Men on the Edge: A Qualitative Investigation of Marginality, Stress, and Social Support among Black Male Student-Athletes at a Predominantly White University

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This thesis titled:

Men on the Edge: A Qualitative Investigation of Marginality, Stress, and Social Support among Black Male Student-Athletes at a Predominantly White University

by

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ABSTRACT

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Men on The Edge: A Qualitative Investigation Of Marginality, Stress, And Social Support Among Black Male Student-Athletes At A Predominantly White University (117 pp.)

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Drawing on data from thirteen qualitative interviews this thesis aims to understand the experiences of Black male student-athletes at a predominantly white university. Robert Park’s (1928) theory of the marginal man is the guiding framework for this study. Taking the marginal man theoretical framework into mind, Black male student-athletes are an interesting group to study because they occupy a unique social location, one on the margins. Respondents expressed that they experience stress and are marginalized academically, athletically, and socially. Respondents’ perceptions of social support have also been recorded and analyzed. Findings suggest that the respondents view stressful experiences and subsequent experiences with social support at the university to be a consequence of a combination of their race and role as student-athletes.

Approved: _____________________________________________________

Debra A. Henderson

Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology
To those who feel invisible.
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First and foremost, I would like to thank God. I also want to acknowledge all of the student-athletes who interviewed with me. I cannot begin to express how grateful I am to have met these men. I hope that their voices will be heard by an audience of individuals capable of providing social support and instituting a change.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research on the Black collegiate athlete dates back half a century to a time when race relations were extremely volatile. When I was beginning to formulate my research questions, I was overwhelmed by the many areas left unexplored in existing literature. While we know some things about race relations in collegiate athletics there are still some things left unsaid. Specifically, the Black athlete experience with social support at predominantly white institutions—a place where people of color are underrepresented and often marginalized—is missing from the research. In order to fill the gap in the research, this qualitative study focuses on the experiences of Black male collegiate athletes at a large predominantly white midwestern university.

Thirteen semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with Black male student-athletes at Midwestern University—a predominantly white university that is a part of a NCAA Division-1 intercollegiate athletics conference. The student-athletes who were interviewed were all members of varsity men’s teams at the university. It is important to note that the Black male undergraduate students at Midwestern University are underrepresented, and there are even less Black male athletes. Black male student-athletes are the minority within a minority.

Robert E. Park’s (1928) marginal man theory was utilized as the guiding framework for this empirical investigation of the Black athlete. Marginal man theory states that marginality emerges when an individual is trapped between two or more competing or divergent cultural experiences. Marginal men live within two cultures and

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1 Used interchangeably with African American
2 Referred to as Midwestern University
take on multiple roles. The inability to merge these experiences results in marginality. Marginal man theory has been applied to the experiences of American immigrants, multi-racial individuals or “cultural hybrids”, and to a smaller extent African Americans. Taking this theoretical framework into mind, Black male student athletes are an interesting group to study because they occupy a unique social location, one on the margins.

College students, especially student-athletes, experience a great deal of stress and social support is the mechanism that people in general, and student-athletes in particular, can use to cope with stress (Watson and Kissinger 2007; Freeman and Rees 2010). Research on social support suggests that members of marginalized groups tend to receive less social support than their dominant group counterparts (Thoits 1982a). In addition, social support is not tangible. Thus, given their position at the university it is important to understand the ways that student-athletes perceive social support. If someone is being provided with social support, but they do not perceive it as such, then the full benefits of social support may not be experienced. These factors present an interesting dynamic in social support that needs to be explored further.

In the following chapters, marginality and the relationship between stress and social support will be explored in detail. In Chapter 2, I will explore the theoretical orientation for this thesis, Park’s marginal man, and I will present a review of the literature on social support and Black student-athletes. The literature provides a framework for understanding why Black male student-athletes, like other marginalized groups, may suffer from stress and social support disparities and how their role as marginal men plays into that.
Research design and analysis are discussed in Chapter 3. The objective of this research is to answer the following research questions: (1) What are Black male athletes perceptions of the social support available to them at a large predominantly white university? (2) Who do Black male athletes identify as the main provider(s) of social support? And 3) In what areas, if any, do the disparities in social support exist for Black male student athletes? Sampling, interviewing, and analysis methods are discussed in further detail in this Chapter.

