletes with this mindset are perpetuating their own educational demise when they begin to believe that sports are more important than academics.

Edwards (1983) states that African Americans seem to view professional sports as a career avenue that circumvents barriers that may limit them based on their race. This perception is supported by the fact that there is an over-representation of African Americans in professional sports and an under-representation of African Americans in the traditional careers that allow upward mobility. Lapchick (1991) documented that roughly 75% of the National Basketball Association (NBA) and 60% of the National Football League were African American men, while the entire Black United States population was only about 12%. There is no other career avenue where this representation exists for African Americans.

McElroy (1981) also reported that the desire to play professional sports was positive because it encourages participation in the college sport system, which exposes them to higher levels of education. Unfortunately, many student athletes focus so heavily on their athletic
aspirations they do not perform well enough to attain a degree. Some student athletes exploit the college system to get an opportunity to play professional sports, often leaving school a few years early and never returning to complete their degrees.

Gaston's (1986) analysis of Black males and the media found that student athletes perceive professional sports as being a shortcut to the pinnacle of American society. It is assumed that along with the prestige of playing professional sports come money, material wealth, and a high degree of social acceptance. Gaston (1986) further argues that a young black male searching for a place in the dominant society and positive self-identification can turn on the television and witness Black athletes being cheered and admired by fans and reporters. These images make becoming a professional athlete seem like a much more attainable goal than envisioning himself as a medical doctor, lawyer, or professor.

In a study by Hawkins (1995-'96), the author explains that a black student athlete recruited to a predominantly White institution may have only a few, if any, family members who had attended college. This results in a lack of cultural background and educational preparation for the community they are entering. The difference between a black student athlete and a black student non-athlete is that the student non-athlete has a much clearer idea of their goals in relation to education. The black student athlete, meanwhile, may have a priority conflict between the demanding lifestyle of athletics and academics.

A higher percentage of African American males rely on sports to attain economic success and fame than their White counterparts. This perception is most likely a result of the belief that institutional barriers limit employment opportunities among African American males in other career endeavors in American Society (Harris, 1993).
For a large number of African American males, professional sports are assumed to be one of the few allowable and available opportunities for success in a society often viewed as racist and oppressive (Sailes, 1984; Edwards, 1983). This perception is supported by the fact that there is an enormous overrepresentation of African American males in professional basketball, football, and baseball, and in major college football and basketball today. Their resistance to racism and persistence to achieve success in the sports world have not only been exemplified in their over-representation, but also in the changes that occurred in American sports as a result of their participation (Sailes, 1996b).

Robert M. Sellers (1997) from the University of Virginia found that a large number of African American male student athletes were "goal discrepant." The study focused on 702 African American male student athletes from 42 NCAA Division I universities to identify individuals whose professional athletic aspirations were inconsistent with their current status as members of the football and basketball programs. He further asserts that student athletes' expectations of professional sports careers have ignited more debates on policies by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Some critics have argued that current policies deny educational opportunities disproportionately to African Americans (e.g., Johnson, 1989; Sellers, 1993; Walter, Smith, Hoey & Wilhelm, 1987). An examination of goal discrepancy within the context of student athletes' college experiences provides adequate framework from which to study student athletes' career expectations (Kupermic, Sellers, & Thompson, 1996). "The college life experience can be viewed from a social/ecological perspective that encompasses the interplay between personal factors and institutional factors that make up the student athlete's phenomenological experiences (Sellers,
This approach allows for the evaluation of the consequences of goal discrepancy with respect to both academic and general life outcomes.

Braddock (1981) developed the "sports-as-impediment" hypothesis. This hypothesis argues that sport involvement negatively affects African American male student athletes' future attainment. Harris and Hunt (1982) viewed African American student athletes as over-investing themselves in athletics while ignoring other potential skills that would allow social mobility.

The Center for the Study of Athletics (1988) reports more evidence that the sports-as-impediment exists. It was found that African American student athletes participating in college football and men's basketball were twice as likely to expect to play professional sports than other athletes. 44% of these African American Athletes suggested that they expected professional sports careers. In a similar study by Kennedy and Dimick (1987), it was reported that 66% of 38 African American male student athletes felt that professional careers were very likely. In contrast, 39% of the 84 White athletes in this study of student athletes expected professional sports careers. Lapchick (1991) estimated that only about 4% of all African American college football players will make it to the NFL and about 6% of all African American college basketball players will make it to the NBA.
Identity

According to author Margaret J. Barr (1990), the amount of attention centered on the development of persons of color is broadening. Scholarly critics would assert that students of color are similar to other students in the way they formulate their identities. However, these same critics would also admit that many of the fundamental theories on identity development make assumptions about variables such as environment, culture, and backgrounds of students that are erroneous (Ross, 1991). Many of these critics also presume that being raised in a minority culture within the larger society creates different developmental outcomes for minority youth.

Scholars, white and black, have introduced a myriad of perspectives and analyses to explain the status of Black Americans in today's society. In order to completely understand the status of Black Americans an individual analysis of black females and black males must be conducted. Staples (1982) believes that although Black females and males face the same challenges in society concerning inequality, Black males' status bear special note, asserting that:

"In the black community, it is the men who need attending to. They are the ones who are failing in school, losing ground in the labor market to white and black women, filling up the prisons and dying slowly through drugs, alcohol, violence and adventurism" (p.3).

Karenga (1980) explains that many contribute to their own self-destruction by developing "hustler values," characterized by a "high level of myth orientation and grandiose dreams." Many black males develop an attitude of "just getting by, making it and nothing
more." Once these males are outside of the educational realms there is a conflict between their reality and the dominant society. Grier and Cobbs (1976) explain that money making is inextricably connected to manhood in this society. An inadequate education and lack of marketable skills poses a major dilemma for black males in a capitalistic society.

In Signithia Fordham's (1996) research on race and identity she found several interesting discoveries concerning Black students and academic success. "As these students envision their racialized bodies, liquidating the Black Self is vigorously resisted primarily because the existing Black Self, stigmatized by the dominant society, is highly valued by the fictive kinship community. Most of these students view success in school as embodying the construction of "Otherness", and they associate such success with an inevitable degree of Self-alienation. Consequently, their psyches are riddled with conflict and tension" (p.283). In the case of Black student athletes, many are torn because they seek the validation and affirmation of the Black community. They must decide how to succeed in the dominant society, without compromising the Black Self.

Fordham (1996) further explains that underachieving Black students view the school and academics as warfare, "an emboldened attempt to reclaim the appropriated Black Self, to avoid being constructed as (an) ‘Other’ (p.283)." Many of these black students express their resistance to the dominant culture by performing poorly in school.

An individual belonging to an exploited minority group, which is aware of many dominant cultural ideals but is unwilling to emulate them, is bound to blend the negative images depicted in dominant society with the negative identity cultivated in his own group (Erickson, 1968). An example would be the use of the derogatory term "nigga" by one African American male to address another; a term often used in "hard-core" rap lyrics.
Student-athletes may simply underachieve and put forth minimal effort toward their own educational attainment, exhibiting a refusal to conform to the ideals of dominant society.

It is important to understand the impact of the super ego on the social behavior of the individual. "Allied with early introjects, the superego thus remains a rigidly vindictive and punitive inner agency of 'blind' morality (Erickson, 1980)." Youth often lean on their imaginations and perceptions of attainable goals to develop a sense of self-worth. With this in mind, African American males begin "dreaming" and focusing on somewhat unrealistic goals to define the self. These males are identifying with being athletes rather than students, or even student-athletes for that matter.

Grier and Cobbs (1976) reinforce Staples' analysis, in their perspective on the Black man's struggle for manhood. They explain that the black man in this country struggles for more than manhood; he struggles "to feel his own." At the same time the Black male believes that his white counterpart has an "ordained right" to his manhood. The African American male struggles over a never-ending battle to finally possess this level of manhood.

W.E. Cross, Jr. (1995), developed a "Nigrescence" model that views African American youth as individuals that move through stages that reflect their development. A student-athlete development model does not exist, but research involving African American male students and student-athletes share similarities in their educational attainment.

In the first "pre-counter stage," the youth are characterized by a limited level of self-awareness about difference and dependence upon the majority group for a sense of worth and by an attitude toward the world and self, which is generally measured by the majority group.

The second stage (Encounter) is marked by an awareness of differences between the majority group and the minority group, which is many times the result of a symbolic event.
Minority group members seek an understanding of their group's identity based on history from their own group's perspective, and their experience with discrimination.

In the third stage (Immersion & Emersion) of Cross' model, there are two phases. In the Immersion phase individuals begin to develop a sense of "blackness" and "group think"-making efforts to distance their level of identity from whites, culturally. The "Emersion phase" is characterized by less volatile behavior, placing fewer racial boundaries across racial lines. Though many are beginning to acknowledge their "black identities," in this phase these individuals begin to develop interpersonal relationships outside of their own culture.

Internalization, the fourth stage, is more peaceful and calm. At this point, individuals have resolved any conflict regarding their emerging identity. In the final stage, labeled Internalization/Commitment, there are traits of long-term interest, commitment, and the capacity to conceptualize the self beyond the narrow confines of an oppressed identity. The athletic arena provides a stage where many feel a level of social acceptance. For many African American males sports instills a positive sense of self and identity.

In a study by Fleming (1983), African American male youth perceived educational achievement as trying to be white. Signithia Fordham (1996) explains in her writing that in the African American community, "acting white" is generally a label used to communicate the response of African Americans to the institutionalization of norms that are generated and maintained by the larger, dominant society. High-school students in Fordham's study had defined "acting white" as representing the "Other" in presence of Black people (p.22). This ideology creates a paradox for African American males student athletes intent on maintaining their racial identities and achieving academic success.
Black student-athletes are at odds with dual-identities, the black athlete and students. "Education should be a process where black student athletes are able to merge their identities without losing either identity. Thus, obtaining a college education by way of an athletic scholarship should be a balanced exchange. However, this hope has been only moderately fulfilled, and this balanced exchange has not sufficiently benefited black student athletes" (Hawkins, 1995-96, p.28).

W.E.B. Dubois (1961) made a similar claim in his metaphor explaining the "Double-Consciousness" that the Negro in American society lives with daily. "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. xxv). Dubois's words articulate what many African American male student athletes are faced with in the world of athletics. In a society laced with racism and negative depictions of the African American male, these student athletes search for a place to feel important. The African American male student-athlete must identify with being both a student and an athlete. For youth searching for an arena to exert a sense of "self" and unrestrained expression, these two roles become contradictory. Sports will over-shadow academics much more often for African American males because of the importance placed on athletic achievement. Not to mention the level of commitment needed to succeed in either role.

In a study of Black male student athletes, Hawkins (1995-96,p.24) conducts a "colonial analysis" to explain how black athletes (mainly) are being internally colonized by
predominantly White, Division I, NCAA institutions. Hawkins describes the circumstance whereby the black student athlete is perceived to be a marketable resource that is exploited, while the image of blacks being physically superior is reinforced and perpetuated. The black male student athlete is exploited for economic reasons, and at the same time the student athlete subjugates himself. Unfortunately, too many student athletes abandon the opportunity to get an education or earn a college degree. "Many of our student-athletes leave early. When one or two students leave early each year, that compounded over five years doesn't look good," states Karl Mooney, Associate Athletic director for academic Affairs at Texas A & M University (Peoples, 1999).

Gaston (1986) argues there are two major components of contemporary American society that are contributors to the destruction of the current generation of black males--the negative aspect of popular culture and organized sports. Ultimately, the adult Black male frequently finds himself on a fantasy island lacking the skills necessary to succeed in society as a whole. This feeling of inadequacy within mainstream society, many times, restricts the Black male's ability to develop a positive self-concept and economic empowerment necessary in developing constructive social and professional relationships.

In Grier and Cobb's (1976) study on acquiring manhood, the authors state that as young African American males begin to mature into adult men, masculinity becomes more and more connected to the possibility of making money. "In a capitalistic society economic wealth is inextricably interwoven with manhood (p.60).” Beyond the struggle of acquiring manhood, the black male is constantly battling to define himself, as he penetrates barriers and meets adversity in order to assume his masculine posture in American society.
Erickson’s (1980) Epigenesis of Identity describes a stage of adolescent development where by youth begin to look for opportunities to make decisions based on their own free will. "The decisions are often faddish attempts to connect the roles and cultivated skills from early development to the ideal prototypes of the day" (p.128). For African American youth searching for a means of validation in the world, sports becomes an avenue to achieve this level of recognition. Erickson explains further that if these same youth have an imagination or ambition that is unlimited, the advice of elders may be ignored in order to secure their own self-image. "He may resist with the wild strength encountered in animals who are suddenly forced to defend their lives. For indeed, in the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity" (p.130). The inability to establish an occupational identity is disheartening for many adolescent youth. Erickson argues that this encourages youth to over-identify with heroes, almost to a point where their own individuality is lost.

**Cultural Isolation**

Historically, there has been a major shift from Black students attending traditional Black colleges and universities in the South to attending predominantly White colleges and universities throughout the U. S. When World War II began, only 10% of Black college students attended predominantly White institutions (Mingle, 1981). By 1984, 80% of Black students in higher education attended predominantly White institutions (Evans, 1986). This shift in the enrollment of African American students from Black colleges to predominantly
White college institutions resulted in a small number of African American students in each of these large schools all across the country.

Being a minority at a large predominantly White institution creates a feeling of invisibility and a level of cultural isolation for the Black students and student athletes. "The small percentages of Black students and Black student athletes on predominantly White campuses results in a condition of hyper-visibility: they are easily noticed in classrooms and throughout the campus. The irony of this hyper-visibility is that it renders all Black students invisible on predominantly White campuses" (Hawkins, 1995-'96). They become invisible because others refuse to acknowledge them for who they are, or they evolve into a state of invisibility because predominantly White institutions are microcosms of the "American World," as explained by Du Bois (1961) in which "the world yields [them] no true self-conscious, but only let [them] see [themselves] through the revelation of the other world" (p. 16).

Cultural isolation in many ways results in barriers to the academic success of both Black students and Black student athletes. They may wish to be students with equal opportunity at these institutions of higher education, but they are constantly reminded of their "two-ness" or their "double-consciousness" as it was labeled by W.E.B. Dubois (1961). Social separation from the dominant group develops a shield to protect Black students from these two irreconciled strivings (Monroe, 1975).

Studies have shown that the highest drop out rates in higher education for African American students occur within predominantly white institutions. While at the same time African American students fare better socially, personally, and academically at predominantly Black institutions (Allen, 1988; Fleming, 1984). Wilson (1984) explains the
reason is due to traditionally Black institutions offering an atmosphere that is viewed as supportive by African American students in higher education. Wilson (1989) further explains that African American students who graduate from these Black institutions have higher academic aspirations. Wilson (1984) suggests that a weak support system and a lack of information are additional obstacles to higher education for ethnic minorities. The study asserts that one of the biggest problems faced by minorities, overall, is the constant feeling of alienation.

The process of excluding the Black student-athlete from membership in the general campus begins with recruiting procedures (Lapchick, 1986a). A large percentage of White athletic recruits reported they were able to participate in campus social activities during campus visits, while Black athletes stated that there were minimal opportunities to experience campus social activities (Lapchick, 1986a).

Demanding practice and game schedules also limits the opportunity for Black athletes to immerse themselves in the campus community (Lederman, 1989). Lederman further explains that athletic programs "could do more for the athletes say, by giving players time to attend Black Student Alliance meetings or to go to counseling sessions during orientation week."

At this time, there is limited research that addresses how cultural isolation becomes intrusive to the educational experience of black male student athletes. According to Fleming (1984), the "intellectual growth" of Blacks on predominantly White university and college campuses is stunted by the stress of racial tension or "un-accepting environments." Fleming suggests that the environments at predominantly White colleges and universities are, many times, socially discomforting and lack the components to provide for the social and academic
well being of Black students. These can be considered inadequate social settings making it more difficult for Black student athletes to remain at these institutions throughout their entire college experience.

Adler and Adler (1991) found that social settings for Black student athletes on predominantly White campuses involve alienation and isolation. The researchers argue further that racial and socioeconomic barriers separate Black student athletes, and cultural and physical differences set them apart from the general student population.

Besides the fact that these settings are somewhat inadequate, there is also the inability to identify culturally with the predominantly White campus environment. Black students are also either culturally isolated, where Black Culture can only be experienced from special programs or in Black Cultural Centers, or Black Culture is totally repressed by a lack of ethnic representation and minimal culturally diverse programming. Many of these studies do not distinguish between the Black student and the Black student athlete; therefore Black student athletes are assumed by the researcher of the current study to be part of these studies.
Academic Counseling and Black, Male, Student Athletes

In 1986, according to the College Football Association (CFA), only four of 47 member schools (Duke, Notre Dame, Wyoming, and Virginia) who reported the previous year, and three of the 53 in that particular year, graduated 75% or more of their players. A later report from the CFA survey revealed that eight of 53 schools had graduation rates of less than 25% (Lapchick, 1986b).

Peoples (1999) reported that while a number of well-known universities were boasting winning records each year, many of the same schools were also guilty of having the worst graduation rates in the country. At the time that this particular article was published, National Championship bowl contender, Tennessee, had only graduated 15% of the black football players, compared to 48% of their White counterparts. A list of 50 universities in the U.S. with the lowest graduation rates, entitled the "Bottom 50" was constructed in this article.

Other institutions that appear on the same list include Kansas State, graduating 7% Black athletes and 50% of the White athletes; at the University of Florida, 28% of the Black athletes to 59% of the Whites athletes; Texas A & M graduated 20% of the Black athletes and 63% of their White counterparts; and at the University of Arkansas 11% of the Black athletes graduate and 33% of the White athletes (Peoples, 1999). Out of the schools listed for this study, White athletes performed almost 30% better on the average.

The 1998 NCAA Division I Graduation Rates Report finds that there has been an overall decline in the graduation rate for all student-athletes. The report also gives the four-year average for freshmen that entered from 1988-1991 and graduated in six years. Results
showed that athletes from the most recent year studied, 1991-92, graduated at a rate of 57%, down one point from the previous year. Overall, football players dropped from 52% to 50%. Black football players dropped from 45% in 1997 to 42% in 1998; White players from 61% in 1997 to 58% in 1998.

The message being sent by institutions is that student-athletes serve an economic purpose rather than entertainment or as amateur competing purposes.