The findings are presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The data in Chapter 4 present the dynamic between positive and stressful experiences of collegiate sport participation. The chapter subtitle, the balancing act, refers to the benefit-stress dynamic as well as the stress associated with the managing of multiple roles. Student-athletes are expected to be masters of role-management. However, the findings in this section suggest that this is an unattainable feat that causes a great deal of stress for student-athletes.

Chapter 5 further explores the stressors associated with athletic involvement, but specifically focuses on race-related strain and types of marginality in the academic, athletic, and social arenas. The respondents’ perceptions of social support are discussed in Chapter 6. Their perceptions of social support allow for a better understanding how the relationship between stress and support may affect their experiences at the university. The factors that lead to disparities in support are included in this chapter.

The final chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings, limitations of this study, and suggestions for further research. The data contained within these pages will allow us to better understand the relationship between stress and social support among marginalized men. However, it is important to note that this study is exploratory in
nature and is limited in its ability to generalize to the broader population of Black male athletes. Nevertheless, the findings from this research will be useful for more than just scholars. Individuals working in intercollegiate athletics and higher-education can benefit from reading this thesis. The findings create clear implications for policy interventions as well. Ideally, the findings from this research can lead to increased efforts to better integrate Black male student-athletes into a system of social support at the university both inside and outside of athletics.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following pages the theoretical orientation for this research will be discussed. Robert E. Park’s (1928) theory of “the marginal man” will be used as a guiding theoretical perspective. Furthermore, contained in this chapter is a review of the literature on Black athletes as well as literature on social support. The synopsis of this literature provides a framework for understanding the experience of Black athletes and the relationship between marginality, stress, and social support.

2.1 The Marginal Man

When the walls of the medieval ghetto were torn down and the Jew was permitted to participate in the cultural life of the peoples among whom he lived, there appeared a new type of personality, namely, a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused.

—Robert E. Park, 1928:891-892

The quote above describes Robert Park’s conceptualization of the marginal man. This research utilizes the marginal man theory as a guiding framework in order to understand the experiences of Black male intercollegiate athletes at a predominantly white Midwestern University. Park states that the marginal man is an individual “living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples (1928:891-892).” In other words, marginal man theory describes individuals who have dual identities in two cultures. The first culture is the individual’s culture of origin, usually thought of as the marginal one, and the second culture is the dominant or central culture. In Park’s research, he explores the lives of American immigrant Jews. Their
identification with Jewish culture and simultaneously with American culture creates a situation of marginality. They are no longer strictly Jews, but rather American Jews, an identity that is less rigid and is undefined. Due to the inability to identify fully with their homogenous home culture or the new dominant culture, marginal men are thought to be trapped in a situation of emotional instability.

According to the marginal man theory, marginal individuals become trapped in a tug-of-war battle between two cultural groups in which they seek to fuse, if not at least to balance. They are often required to take on multiple roles and to balance a commitment to both their home culture and to the dominant culture. Occupying two or more social roles can be strenuous for any individual. However, the marginal man experiences an ongoing, and oftentimes permanent, strain. Park (1928) articulates this best when he states, “there are periods of transition and crisis in the lives of most of us that are comparable with those which the immigrant experiences when he leaves home to seek his fortunes in a strange country. But in the case of the marginal man the period of crisis is relatively permanent (1928:893).” Marginal men therefore, occupy a period of constant transition and crisis that often develops into a personality type.

For Park, writing during the modernization of American society, the marginal man—more than just a unique personality type—serves as the gateway for sociological insight. Specifically, Park’s work focused on acculturation, assimilation and amalgamation processes among immigrants and other marginal men including ethnic “hybrids.” Ethnic hybrids included bi-racial and multi-racial individuals such as the Mulatto or the French Creole. The heterogeneity of populations in modern society has the potential to create many forms of marginality. Park asserts that “[i]n the long run,
however, peoples and races who live together, sharing in the same economy, inevitably
interbreed, and in this way if in no other, the relations which were merely co-operative
and economic become social and cultural (891).”