"While bowl game revenues have nearly doubled... to $88 million, or about $4 million a year... the NCAA's Division I men's basketball tournament brought in roughly $153 million" (Blum, 1993). With the increase of annual revenues, fan attendance, and multi-million dollar television contracts, it becomes clear that these athletes are needed for financial stability for colleges and universities. This business venture on the part of the NCAA and college institutions does a disservice to the young black male athlete and his educational fortitude (Barbalias, 1996).

"...There are allegations that colleges and universities are in the entertainment business, that they mold themselves and their existence to accommodate that pressure and that demand! All of these circumstances raise questions that deal with academic requirements, recruitment abuses, scheduling abuses, impact of commercial television, ineffective sanctions, salary excesses, and the ultimate abuse--gambling and cheating we have witnessed" (p. 6), stated Bill Friday, North Carolina University (Lapchick, 1986b).

Within the literature there has been an overall failure to examine the "entire" experience of African American student-athletes. Research in the area of sports psychology tends to examine only academic performance of college student-athletes. Literature in this area has almost completely focused on pre-college factors such as college entrance exams
and educational background as predictors of academic performance. Unfortunately, this limited amount of research fails to explore the student athlete's experience after they have arrived on campus and the ways in which these experiences may also influence their ability to achieve successful outcomes. This is particularly the case with regard to Black student-athletes (Sellers, Kuperminc, & Damas, 1993).

The lack of information regarding the impact of college life experiences on academic performance may prove to be detrimental for Black student athletes at a time when the NCAA is in the process of reform.

Critics have argued that a more comprehensive understanding of student-athletes' experiences and their influence on academic performance may provide potential implications that may improve student-athletes' chances for academic success (Sellers, 1993).

Terenzini & Pascarella, (1978) in their study of 556 students at a large eastern university, found that academic integration was the strongest predictor of freshman dropout, while pre college variables posed as a weak influence. They further found that academic success was directly influenced by the student's ability to connect with the rest of the university. Therefore, schools or athletic programs that discourage student-athletes integration with the non-athletic student body are risking higher dropout rate amongst the student-athlete population.

It becomes important to the relationship between the advisor and student athlete that they are treated as individuals. It is more important for advisors to be aware of black male student athletes' needs than to be behavioral science theorists with little cultural relevancy (Ross, 1991).
According to Thompson, Neville, Weathers, Poston, and Atkinson (1990), many African Americans have adapted to discrimination by developing an attitude of mistrust for European Americans employed to assist them academically. Research focusing on the field of cross-cultural counseling, ultimately, should provide some insight into ways in which counselors may build their credibility with students who are culturally different (Atkinson, Ponce, & Martinez, 1984). There is also evidence that African American students will view athletic counselors as more culturally competent, regardless of their ethnicity if the individual is culturally sensitive (Pomales, Claiborn, & La Fromboise, 1986). Furthermore, studies where counselors openly acknowledge their cultural differences and the obstacles pertaining to this, are perceived as credible sources for African American student (Poston, Craine, & Atkinson, 1991).

Methodology of the 1987-88 National Study Of Intercollegiate Athletes

In an effort to address the issues Black student athletes face during their college experiences at NCAA Division (I) Institutions, the Presidents Commission of the NCAA collaborated with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in 1988. The AIR is an independent, non-profit corporation. For approximately 40 years, AIR has performed research, development, and evaluation in the behavioral and social sciences, particularly
within the educational setting. This study took place at the central office of the AIR in Palo Alto, California.

The President's Commission of the NCAA wanted AIR to study the intercollegiate athletic life of Black student-athletes and identify the effects of their participation (AIR, 1989). The study by AIR targeted four main areas:

1) The background of students and the campus environment;

2) Significant influences and sources of support;

3) Academic and athletic requirement and;

4) Progress toward goals.

The intended purposes were to identify the nature and scope of problems facing Black student-athletes on predominantly White campuses and, hopefully, make changes in legislation and policy to reduce these problems.

To accomplish this task, AIR selected a random sample of 42 Division (I) institutions out of the 291 total for 1987-88 in the U.S. Three predominantly Black Division (I) institutions were part of this selection. "These predominantly Black institutions include the historically Black colleges and universities as well as those with a majority Black student body," (AIR, 1989, P.11). Three hundred ninety-two Black student athletes extracted from this selected group of colleges (mainly consisting of men's basketball, football, and women's basketball players) were surveyed by questionnaires.
Summary of Literature Review

The literature gathered in this study was designed to motivate empirical discourse surrounding the livelihood of African-American, male student-athletes, that participated in amateur college football and basketball at large institutions. The researcher localized a set of themes from the research that would provide an insightful analysis of the experiences and perceptions of black, male student-athletes.

The literature provided a research basis for which to address the issues that impact the perceptions and experiences of this population. Their perceptions of opportunity, identities, culturally isolated environment, and academic counseling were presumed to have the most influence on the lives of individuals as well.

As stated previously, this study endeavors to examine and understand the experiences of black, male student-athlete. A case study design was utilized to extract data from a sample size of six participants. The findings in this study may ultimately result in more insight and awareness of the unique status of this population within the institutional structure.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section of the research study is designed to explain the methodological procedures that were utilized to conduct this study. The research methodology of this study was based on a qualitative approach. The interview process design was used to describe and analyze the goal aspirations of selected African American male, student-athletes at a large, Mid-western university. The chapter is organized into six sections: (1) Purpose of Study; (2) Qualitative Research; (3) Selection of the Participants; (4) Sample Selection for Interviewing; (5) Data Collection; and (6) Data Analysis.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of career opportunity and "Self," in relation to their experiences as African American males and student-athletes. The research examined the student-athletes perceptions of future opportunities based on their involvement with sports and academics throughout their entire lives. The research methodology applied was based on a qualitative approach and the interview process design.
Anderson (1991) suggested that learning to listen in the interview process is the interactive nature of the interview that allows one to ask for clarification, notice what questions the subject formulates about his/her life, and go beyond conventional, expected answers to a person's construction of their own experiences. Since this study is primarily concerned with the perceptions of self and opportunity, the interview approach elicited additional suggestions for future study.

Qualitative Research

In conducting qualitative research inquiry researchers are concerned with developing a sound methodological approach to carry out the study. This is important because qualitative research has yet to gain complete acceptance that exists when conducting quantitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

The phrase "qualitative research" has been associated with other terms such as field research, naturalistic research, ethnographic research, symbolic interactionist research, case study, phenomenological research, the Chicago School, and interpretive and descriptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Bogdan and Biklen outlined a history of social investigation, ethnographic studies, social anthropology and qualitative research in their book, Qualitative Research for Education (1982). Bogdan and Biklen describe the evolution of qualitative literature as it gained prominence in qualitative field.
A qualitative approach offers a unique opportunity for the researcher to create an understanding of a problem or situation (Merriam, 1988) by uncovering the multiple meanings of phenomena from the perspective of those who have experienced the events. A characteristic of qualitative research is its use of the researcher as the data-gathering instrument (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Use of a human instrument allows greater responsiveness and adaptability to address changing conditions that may affect the phenomena being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Rationale for the Research Design

This study employs the case study approach, interviews, and document analysis to enable the researcher to collect data about the perceptions of career opportunities, identities, and the academic counseling services provided to the student-athlete population.

The case study approach, interviews, and document analysis are the research instruments that have been utilized by authors for the past quarter of a century to produce a multitude of influential books and articles. In their best-selling book, In Search of Excellence, Peters and Waterman (1982) used interviews and case studies to describe the attributes, which led to the fantastic success stories of some of America's top performing companies.

Atkinson (1990), the author of The ethnographic imagination, explained that qualitative research lends itself well to using interview as a source of data where questions
have been determined. The purpose of interviewing is to yield a cultural description as perceived by the informants. Spradley (1979) asserted, "...people everywhere learn this culture by observing other people, listening to them, and then making inferences. The ethnographer employs this same process of going beyond what is seen and heard to infer what people know" (p.46). Spradley continued, "An ethnographer seeks out ordinary people with ordinary knowledge and builds on their common experience" (p.49). When conducting interviews, capturing the words of your informants, solely, is not enough in ethnography. A conscientious ethnography reflects 'tacit knowledge', the unarticulated non-verbal nods, silences, humor, and subtleties.

In ethnography it is also necessary that we give an account of how we know certain things (Altheide & Johnson, 1994), what we regard as empirical materials--the experiences--from which we produce our second (or third) accounts of "what was happening." The researchers also state that accountability can be enhanced through the sharing of our experiences and insights with the readers. Our experience suggests that researchers should accept the inevitability that all statements are reflexive, and that the research is a "social act."

According to Geertz (1983), "Doing ethnography is like trying to read a manuscript--foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherence, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shape and behavior," (p. 97). In a qualitative study, the researcher is one of the data-gathering tools used. Through direct observation, a subjective and personal element is necessarily involved with the study.

The data collected in a qualitative study may be richly descriptive, addressing the dynamics of the process. Data collected are often analyzed indirectly, meaning that data are
first collected and hypotheses are generated afterwards. Hypotheses generated by the study may then be used for further testing, observation, or quantitative research.

According to Kniker (1990), qualitative research enables the researcher to:

- Evaluate events, phenomena and behaviors which cannot be measured quantitatively;
- Describe unique situations or events;
- Describe the attitudes and behaviors of people from their own point of view; and
- Reveal systemic human behaviors.

For example, each of the preceding descriptors confirms the usefulness and compatibility of a qualitative approach to study the perceptions and experiences of student-athletes. In this case, the researcher assumes that student-athletes are better able to explain and evaluate their education experiences than someone from outside the situation. How their personal goals, career aspirations, academic preparation, and socio-demographic background interact with the structures and cultures of their disciplines can be most accurately told in their own voices. The researcher of this study endeavored to complement the narrative process by bringing to it an understanding of the problem or situation to be studied and by utilizing research skills to elicit useful information. Finally, the researcher interpreted the results and attempted to "reconstruct reality from the frame of reference of the research participants," (Borg, 1989, p. 386).

Data collection for this research study was conducted primarily through the use of interviews, observation and review of the literature. The information gathered from the interviews included: an understanding of goal and career aspirations, a narrative report of the
student-athlete's early involvement in sports, and accounts of elementary, high school, and college experiences.

For this research study, a copy of the Information for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects was submitted to the Graduate College's Human Subject Review Committee at Iowa State University. The purpose was to ensure that the rights and welfare of the participants would be adequately protected, confidentiality of data was maintained, and informed consent of participation was obtained from each participant.
Rationale for Study

The underlying premise in this study is that the experiences of black, student-athletes on a predominantly white campus are heavily influenced by extraneous factors unrelated to the field of higher learning. Factors such as socio-economic background, attitudes, and perception of opportunities often have a detrimental impact on their college experiences. Arguably, these factors may be directly related to the attainment of their academic goals and professional success beyond the playing field. Data for this study was collected through ethnographic interviews. The results of the interviews was transcribed and constructed into cases.

Participant Selection

In the Spring Semester of 2001, the researcher met with (16) African-American male student-athletes on an individual basis to solicit their participation in the research study. This group of student-athletes consisted of (3) graduate students; (5) seniors who had just exhausted their athletic eligibility; (2) juniors; (3) sophomores, and finally, (3) freshmen.

Out of this group of (16) student-athletes, only (6) of these individuals were actually used to develop the case study portion of this research study.
Many of the student-athletes, initially, committed to being interviewed, but simply became unavailable the date and time they were supposed to be interviewed. For reasons unknown to the researcher, these individuals did not want to be interviewed, but had a hard time saying “no,” when asked originally.

Prior to being interviewed each participant was given a written statement indicating the nature of the research, the use of a pseudonym for confidentiality, an estimated interview time, and an explanation of how his confidentiality would be ensured. Participants were then encouraged to ask questions related to the interview before formally consenting. An Informed Consent Form appears in Appendix (A).

Information was gathered from the participants through open-ended questions conducted in a very conversational manner. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were arranged at the convenience of the student-athletes. The main objective in the interview sessions was to determine or explain how the participants view important events in their lives.

The interview protocol involved pre-selected themes relevant to the literature review and research questions. The researcher decided the sequence and wording of each question based on the direction and sentiment of the conversation. The interview topics for this study appear in Appendix (B).
Sampling

For this study (6) participants were chosen for the interview process. Three of the participants were, at some point, members of the football team, while the other three played college basketball. The participants were selected by the researcher based on the criteria of (1) being African-American, male student-athletes who are currently attending or had attended a large, mid-western institution; and (2) had also completed four years of collegiate athletic participation. The sampling method chosen for this study was "purposeful or purposive" sampling.

In purposive sampling the researcher endeavors to select specific elements or commonalties from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). In a report by Whitt (1990), purposive or "criterion-based" sampling are described as a selection of participants based on previously established criteria outlined in the study. He also determined that the nature of qualitative research limits the feasibility of studying large samples, entire processes, or events.

Patton (1990) expressed that purposive sampling is "selecting information-rich cases for an in-depth study." He further states that this approach is necessary if the goal is to understand something about those particular cases, without needing to generalize about all such cases. A fewer number of cases utilized in a research study allow the information to be more manageable in the analysis phase.
The purposive sampling approach supports the researcher's argument that the selected sample should be representative of African-American, male student-athletes at a large, Midwestern university.

Data Collection

Information acquired in this study was obtained primarily through semi-structured interviews, literature review, and participant observation with African-American, male student-athletes who participated in college football or basketball during their college experiences. As a former student-athlete and an graduate assistant in the counseling services department for athletics, the researcher was able to interact and observe this environment and the individuals involved.

The interview sessions were scheduled at the convenience of each participant at isolated locations on the college campus. Each student-athlete was encouraged to ask questions before the interviews. They were then informed that their names or identities would not be revealed within the study. After completing the interviews with the student-athletes, the researcher contacted each individual to discuss the accuracy of the information provided. An interview protocol was utilized to record the responses given by the participants.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997), generally, in ethnography there is an association with certain data collection strategies such as interactive observation, interviewing, and artifact collection. Multiple strategies or multi-methods are typical when
conducting a research study, which strengthens the data obtained from any single strategy to confirm data within a single strategy of data collection (p.438). This study combined interactive strategies (ethnographic interviews) and non-interactive strategies (documentation) to devise a more holistic perspective of the participants' experience.

According to Brodkey (1987), "Ethnography is the study of lived experience." The author further explains that ethnographers observe life while assuming that the participants see themselves in terms of a group (or groups) to which they belong.

Interviews for this research study were conducted with the participants on an individual basis; capturing the participants' perspective of the college athletic experience and how they make sense of the events salient to their academic and career aspirations. The approach in this case will involve informal and open-ended dialogue to provide the participants with every opportunity to articulate and explain what is most salient to them.

This research study used a case study design to focus on one phenomenon, and develop an in-depth understanding regardless of the number of sites, participants, and documents (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The purpose is to develop an understanding the person(s) or the particular phenomenon with which these student-athletes are associated.

The data collected from the interview process was used to develop a comparative analysis between the major themes presented in the literature review and the experiences and perceptions of the participants. The methodology chapter has been outlined into the following sections: 1) Purpose of Study; 2) Qualitative Research; 3) Participant Selection; 4) Sample Selection for Interviewing; 5) Data Collection and (6) Data Analysis. Interview responses were transcribed, analyzed and used as data to illustrate findings. This case study design will be the initial form of data collection in this study.
Data Analysis

Data analysis entails the organization of what the principal investigator has seen, heard, and read in order to develop an empirical perspective of what has been learned. Working with the data allows you to formulate explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link your story to the other case studies. For this to occur, you must categorize, synthesize, search, search for patterns, and interpret the data you have collected (Denzin 1989; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Tesch 1990).

Wierman (1991) described data analysis in qualitative research as "...a process of categorization, description, and synthesis," (p.88). He went further to explain that the data reduction is crucial in providing a description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study. "This type of study also enables others to anticipate, but not predict, what may occur in similar situations" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 533).
Secondary Analysis

Secondary analysis is basically a re-working of data already analyzed (Dale, Arber & Procter, 1988). Secondary analysis has been defined by Hakim (1982) as "any further analysis of an existing data set which presents interpretations, conclusions or knowledge additional to, or different from, those presented in the first report (p. 1)." Hakim goes further to describe secondary analysis as an "extraction of knowledge on topics other than those which were the focus of the original survey’s focus," (Hyman, 1982, p.1). It also involves relying on practical experience in analyzing the data that has been gathered and compiled in a particular manner (Dale et al., 1988).

The AIR study is a useful data set from which new interpretations, conclusions and additional knowledge could emerge. A secondary analysis of these data will move the study beyond its descriptive nature to a theoretically informed analysis. Hopefully, this secondary analysis will provide a wider cultural context of the Black student-athlete, and factors that potentially impact graduation and retention rates.

The part of the data collected by AIR, which this study will focus on, is the section that discusses the background of Black student-athletes and the campus environment, which is also referred to as "the perceived psychological and emotional well-being" section.

The key variables addressed in this section of the AIR study were: racial isolation, a sense that you are different from other students, a feeling that you lack control over your own life, racial discrimination, and social isolation. Each of these variables will be analyzed within the current study. Comparison of these variables with the literature review, and case
study interpretations should bring forth an in-depth understanding of the Black student-athlete.

An assumption of this study is that the negative experiences of Black student-athletes and the combination of being Black students and Black athletes impact their low graduation rates. For example, the 1991-92 Division (I) graduation rate for Black male student-athletes was 33% and the rate for White male student athletes was 54% (NCAA, 1992). The Division (I) graduation rate of Black female student-athletes was 43% and the rate for White female student-athletes was 65% (NCAA, 1992).

In conclusion, the methodology of this study involves doing secondary analysis on the 1987-88 AIR study on the experiences of Black student-athletes at NCAA Division (I) institutions. The section of the AIR Study concerned with the perceived psychological and emotional well-being of Black student-athletes will be the main focus of the secondary analysis. The variables in this section will be used to compare information acquired in the interview portion of this study.
CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This study will contribute to knowledge base by providing insight and understanding of the goal aspirations of African American, male student-athletes, attending a Midwestern institution. This type of study also enables others to anticipate, but not predict, what may occur in similar situations (McMillan & Schumacher, 1987).

In order to focus this study, the researcher organized themes from the literature to contrive research questions that will address the issues stated in the problem statement section. The research questions were listed as such:

What are some of the main issues or factors that influence African-American, males student-athlete's perceptions of opportunities beyond their college experiences?

(1) Is there a relationship between these individuals' identities and how they each view their career paths?

(2) As student-athletes, does the isolated, student-athlete culture hinder the educational attainment and achievement of black, male student-athletes?