Everett Stonequist (1937), a student of Park’s work, expanded the theory of the
marginal man. Stonequist focuses heavily on the social-psychological effects of
marginality. Stonequist (1937) defines the marginal man as one who is,

"... poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social
worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and
attractions of these worlds, one of which is often ‘dominant’ over the
other; within which membership is implicitly if not explicitly based upon
birth or ancestry (race or nationality); and where exclusion removes the
individual from a system of group relations (1937:8).”

In this definition, the marginal man suffers from psychological and social distress.
Similar to Park, Stonequist uses life-history assessments of immigrants and other ethnic
“hybrids” as the basis of his analyses. Specifically, Stonequist focuses on the
development of a marginal identity among 2nd and 3rd generation Jewish-Americans.
Comparisons were also made between marginal men in the Jewish community and other
marginalized groups, such as the American Negro.

Responding to marginality, Stonequist asserts that “the discussion has been
confined to racial hybrid situations. The fact of race mixture, however, proves upon
analysis to be rather incidental (1937:7)” He goes on to suggest that the racial hybrid is
likely to be a marginal character, not because of his mixture of blood is viewed as a
biological fact, but because his mixture places him in a certain social situation. The
validity of this interpretation is strengthened when comparisons are made with
individuals of unmixed race occupying a similar social situation. In this example the
social and cultural implications of race clearly outweigh the biological ones. For marginal men, the wellness disparities that they experience emerge due to their occupation in two or more divergent cultural milieu.

Stonequist notes that there are several other ideas similar to the concept of the *marginal man* that can be found in social scientific literature. Charles Horton Cooley’s (1902) *looking glass self*, W.E.B Du Bois’ (1903) *double consciousness*, and many other “identity” theories echo some of the same sentiments of the *marginal man*. However, according to Stonequist neither Cooley’s theory of self development nor Du Bois’ theory of self awareness fully explains the phenomenon of marginality. In an attempt to distinguish the marginal man theory from other identity theories Stonequist notes that the marginal man is “placed simultaneously between two looking-glasses, each presenting a different image of himself. The clash in the images cannot help but make the individual somewhat conscious of the process—conscious of the two mirrors and conscious of the two clashing images (1935: 7).”

It is important to note that a marginal position does not always lead to a negative outcome. Stonequist states that “a notion that the marginal man is necessarily ‘abnormal,’ unhappy, or otherwise unfortunate appears to have arisen. This is a misconception of the facts, a narrowing of the concept to the more disorganized cases” (footnote p. 11). Both Stonequist and Park would agree that the marginal individual experiences a great deal of distress in trying to merge his two identities/cultures. However, Stonequist argues that some marginal persons are successful at this management of roles/cultures.

Stonequist proposed that if a group exists that consists of similar marginal men, and it is large enough in size, it may provide the opportunity for marginal persons to seek
refuge within the group or culture of their peers—a form of withdrawal from the dominant culture—with minimal social and psychological consequences. Stonequist suggests that “the intermediate group—say, of mixed-bloods—may be large enough to afford a moderately satisfying life (1935:11).” Although some groups can provide respite within their marginal culture, Stonequist believes that the ultimate goal of many marginal men is to achieve assimilation into (or at least towards) the dominant culture. Stonequist suggests that “the Negro’s efforts to improve himself and his race necessitate his becoming more like the white man, not differentiating himself (p. 107)”. However, assimilation into the dominant culture is not always possible. So, many marginal people find themselves identifying primarily with the inferior group, while others (assuming there are large enough numbers) can create a new culture of marginal individuals.

Milton Goldberg (1941) attempted to advance the concept of the marginal man by introducing the term “marginal culture”—a merger of the social-psychological “marginal man” and the anthropological “marginal area”. Goldberg created a 4-point checklist for identifying and classifying a marginal culture: “(1) the so-called "marginal" individual is conditioned to his existence on the borders of two cultures from birth, if (2) he shares this existence and conditioning process with a large number of individuals in his primary groups, if (3) his years of early growth, maturation, and even adulthood find him participating in institutional activities manned largely by other "marginal" individuals like himself, and finally, if (4) his marginal position results in no major blockages or frustrations of his learned expectations and desires, then he is not a true ‘marginal’ individual in the defined sense, but a participant member of a marginal culture. (1941:53)” In order to be viable, the marginal culture must be “providing its members
security, adequate facilities for participation in group life, and the opportunity to express their own cultural interests, without at the same time making them in appearance and behavior distinguishable from the members of the dominant culture. (1941)” In this way, the marginal culture seems to be more of a means for “passing” or “withdrawal” rather than assimilation.

The theory of the marginal man has not gained ubiquitous acceptance in the sociological community. Ruth Johnston (1976) suggests that Park and Stonequist focus too much attention on the psychological component of marginality. It is undeniable that the psychological component of marginality has been accentuated in the original literature, but there are indeed structural-, cultural- and societal-level phenomena that were noted by Park and Stonequist. It is precisely the interaction of individual- and societal- level processes that create the phenomenon known as marginality. The capacity of the marginal man theory to connect personal troubles with larger structural issues is precisely why it is needed in sociological studies.

Weisberger (1992) attempted to reconstruct Park’s theory of the marginal man in order to create a more general theory of marginality. He proposed a theory that was applicable to marginal groups, but primarily relied upon historical accounts of marginalized individuals. Weisberger noted that marginalized individuals “exhibit an immense plurality of identities and divergent attitudes (1992:445)” and these individuals experience simultaneous fascination and repulsion towards their culture. He also observed the crisis of double ambivalence that is noted in the original marginal man theory. Weisberger argues that sociological research on marginality has wide implications
because in contemporary society “marginality is increasing in frequency and is rapidly becoming the rule, not the exception. (1992:445)”

Seagren (1994) authored a conference paper in which he presented research that utilized the marginal man theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of Chinese immigrant professors at American universities. Seagren documented several cases of marginality experienced by these professors. However he stated that “descriptors of subjective and objective marginality experienced by Chinese professors do not justify the conclusion that Chinese professors are unhappy men. (1994:24)” Similar to Seagren, Liu (2008) cautions readers not to assume that marginality is an entirely detrimental state.

Liu (2008) argues that the identity strategies open to marginal men and women today far exceed the possibilities envisioned by Park and Stonequist. Lui’s research shows that even among relatively privileged individuals, in this case university professors, marginality still occurs due to the inability to fuse two cultures in which the marginal individual participates regularly. However for Liu, partially reflecting on his own experiences, the situation of marginality can at times be a choice. He asserts that marginal men are not always trapped in a discomforting limbo between two cultures; they are in constant drift in their own comfortable border zone (2008). Lui even went as far as to propose that marginal men have a “comparative edge”, or an acquired ability to successfully navigate many different cultures. Lui concludes that marginality albeit detrimental at times, can be a beneficial social position for some. These conclusions reiterate claims made by others that marginality is not always disadvantageous, while also suggesting that the phenomenon of the marginal person is still present.
Marginalized individuals are an ideal population to study in sociological research. Parks argued that “it is in the mind of the marginal man where the changes and fusions of culture are going on-that we can best study the processes of civilization and of progress. (893).” In agreement with Park, Stonequist suggests that the marginal man is the key-personality in cultural change. “From the practical viewpoint the study of the marginal man is obviously significant. From the standpoint of theoretical science, his life-history offers a method for studying the cultural process from the mental, as well as objective, side” (p. 13). With deference to the evolving theories of acculturation, this thesis project utilizes Park’s marginal man theory as a guiding framework to understand the experiences of Black male intercollegiate athletes at a predominantly white Midwestern university. In the following section, the literature on the Black athlete will be reviewed and discussed.