(3) What are some of the views held by these individuals of the academic support system and counseling provided by the Athletic Department?
Goal of Data Analysis

"Thick, rich descriptions which provide literal depictions of the respondents' experiences, and exhaustive data accumulation are prerequisite in qualitative research," (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 119). Merriam (1988) wrote, "the goal of data analysis for the researcher is to generate reasonable interpretations and conclusions based upon a preponderance of data," (p. 130).

Chapter I of this study theorizes that a phenomena currently exists for African American, male student-athletes. The responses from the participants in this study will be examined within the theoretical construct or literature review of this study.

The types analyses taken of the data in this study include two different types of interpretive analyses; "grounded theory" and "theme analysis". The intent is to provide an in-depth description, while contributing to the overall knowledge base. Theme analysis describes specific recurring qualities, characteristics, subjects of discourse, or concerns articulated. "The researcher selectively analyzes aspects of human actions and events that illustrate recurring themes," (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 532). In a theme analysis there is an emphasis or focus on the complexity and interrelationships of individual cases and then synthesizes each theme by case.

Grounded theory provides a theoretical approach and perspective to the analysis process in this study. Grounded theory links an abstract concept to a proposed theory as an explanation of the phenomena. "Theoretical emphases augment the significance of the study
but usually require a commitment to inference-making, divergent thinking, and an interdisciplinary knowledge of theories," (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 534).

This section will also include a secondary document analysis on of African American, male student-athletes conducted by the American Institute on Research in 1987.

Biographical Profile of Participants

Kevin: Kevin is majoring in History, and recently concluded his college football, playing career. He is originally from Iowa. His father, three uncles, and two cousins have all been college athletes. Both parents are teachers who have provided a support system based on family, religious faith, and strong academic influence. He credits everything that has happened to him to his faith in Christianity. At the time of this study, Kevin was 18 credits short of graduating but he plans to put that on hold to try-out for the NFL. By the time of this write-up, Kevin had received a call from an NFL team, and he states that he will return to finish his degree someday. He also states that if a professional career in football does not materialize he wants to become a high school history teacher.

David: At the occurrence of this study, David had exhausted his eligibility as a member of the men's basketball team. He is a senior in Communication Studies. He was also a transfer student from a junior college in Texas. David has a four-year-old child for whom he plans to be a role model. At this time, David is 11 credits from receiving his college degree. He admits that he is not ready for a "real job" yet. Even after he graduates
this summer, he plans on attending several professional basketball camps. He would like to make a substantial amount of money to help his mother and take care of his daughter. If David does not get a chance to play in the NBA, he plans on playing for a semi-professional team here in the U.S. or in Europe. He plans on getting a "real job" once his physical talents are no longer a commodity.

**Kenny:** Kenny is a senior in Agricultural Studies. He exhausted his athletic eligibility last year, and he spent his fifth year of college as a traditional student. Kenny's father was an Ordained Bishop, and a principal at a private Christian high school. His mother is a real estate agent. Kenny was involved in at least three different sports throughout his childhood. He attended a Christian private school that was predominantly black. He was the high school Valedictorian as a senior. He credits most of his early academic success to his parents' expectations, and sports. Kenny admitted that college was difficult for him in the first few years because he didn't believe he could excel at a white school.

**Andrew:** Andrew is originally from Philadelphia. He is currently a graduate student "at large" or without a chosen major here at Iowa State. He attended three different colleges as an undergraduate. Andrew began his college experience at an all black college on the east coast, he then attended two other small colleges before arriving at this campus. Andrew admits that he applied for graduate school for two reasons. 1) He feels that he got very little from his days as a student-athlete because academics were never his priority. 2) He has unsuccessfully tried a myriad of different professions, and nothing else seemed to work. Andrew is able to discuss his days as a student-athlete as if they were yesterday. He completed his undergraduate education in 1988.
**Brian:** Brian is from Chicago, Illinois and is currently a graduate student working towards a Master's in Sociology. Brian was a member of the men's basketball team, and he majored in Communication Studies as undergraduate. His single parent mother, who has always been a big part of his involvement in sports and academics, raised Brian. He played several sports growing up, but chose basketball as an avenue to get to college. Brian expresses that even though he graduated with a Bachelor's Degree, he has always done just enough to get by. After graduating from college, he played on several semi-professional basketball teams before applying to graduate school. Even while in graduate school, Brian took a semester off once, to try-out for a professional team. He returned to school after that attempt was unsuccessful.

**John:** John is from Chicago, IL and currently a first-year graduate student in Community & Regional planning. His undergraduate major was also Community & Regional Planning. John was a member of the Iowa State football program for two years after transferring from a smaller college. He applied to graduate school so that he could remain near this campus and train for the NFL camps that come every summer. John has three sisters who all attended college. His mother did graduate from high school, but never attended college. His dad never completed high school. John feels that he is in great shape and he now has an agent to negotiate for him. At the time of this interview, he had just signed a contract to play in Canada. He admits that he wants to chase his dream while he still can.
Analysis of Data

Perceptions of Opportunity

One theme that emerged from the data collection process was the perception of these individuals' future opportunities. The research addresses issues that may possibly affect how these individuals view their futures. It has been theorized that the economic conditions of individuals from the lower class have a direct impact on their socialization. As a result, many times these youth pursue dreams of athletic success rather than academic success (Sailes 1987). Sailes (1996b) also found that social class effects the quality of education a person receives and their development of educational values that ultimately influence educational achievement. Many of these youth are socialized in a way that views athletic success as a step above academic success. Kenny, a senior in Agricultural Studies, was his high school's valedictorian prior to attending college.

Kenny: "I can't say that I actually liked school growing up, it was just what my parents required. Since the age of about eight years old, if I didn't go to school and study hard I couldn't play sports. Texas high school football is huge; it's like basketball to Indiana, or high school baseball to Arizona. Between 9th and 12th grade there was about 400 players on the team. It's what everybody wanted to play, it's what everybody dreams of being good at."

David: "In school kids would say.. 'can you really jump that high?' or 'you can actually run that fast?' Those were words I wanted to hear. Plus, you can't play without passing your classes. So my grades picked up because my coach would put limitations on
what I could get for my G.P.A. I had to put forth a little effort, and I was in the door before you knew it.”

Andrew: "When I first got down there (college) I was really into my studies, but as time went on I stopped because I was playing at first, then all of sudden he (the coach) stopped playing me. So, I got discouraged and I wanted to transfer. My grades starting dropping."

John: When asked about a career beyond sports he said: "I guess I have never really thought hard about it. I guess I can finish my Master's degree and work for some (regional) planning agency, but right now I haven't actually thought about it. Right now I'm chasing this dream and I can always come back." John is a graduate student and former student-athlete and he has been training for the NFL since he was admitted to graduate school. John stated that he was scheduled to meet with several teams during the summer, and that's why he had been working-out a lot lately.

Each of the participants in this study viewed academics as a means to an end, if they wanted to continue participating in athletics. Even the student-athlete in this study who graduated from high school with honors, stated that academic achievement was "required." Sports were used as an incentive, in most cases, to motivate academic achievement.
Identity

To better understand how these individuals viewed themselves in relation their experiences involving school and sports, the researcher organized a theme that addressed the identity of African American, male student-athletes. Grier and Cobbs (1976) explain that money making is inextricably connected to manhood in society. An adequate education and lack of marketable skills poses a major dilemma for black males in a capitalistic society. Karenga (1980) stated that many contribute to their own self-destruction by developing "hustler values" characterized by a "high level of myth orientation and grandiose dreams." This often results in an attitude of "just getting by, making it and nothing more."

In a study on race and identity, Fordham (1996) found that black students are trying to discover ways to succeed in dominant society, without compromising the Black self. In the case of black student-athletes, many are torn because they seek the validation and affirmation of the Black community. Many of these black students express their resistance of dominant culture by performing poorly in school. Youth often lean on their imaginations and perceptions of attainable goals to develop a sense of self-worth. With this in mind, African American males begin "dreaming" and focusing on somewhat unrealistic goals to define the self. These males identify with being athletes rather than students, or even student-athletes for that matter.

In response to a discussion about early schooling participants stated:
Brian: "I don't know... I liked school, but I didn't like people to know I was smart. I liked to read, and my mother would sign me up for book clubs, or take me to the library on a regular basis. But I only wanted to be smart at home."

Andrew: "When I was growing up, the guys in the neighborhood would meet up at this park to play basketball. We would get together to pick up teams. I was always chosen first, or made a captain of one of the teams. That let me know my peers respected me. You out there playing, getting better, and people start to respect you; teachers, kids in the 'hood, everybody."

John: When asked about how sports involvement made him feel, John stated: "It makes you feel good when people notice you because you are no longer a part of the crowd, everybody wants to stick out for whatever ability they have and get recognized. It's like saying 'I can do this and everybody knows'--and for me it was the same thing with football.

"In college there was more attention, when you play in front of all those people you feel like everybody is watching. Days before the game you are trying to get your mind ready for the game or you are going to go out there and get embarrassed, so it's hard to focus on school.

"At my previous college, we rode the bus everywhere, to every game. But here, we flew everywhere. It's like we got special treatment. It feels good, I mean....it gives you that special feeling. We would travel as a team and people would ask who we were, and it was like instant respect. People would say--'yeah, they are Division I football players'."