**Black Athletes at Predominantly White Institutions**

Scholarly attention to the Black athlete gained prominence in the post-civil rights era with the publication of *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (1970)—a seminal piece written by sociologist and former athlete, Harry Edwards. Edwards’ research has been influential in guiding the sociological scholarship on the Black athlete. His main argument is that Black athletes are exploited for their physical prowess at the collegiate and professional level. Additionally, he describes instances of financial, educational and social exploitation of Black athletes. Edward’s view of athletics concerning structural conflict, inequality, and exploitation has been one of the guiding paradigms in the literature on the Black athlete. In this section, research will be reviewed in order to better
understand the current state of the scholarship on Black athletes as well as to identify gaps in the literature that this research will be able to fill.

The rise of Black athletes in American sport was an indirect result of the 1896 Supreme Court ruling that made segregation legal (Edwards 1970). This “separate but equal” ruling in Plessy vs. Ferguson, indirectly led to the emergence of Negro Colleges, or what we now know as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (or HBCUs). These universities were thought to be ideal for the development of Black Americans but Edwards (1970), critical of the lack of intellectual substance argued that, “These institutions, which were generally supported by philanthropic whites or by state funds controlled by racist government officials, endeavored to develop ‘safe’ educational programs—meaning of course, those that were non-threatening to whites” (pg. 4). These schools generally emphasized dance, athletics, and other “non-intellectual” pursuits—such as agriculture, industry, and mechanics. Edwards, grudgingly, goes on to suggest that “… despite their educational shortcomings, or maybe because of them, Negro colleges have provided an avenue to athletic prominence for many Black athletes” (1970:5). HBCUs provided a means for African Americans to get a college education and to participate—and do extremely well—in their sport.

The athletic prominence of Black athletes at Historically Black Colleges did not go unnoticed. Edwards argues that as big-time sports programs at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) began gaining revenue for sports, the fear of losing a grip on the market to Negro Colleges necessitated the recruitment of African American athletes to these all-white colleges. The economic incentives of having competitive athletic
programs forced even the most exclusive and prestigious schools to examine their admission policies. It is true today what was true then: amateur athletics in America is big business. Big time collegiate sports teams gain revenue and national attention (mainly basketball, football, and sometimes baseball). The financially driven recruitment of amateur Black athletes is one example of exploitation noted by Edwards. He argues the “[t]he old cliché about ‘You give us your athletic ability, we give you a free education’ is a bare-faced lie, concocted by the white sports establishment to hoodwink athletes” (1970:16).

At the end of the day Black athletes serve mainly as athletic “commodities” at PWIs. They are expected to be athletes first and foremost, to “eat, sleep, and drink athletics (1970:9).” White collegiate athletes face some of the same pressures, but the Black athlete is further constrained by racialized ideologies that equate Blackness with physicality, and physicality with lack of intellect. As Edwards further stated, “gradually, most black college athletes begin to realize that his white employers, his teammates, even his fellow students, in spite of the cheers and adulations they shower upon him, regard him as something akin to a super animal, but an animal nevertheless (1970:17).” Black athletes are expected to excel above and beyond in sport, after all that’s why they were recruited. Unfortunately, this overemphasis on sport productivity undermines academics, and further reinforces racial stereotypes about Black physicality (Yopyk and Prentice 2005).

Yopyk and Prentice (2005) explored the pervasive effects of social identities on task performance among collegiate athletes. Their findings suggest that when student-
athletes identify primarily with their role as an athlete, rather than a student, their focus shifts towards athletic performance. However, when student-athletes identify more with their role as a student, the academic performance is prioritized higher than athletic performance. According to Edwards, Black student-athletes are primed to focus more on their role as an athlete, which may have detrimental costs to their academic performance.