Kevin: "I have been involved with sports as early as I can remember. My dad played college football and several of my uncles were also college football players. You could almost consider me a legacy. But, athleticism is in my blood, and God gave me this talent."
My goal is to use my talent to spread God's word, because if it was not for him I would be nothing." Kevin was the epitome of a kid who was socialized into the world of sports at an early age. During the course of the initial conversation with him he explained that all of the men in his family had played college sports, therefore it was almost expected for him to do the same or better.

Most, if not all, of the participants articulated a sense of self worth and importance as a result of being involved with sports. Furthermore, none of the participants mentioned potential careers outside of athletics, even though they all held at least junior status.

**Cultural Isolation**

Several scholars wrote about the cultural isolation that many black students face on a large, predominantly white campus. For African American student-athletes, cultural isolation occurs on a very different level because of their commitment to athletic training. The researcher examined this area to see if the experiences of the participants were reflective of the research. Hawkins (1995-96) stated that being a minority at a large, predominantly white institution creates a feeling of "invisibility" and a level of isolation for black students and student-athletes. "The small percentages of black students and black student-athletes on these campuses results in a condition of 'hyper-visibility': they are easily noticed in classrooms and throughout the campus. The irony of this hyper-visibility is that it renders all black students invisible on predominantly white campuses," (p. 23). Cultural isolation in many ways results in barriers to the academic success of both black students and black
student-athletes. The process of excluding black student-athletes from membership in the general campus begins with the recruiting process. A large percentage of white athletic recruits reported they were able to participate in campus social activities during campus visits, while black athletes stated that there were minimal opportunities to experience campus social activities and events (Lapchick, 1984). Stunted "intellectual growth" and "unaccepting environments" of blacks at predominantly white colleges can be considered inadequate settings for learning, making it more difficult for black student-athletes to remain at these institutions for their entire college experience.

**Brian:** "I was excited about college, but in the back of my mind I wondered if I could make it at this school academically. I hated the large classrooms because in high school, I would approach the teachers when I needed help. In college I rarely did that. It seemed like too many students, and I always felt like people were staring at me in class. I didn't know if it was because I looked familiar because I played ball, or because I stood out. With other black students on campus, it was a little strange. Up until my junior year other black students that I met would swear that I was a freshman or a transfer student because they never saw me. Holding office or leadership positions on campus was not really an option because of time commitments. No one really even talked like that on my team."

**Andrew:** "I was about five hours from home, so I had to get adjusted to this campus in some way. I didn't really have money or a car, so I rarely left the campus. We had a curfew too. We had to be in our rooms by a certain time everyday. We couldn't even go to parties, so that sucked. My coach was more like a drill sergeant. He wasn't really a good coach."
John: When asked about the idea of isolation from the general socialization with traditional students John said: "I never thought it like that, but I guess black athletes don't get to go to functions by students or black students. You don't get too involved in it (campus life). I think the way the football program is set up, you do need that isolation. You really don't have free time. A lot of times it hurts you because other (black) students say, 'he thinks he's too good, or he thinks he's all that because he plays football'. People hurt you socially when they say things like that, but people who know you understand what you are trying to do...so they respect that. It is like a trade-off, it evens off."

Academic Counseling & Black, Male Student-Athletes

Academic counseling was the final theme that emerged from the data. Based on a review of the literature the researcher assumed that academic counseling played a significant role in the educational attainment and achievement of African American, male student-athletes. Most of the respondents in this study acknowledged the fact that the academic counselors and study table hours give them a chance to succeed academically. These same individuals also admit that they have low motivation levels when it comes to academics. At least half the respondent group shared that they were socialized in households where academic achievement was expected. Two participants who finished high school with good grades explained that the focus in college football is so intense that they found themselves putting forth minimal effort at times, often just to save their energy for practice and game recuperation.
One participant confessed that counseling services for student-athletes works, but a large number of guys are not trying to excel in any way. In a general sense, each person interviewed saw very little connection between academic success and career opportunity. Even the graduate student in Community & Regional Planning had not actually thought about a career in this field. He admitted that his interest in graduate school was mainly to allow him to remain on the campus to train and get stronger for the next NFL summer camp.

Critics have argued that a more comprehensive understanding of student-athletes' experiences and greater emphasis on academic performance may provide positive influence that would, in turn, improve their chances for academic success (Sellers, 1993). Studies where counselors openly acknowledged their cultural differences and the obstacles pertaining to it were perceived as credible sources on these campuses (Poston, Craine, & Atkinson, 1991). It becomes important to the relationship between the advisor and the student-athlete that they are treated as individuals.

Brian, one of the two graduate students who played basketball, made these comments about academic counseling: "Of course you could benefit from the counseling services, but only if you came ready to study everyday. Guys would just sleep sometimes, and some all the time. I honestly believe that I played with a couple of guys who could barely read. But, I rarely asked for tutorial help. I remember a time when I asked for help on a paper, a couple of counselors were treating me like I couldn't read, so I stopped asking for help."

Kevin, a senior in History, was asked if he felt that academic counseling had any impact. He responded: "Most definitely. But it's a case where you only get out of it, what you put into it--like anything else. The counselors help me a lot. I would not be on right track if it wasn't for Mrs. Lee. She just stayed on top of me and help me stay focused."
Kenny, the senior in Agronomy and member of the football team stated: "I see how eligibility was pushed on to other players, and I just sat back and watched. I tried to explain to my teammates their options because they were being encouraged to take easier classes so that they could continue to play, but come down the road you need graduation requirements. I have witnessed guys being told to take classes like geology, when geology had nothing to do with their major; and the course wasn't even treated as an elective either. I'm not saying it doesn't help them, it just doesn't help them graduate. I think you have to see who the counselor reports to. Sometimes it's the head coach, and the counselor will do what the coach is telling them to do."

Summary of Analysis

The respondents in this study each have had very different experiences growing up. As different as their experiences were, the common bond they seem to share is the burning desire to be professional athletes. For many of these individuals, an athletic scholarship seems to be the perfect way to get to this point. For some, it is the only way. In this study, the researcher tried to identify themes that were most salient to the experiences of African American, male student-athletes.

Ironically, all of the participants chosen in this study are either in graduate school, or they are very close to graduating, yet professional sports still seems to be the main priority. Regardless of the career potential many of them have once they graduate, several were
unclear about what field they would be willing to choose. Some even felt it was too early in their lives to make such a decision.

*John*, the graduate student in Community & Regional Planning and former football player was clear that he hadn't even thought deeply about a career in his own field. He also admitted that graduate school would keep him busy while he trained for his football career.

Reiterating the phenomena articulated in this study, there seems to be an attitude among African American, male student-athletes that says professional sports is the most accessible way to succeed in this society. The allure of the professional level is so attractive for some of these young men that an education becomes a second, or even third thought.

The socialization into sports for these individuals seems to begin at an age when it is still considered to be a game, or pasttime. By the time they reach college, the game they grew up playing now becomes a career avenue they are willing to give their all to attain. The research seems to indicate that there are several factors involved in this phenomenon. Besides getting paid for playing the game that they love, most of the respondents simply expressed that professional sports would release them from the feeling of hopelessness, while providing for their families. Unfortunately, some of these individuals have never taken their education seriously, even when they did well. Harris (1993) stated that this perception is most likely a result of the belief that institutional barriers limit employment opportunities among African American males in other career endeavors in American society. The fact that these young men are praised and applauded for their physical talents, and made to feel invisible in other settings only lends fuel to the fire of this phenomenon. As young men in this society, these individuals are seeking social mobility that is believed to only come from making it in professional sports.
The research in this study also suggests that African American male student-athletes in predominantly white settings experience a level of isolation that stunts their developmental growth. In theory, the matriculation through the college experience is designed to prepare students to succeed in society as a whole. If this is true, these individuals are being sheltered from the campus world, and ultimately the real world.
CHAPTER V:

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of this study was to examine the goal aspirations of African American male, student-athletes at a large, mid-western university. The researcher in this study organized five major themes from the literature to address the research questions listed in this study. The literature was used to construct an adequate theoretical framework to analyze the experiences of a representative sampled group.

This chapter will summarize and discuss the findings of the data accumulated in this study. The information collected in this study was used to address the research questions designed to guide this research study. As listed in Chapter I, the research questions include:

1) What are some of the main issues or factors that influence African American male, student-athletes' perception of opportunities beyond their college experiences?

2) Does a relationship exist between these individuals' identities and how they view their career paths?

3) As student-athletes, does the isolated student-athlete culture directly hinder the educational attainment and/or achievement of African American male, student-athletes?

4) What are some of the views held by these individuals of the academic support system provided to them?
The study was focused on providing a unique perspective of these individuals’ experiences and issues that may influence their expectations of their own futures. The emergent themes developed in this study include:

1) Perceptions of opportunity;
2) Identity;
3) Cultural isolation;
4) Academic counseling.

The objective in this study was to examine the relationship between black, male student-athletes’ experiences and the constructs formulated for this study.

The research relied upon qualitative research methods to gather data surrounding the goal aspirations of African-American male, student-athletes. One-on-one interviews were conducted with six individuals who had participated in either football or basketball for four years. The goal of the interview process was to provide an insightful view and understanding of the decisions made by many of these individuals in relation to their experiences. To ensure that the data collected were both valid and reliable the researcher utilized multiple data sources, participant observation, and member checking to confirm that the interview responses were accurate.
General Findings

Data collected in the interview process was analyzed to identify disparity and similarity between the experiences and responses from the research participants. These emergent themes were listed within the proper theoretical constructs to support whether or not the original assumptions made by the researcher were justifiable. Immediately following that section will be a discussion of the findings based on the theoretical constructs or themes expressed in this study. The results of the American Institutes of Research (AIR) Study will also be summarized in this section.

Perceptions of Opportunity

Themes that emerged from the data collected from the research respondents surrounding their perceptions of opportunities include:

1. As early as grade school, sports have been used as an incentive to motivate these individuals academically.

2. Dreams of playing college and professional sports begin as early as 7th and 8th grade.

3. Regardless of academic preparedness prior to college,

4. Several were aware of the overwhelming odds of advancing to the professional level, but this did not deter their thinking.
Identity

Themes that emerged from the interview sessions involving identity and development were:

1. Some ultimately perpetuate false-perceptions and stereotypes of themselves because of uncertain goals, academic intimidation, and low expectations.
2. There is an overwhelming preference to identify with being an athlete, over the idea of being a student.
3. Several of the respondents articulated that their socialization into sports began as early as grade school (e.g., little league, school teams, or neighborhood collaborations).
4. As young African American men, there seems to be the perception that success can only come from the large financial contracts, and fame associated with this lifestyle.

Cultural Isolation

The two major themes that emerged from discussions with respondents concerning cultural isolation were:

1. African-American, non-students openly criticize student-athletes for their lack of overall involvement in social events and leadership programs.
2. Some seem to be un-aware or un-affected by this "isolated" experience. Of those who were aware of their isolated experience, there were no regrets. The justification that was given by some was that their rigorous training and game schedules took up most of their time, at the same time this isolation allowed them a chance to focus and rest properly.
Academic Support

The themes that emerged from the data concerning the academic support and counseling services were:

1. After initially arriving to campus many of these student-athletes are suspicious and doubtful of the academic services and counselors. In some cases it took some up to two or three years to begin.

2. Several credited and praised the academic counseling system for their support and guidance. They also noted that their progress was linked to the close and supportive relationships they developed overtime with certain academic counselors.

3. Where these student-athletes place their priorities seems to play a large role in whether or not they succeed, aside from the tutoring, study tables, and the counseling. Those with low academic motivation rarely take advantage of the tutorial services provided, and therefore do poorly in their classes.

Findings of the American Institutes of Research (AIR) Study

The data collected in this study focused on the enrollment status, academic preparedness and socio-economic characteristics of African American male, student-athletes participating in intercollegiate sports. The results of the AIR study will be used to supplement the primary research being considered in this study.
Enrollment Status

At the time of this study African American males made up approximately 37% of Division I football players, and 56% of these males participated in college basketball (AIR, 1989). Lederman (1992) in a later reported an increase to 42.7% of Division I football players and 59.9% of basketball players. He went on to report that although African American males make up a large percentage of the scholarship athletes, African Americans, in general, only represented about 6% of the undergraduate population.

Academic Preparedness

During the time of this study the NCAA required that students score at least a 15 composite ACT score or a 700 on the SAT in order to qualify for Division I intercollegiate athletics. Since then, the composite ACT score has increased to 17. In the field of Higher Education SAT and ACT scores are regarded as indicators of the ability to handle college level knowledge and information. Hence, the fact that low scores are considered to be "a measure of academic unpreparedness," (AIR, 1989, p. 15). The ACT scores in this study were divided into three sections: Low (0-14), Middle (15-23), and High (24-36). The percentages of Black student-athletes and where they scored were listed as such: 57% were in the low range, were in the middle 35%, and 8% were in the high range. The SAT scores were also divided into three sections: Low (400-752), Middle (753-1059), and High (1060-
The percentages of Black student-athletes in this study scored as follows: 58% of these individuals scored in the low range, 36% scored in the middle range, and 6% scored in the high range. This study also reported that on the ACT, their White counterparts scored 22% in the low range, 50% in the middle, and 28% in the high range. On the SAT this same group scored 19% in the low range, 56% in the middle, and 25% in the high range.

Based on the results in this AIR study, one could argue that a large number of Black male student-athletes enter college campuses academically unprepared for the curriculum established by many institutions.

**Socio-economic Status (SES)**

The third area of focus in the AIR study of Black, male student-athletes was their socio-economic status. The investigators in this study theorized that this particular characteristic had or will have a significant effect on their success in college. The investigators also presumed that SES had a significant influence on these individuals' frame of reference, and therefore their perceptions of priorities and goals (AIR, 1989).

The SES measure in the AIR (1989) was formulated by standardizing and averaging the values of four variables: annual family income, father's education, mother's education, father's occupation, or mother's occupation if father's occupation is not listed (p. 18). The AIR study separated the SES measure into three categories: Low (0 - 42.64), Middle (42.65-56.39), and High (56.4 -67.93). The preceding categories, which translate this information
into dollar amounts, were calculated by taking an SES of 32.7 correspondents to a mean annual family income of less than $5,000, an SES of 49.8 - the midpoint of the distribution obtained from the national sample - corresponds to a mean annual family income of about $45,000, and an SES of 67.9 corresponds to a mean annual income of $80,000 or more (p. 18-19). The families of Black student-athletes made up approximately 49% of the low range, 42% represented the middle range, and 8% fell in the highest range. Thirteen percent of the white student-athletes were in the low range, 58% in the middle and 29% fell in the highest range.

Essentially, this study has found that Black student-athletes' whose families showed low SES measures in conjunction with the percentages of Black student-athletes having low ACT or SAT scores exemplify the difficult challenges these individuals face when they receive an athletic scholarship and arrive at large, predominantly white institutions.

The information gathered in the AIR study illustrates that a large number of Black student-athletes who enter college with low ACT or SAT scores come from families with low to middle SES ratings. Disproportionately, the study found that there are more Black student-athletes at predominantly white institutions than Black students in general around the country (AIR, 1989). The data from the AIR study further confirms the fact that many of these student-athletes are focusing on professional sports to improve their economic status.

Summary
This study was developed mainly to provide a deeper understanding of some of the reasons African American males student-athletes focus heavily on careers in sports, while ignoring their education and other career options. The theoretical constructs and the data from the respondents were systematically utilized to address some to the issues related to the experiences of these student-athletes and their goal aspirations. Perceptions of opportunities, identity, cultural isolation, and academic counseling were the themes that were the focus of this study.

In summary, this study found that a large majority of these individuals are, in fact, placing much more emphasis and energy on their athletic careers over academic success and a college degree. The researcher also found that regardless of their potential or marketability in professional sports, several still believe that their "chance to shine" will come. One of the respondents, David, spoke of how he had plans to attend several professional basketball camps this summer with the hope of getting noticed. With a very limited playing career as a reserve coming off the bench, the odds that he will not achieve this goal are high.

Lapchick (1991) earlier in the study stated that approximately 75% of the National Basketball Association (NBA) and 60% of the National Football League were African American men. While the entire Black United States population was only about 12%. There is no other profession in the world where that representation exists. In another study conducted by the Center for the Study of Athletics (1989) found that black males were twice as likely to expect careers as professional athletes than their white counterparts. In the 1980's Harry Edward reported that the odds of attaining a professional career in sports were 20,000 to 1 and 65 to 75% of these athletes may never graduate from college. Since then the number continues to climb. Barbalias (1996) reported 37,500 to 1 in a more recent study.
In response to research question 1, what are some of the main factors that influence their perceptions of career opportunities beyond their college experiences?, the study found that childhood socialization and economics play a large role in their view of education. This notion was supported both by the research and the respondents in this study.

The identity of African American male, student-athletes was addressed in this study to determine whether their perceptions of self impacted their decisions. The second research question asked: is there a relationship between their identities and their choice of career paths? This study found that their identities play a more prominent role in their academic attainment than anything else. Karenga (1980) wrote that many develop the attitude of "just getting by," figuring that they can shift more attention to their athletic careers and develop faster and stronger. This ideology was reinforced by most of the respondents in this study. Kenny stated, "honestly, some things I did wrong...in class I was only trying to get by, but on the field I would try to be excellent." John was asked what were some things he would chance about his experience. He stated that he would have started younger, and once he got to college he would have worked harder in strength and training. Andrew and Brian both spoke of how their grades would drop lower when the coaches would not give them a chance to play, further supporting the notion that their professional careers are at the center of their livelihood. Researcher Fordham (1996) explained that underachieving black students view school and academics as "warfare." Feeling stigmatized by the dominant society, many of them view school success as the construction of the "other," as oppose to the "black self." Many of these student-athletes exist in a dichotomy where they feel torn between validation and affirmation from the black community, yet they must decide how to succeed in the dominant society without giving up the black self.
The researcher sought a student development theory that would best explain the plight of black student-athletes as they matriculate through their college experience. Since there is no student development model designed for this particular group, the researcher attempted to apply Cross's model of "Nigrescence," which was developed to analyze only the African American student in general. The researchers found that this model was inadequate in examining the black, male student-athlete, mostly because it does not take into account the even more unique experience of student-athletes. The fact that these student-athletes live very isolated lives from the rest of the student population somewhat sets them apart from even non-athlete African American students.

The research discussing the cultural isolation of African American male, student-athletes suggests that isolation from the normal or traditional activities (e.g., student office, campus internships, work-study, student government) stunts social and marketable skills necessary in the post-collegiate world.