As mentioned earlier, Edwards places a great deal of emphasis on the exploitation of Black athletes “educationally”. Although HBCUs had their own educational shortcomings, Edwards argues that “black athletes have not been much better off at white schools (1970:10).” He asserts that the problem lie with college coaching staffs at white schools that provide poor academic counsel and make efforts to “herd” the Black athletes into “Mickey Mouse” courses (Edwards 1970). Edwards calls this a “criminally fraudulent deal educationally (1970:11).” Black athletes—some of whom are first generation college students—are recruited to PWIs for their athletic ability, but are given little assistance to excel academically. In order to ensure Black athletes meet eligibility requirements, coaches and academic staff “encourage” athletes to take safe classes. This is great for college sport participation, but can be detrimental for individual Black athletes who, at some point, will have to leave the world of sport and be expected to compete in the civilian job market—a place that requires skills beyond physicality.

In addition, Edwards argues that “compounding the Black athlete’s concern is the question of his social life…(1970:8).” He states that “perhaps the grimmest, most dehumanizing experiences for black athletes arise from the dismal and repressive social conditions they encounter on white campuses (1970:11-12).” During the post-civil rights era, Black students entered the academy in the largest numbers in history. Expecting to be
welcomed by a forward thinking and progressive environment, many Black students were met with hostility and resentment by white students and faculty. The athletic prominence and in some cases celebrity of Black athletes at these schools provided limited refuge. The prejudice and discriminatory practices of many white individuals and organizations, mainly social clubs like fraternities and sororities, at these universities prevented Black athletes from being fully inculcated into the social culture at PWIs. Also, the demanding time commitment to their sport prevented Black athletes from socializing and bonding with other Black students (which were limited in number depending on which university they found themselves at). With a lack of student-organizations to join, women to court, faculty willing to mentor, and a slew of other social deficiencies, Edwards notes that “outside of the athletic arena then, the life of black athlete is lonely, monotonous, and unrewarding (1970:15-16).”

Miller and Kerr (2002) conducted a qualitative study in which they explored the athletic, academic, and social experiences of Canadian intercollegiate athletes. Their findings on the social experiences of student-athletes compliment the assertions made by Edwards. Their findings revealed that although student-athletes benefited from an immediate social support system, their interactions were restricted almost entirely to teammates and other athletes (2002:363). They conclude with a call for future research to determine the impact of this narrow social interaction on the overall social development of student-athletes. Although Miller and Kerr studied Canadian athletes, their research gives support to the arguments originally presented by Edwards (1970).

Edward’s book was not limited to discussions around the “rise” of the Black collegiate athlete. In fact, as the title suggests, Edward’s book is a recollection of the
athletic revolts of the 1960’s. More specifically, Edward attempts to explain the successes and failures of these athletic revolts. Edwards concludes with offering suggestions for future revolts. Although his advocacy and social activism were refreshingly unconventional and his scholarship was sound, his “hands-on” approach and the practical limitation of his methods have come under scrutiny in some later publications (Wiggins 1997).

Edward’s original work on the Black athlete was published during a time of heightened racial awareness; a time when racialized rhetoric was commonplace. As the years progressed and visible advances toward equality were made, many attempts to discredit the notion of African Americans as helpless victims of a racially oppressive environment emerged. Specifically, critics of Edward’s work dismiss it for placing too much blame on the system of white supremacy and intercollegiate athletics. Sports historian David Wiggins (1997), argues that understanding racism can be very useful in providing a general understanding of Blacks in American sports. However, these sometimes broad generalizations provide limited insight into the complex, and often, confounding experiences of individual Black athletes—which vary in degree.

Wiggins devotes the early essays in his book to the history of Blacks in American sport. This historical framework documents the progression of Blacks in sport—from the slavery plantation, to segregated colleges, to the civil rights era of desegregation, all the way to contemporary (1990s) athletics. Symbolically, each stage reflects advances toward equality in American race relations. Wiggins also spends a great deal of time discussing the athletic revolts of the 1960s and 1970s. Specifically, he attempted to explain some of Edward’s analysis focuses primarily on the 1968 Olympic Protest which he helped to organize.
the reasons why the athletic revolution that Harry Edward hoped for never came to fruition.