In theory, this puts student-athletes at a disadvantage, even when they do graduate from college. Data from the respondents utilized in this study found that some of these student-athletes did not acknowledge their isolated experience, or felt that it actually enhance their ability to succeed as college athletes. In contrast, Brian, a graduate student at the time of this study, explained how he felt lost once his athletic eligibility was exhausted. He found himself trying to understand certain dynamics of the campus that traditional students learn in the first two years of college. Kenny, spoke of his regrets during the first few years as a student-athlete. He explained that he did not become a pro-active student until his eligibility was exhausted. "It took me two years to realize that I'm not much different than the white students who come to school here. After that my confidence increased. I wish I would have
developed the attitude to just approach people and ask for help, or get study groups started
with other students in my major."

On this issue, research question 3 asked if this isolation hinders the educational
attainment and achievement of African American male, student-athletes. The findings in this
study seem to suggest not only that their job-related skills are never cultivated, but also that
their ability to interact socially with others is also put at risk, leaving these individuals
without confidence in their own intellect and career potential. A study by Bean and Bradley
(1986) concluded that non-athletic college students who were directly connected with the rest
of the university had greater academic success. Therefore, schools or athletic programs that
discourage student-athletes' integration with the general student body are risking a higher
attrition rate of the minority student-athletes.

The final research question in this study attempted to respond to the issues regarding
the academic counseling provided to the student-athlete population. The study argues that
academic counseling provided to this population also plays a role in the educational
attainment of African American male, student-athletes. Research question 4 inquires about
the views held by these student-athletes concerning the academic support provided. The
research on academic counseling and minorities suggests that athletic programs must be
aware of various issues related to the African American student-athlete and, more
specifically, the males. Ross (1991) expressed that it was more important for academic
counselors to be aware of black, male student-athletes' needs than to be behavioral science
theorists with little cultural relevancy. The research in this area further explains that
counselors can build their credibility with African American student-athletes by simply
acknowledging their cultural differences. Counselors who were viewed as culturally
sensitive diminished the barrier of mistrust held by many African American males who arrive at the institution.

**Recommendations**

*In examining the data and the findings of this study, the researcher suggests several recommendations designed to guide athletic and institutional administration, coaches, academic advisors/counselors, faculty, the NCAA and the student-athletes themselves.*

The recommendations in this study were formulated based on a qualitative research base, literature, participant observation, and the information collected from a small sample group of six African American male, student-athletes. The recommendations suggested in this study include:

1. **Full acknowledgement from all universities and the NCAA that a large number of African American males are not initially attending college to attain a college degree.**

   The NCAA has been in the process of reforming various policies to ensure that Institutions around the country comply with rules and regulations involving sports participation and the student-athlete population. But there have been very minute adjustments made to foster positive attitudes about academics, and the ultimate results; graduation and careers related to these degrees and majors.

2. **Implementation of career building seminars.**
"Black, college athletes typically are not furnished with opportunities to develop non-sport identities, learn job-related skills or extended knowledge about life outside of sports, establish meaningful relationships with influential people in positions of power, garner material resources and develop an awareness of abilities needed to nurture careers outside of sport (Wiggins, 1991)."

Once this issue is exposed and understood, governing officials can move from being complacent about this issue, to strategically implementing programs that address their professional development outside of sports. These programs could focus on dialogue with student-athletes surrounding the advantages of succeeding academically in relation to professional careers, and summer internships. Professionals from various career fields could attend these seminars or programs to share their experiences, while teaching these youth how they succeeded.

3. Orientation of campus resources, faculty, and administration.

Student-athletes upon arriving on campus could be orientated to various resources and the officers of those resources on the college campus. Teaching student-athletes the specific locations of vital resources on campus would allow them to become more pro-active and involved in their own education. Familiarizing student-athletes with faculty and other decision-makers on campus would equip these individuals with the proper knowledge and understanding of the several dynamics of the institution. Meeting administration and members of the faculty outside of the classroom setting would show student-athletes that some officials are very empathetic about their needs and concerns involving academic success. The goal in this process is minimize the anxiety and intimidation of the large
college campus. This may result in a level of confidence needed to approach faculty and administration when they have concerns. Several respondents stated that they never had the confidence to approach professors and other students about classroom materials.

4. The construction of a student development theory relative to the African American student-athlete.

A developmental model for the African American, male student-athletes did not exist at the time of this study. A theoretical framework of this nature would have provided the proper foundation for a more insightful understanding for this study and a basis future study. Cross' "Nigrescence" model did not provide a framework that addressed the unique experiences of African American male, student-athletes.

**Limitations of the Study**

This qualitative study examined the goal aspirations of black, male student-athletes and the factors that influence this process in one way or another. The researcher focused on data collected from individuals who participated in football or basketball at a large, mid-western university. Six participants were used to develop a case study analysis of their experiences in relation to the themes and the research questions posed. The researcher assumed that each student-athlete shared authentic and honest responses in the interview sessions.
Originally, sixteen student-athletes were approached to be a part of this study. The researcher did not anticipate the fact that many of these individuals were either uncomfortable or un-trusting of individuals requesting interviews concerning their lives, and or lifestyles. In one case, a participant disclosed that he was extremely nervous about the interview, but he wanted to help anyway.

The study is intended to provide an insightful and knowledgeable perspective of a selected sample size from this population. The limited sample size and unique individual experiences do not allow the findings of this study to be used as generalizations of mid-western institutions or any other college around the country. The goal was merely to provide empirical recommendations for all programs involving African-American, male student-athletes.

The researcher relied on open-response, one-on-one interviews for this study in order to articulate an understanding of the views of a sample group of student-athletes. The researcher, in conducting this study, was aware of the potential biases that may be involved as a result of personal experience as a former student-athlete. These potential biases were governed through object analysis and acknowledgement of potential bias.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study endeavored to examine and address the goal aspirations of African American male, student-athletes at a large, mid-western university. Hundreds of
thousands of these individuals, each year, are dreaming about careers in professional sports without seriously considering other career opportunities that may come from the attainment of a college degree. To organize and guide this study the researcher identified factors such as perceptions of opportunity, identity, cultural isolation, and academic counseling to address the research questions, which provided a quintessential core for this qualitative research study.

The goal of this study was to provide a perspective and response to why so many of these individuals chase the dream of playing professional sports with "tunnel-vision." The respondents in this study provided very insightful perspectives of their own experiences in relation to the purpose of this study.

The problem itself is much bigger than this study, the college institutions, and the NCAA as well. As long as there is an opportunity for young African American males to become financially independent with the stroke of a pen, this perpetual cycle will always exist. As researchers, administration, faculty, and advisors, it is up to us to evolve and adapt to the trends that occur within the institutional environment. Players are starting at an earlier age and therefore, they are thinking about the NBA and the NFL at much earlier stages than the past generations.

If the college institutions do not begin to implement measures to attract these individuals to the advantages of a college education, the college degree will become an option many African American males view as an unattainable goal, or a waste of time. There will come a time when high-school athletes will think about the professional level before deciding what college to attend.
APPENDIX A:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this project. All of the data collected from this interview will be used for my thesis project for the graduate program in education here at Iowa State University.

2. The purpose of this research is to understand the perceptions of African American male student-athletes view their educational and career opportunities while existing on a large, predominantly white campus.

3. The purpose of this interview is to talk to you about your experiences involving your background in sports and education.

4. For research purposes, this interview will be tape-recorded for a more accurate of your contributions. Is this ok?

5. There are no perceived emotional risks to you by participating in this interview. There certainly should not be any physical risks. If at any time you feel at risk or discomfort, you may discontinue this interview.

6. I am happy to answer any questions that you might have about our interview or about the research project itself. Do you have any questions at this point?

7. All the information will be kept confidential. If you like, you may choose your own pseudonym (fake name), and I will refer to you in my study only by that name or I can choose one for you. After we finish this interview, I will keep the tape recordings in my possession or in a locked drawer until I transcribe them. I will do the actual transcription myself, and will use only your pseudonym throughout this process. After I finish transcribing the tape, I will erase and dispose of it.

8. I anticipate that this interview will take no more than an hour. Is that ok with you? Are you ready to begin?

By signing here, I certify that the previous statements have been read and that I agree to partake in this interview. I realize that I am free to discontinue the interview at any time.

_________________________________________ Date__________
APPENDIX B:
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Background
   A. Date of birth
   B. Place of birth
   C. Parent(s)
   D. Siblings
   E. Children

II. Education
   A. Early experiences in school
      1. Best memories
      2. Worst memories
   B. Teacher/Mentor relationships
   C. Academics
   D. Self assessment of various grade levels
   E. Favorite subjects
   F. Least favorite subjects

III. College and academics
   1. Major
   2. Academic counseling services for student-athletes
      a. Academic counselors
      b. Study tables
   3. Classmates
   4. Classroom environment
   5. Instructors
   6. Memorable experiences
   7. Academic goals
8. Campus resources

IV. Sports
   A. Early experiences with sports
      1. Favorite sports
      2. Grade school sports
      3. High school sports
      4. Coach/player relationships
      5. College recruitment process

V. College sports
   A. Sport
   B. Practice Schedule
   C. Travel
   D. Inspirations/motivations
   E. Coaching relationships
   F. Media
   G. Fans
   H. Teammates
   I. Self-assessment
   J. Professional sports/goals
BIBLIOGRAPHY