Wiggins argues that racial ideologies continue to permeate the minds of individuals living in America. Specifically, racial stereotypes of Black physicality are continually reinforced and exacerbated by the athletic success and prominence of Blacks in basketball, football, baseball, and track and field. Stereotyping may have been the only way to explain why Black men faired so well in sport and so poorly in other endeavors. Wiggins states that “the notion of race undoubtedly had different connotations for blacks than for whites, but it was still a convenient way for them to explain the complex phenomenon of black athletic superiority (1997:198).” Wiggins notes that both Blacks and Whites are guilty of selective stereotyping Black athletes.

Racial stereotypes coupled with participation in sport place Black athletes in a double-bind situation. Wiggins argues that “to achieve success, it is necessary for black athletes, even more than for their white counterparts, to submit to the dictates of coaches and other support personnel, display evidence of moral rectitude, and exhibit high levels of conformity and respectability as well as physical skills (1997:201).” Although Black athletes are cognizant of their marginalized social position, they also tend to hold tight to the American value of rugged individualism. In sport, and in broader society, the values of hard work and self-discipline are held to a high esteem and racialized stereotypes that place Black athletes as inheritors of God-given athleticism are in direct contradiction to the idea of individual meritocracy.

Wiggins notes that, like other athletes, Black athletes want to be acknowledged for their hard work and dedication and to do otherwise would demean their
accomplishments and “serves only to perpetuate longstanding beliefs about the black race’s lack of intelligence and faulty character (1997:219).” As a result, “black athletes moved in and out of their respective roles as black, athletes, and Americans with high degree of regularity in an attempt to foster a positive self-image and realize success in one of the country’s most prominent institutions (1997:201).” This double (or even triple) consciousness among African Americans is found at every level of sport. Wiggins argues that, for collegiate athletes, fulfilling the role of a student-athlete creates an added dimension to this identity crisis. “While their fellow students faced the usual problems of preparing for class and deciding upon a major, black athletes had not only to deal with these matters but also decide on how they could maintain an allegiance to other black students and remain in the good graces of their coaches (1997:151).” Here we see Black athletes once again in a constant push-n-pull identity struggle to commit themselves fully to the demands of sport and to the Black campus community. Apparently, the two cannot coexist.

Wiggins argues that the fact that the Black athlete identity is multifaceted means that no “one-size-fits-all” model would be appropriate for raising awareness and activism among this subgroup of the Black community. He argued that Edwards has failed to unify Black athletes around a singular cause and that is one of the main reasons why there has been such as steady decline in sports activism. Wiggins also asserted that “everything that Edwards asked of the black Olympians was in direct opposition to what they had always been taught was the proper behavior of a competitive athlete” (1997:216). The conservative values of sport (discipline, hard work, sportsmanship, and respect for authority) in some ways stood in direct contrast to the tactics adopted by civil rights and
Black power activists. Additionally, Wiggins notes that “because of their youth, their constrictive role as student-athletes, and their limited experience in the political arena, black athletes made some tactical mistakes that put them in a vulnerable position not only with coaches and administrators, but with other black students as well (1997:151).”

In some ways, the decline in activism among Black athletes may also be a result of the marginalized position of Black athletes in the African American community and the deterioration of a collective consciousness. In discussing the role of sport in the Black community Wiggins states that “a large segment of the black community continued to believe that success in sport served as an important symbol of possibility and a much-needed example of achievement (1997:122),” but that “America’s black intelligentsia continually cautioned against an overemphasis on sport and stressed the importance of preparing for life after basketball (191).” Wiggins, critical of the overemphasis on athletics in the Black community, argues that “insisting that black athletes such as Jordan and Barkley serve as role models is, perhaps more than anything else, a reflection of the lack of leadership in a black community (1997:220).” This “blame the victim” language can be found throughout Wiggins work. Although he does acknowledge the historical and structural forces that have led to the tumultuous race relations in America, Wiggins focuses more on Black athletes’ decisions to exercise individual agency.

Wiggins highlights several cases of outstanding athletes and newsworthy events in athletics. In a way, he reinforces the stereotype that a few prosperous Blacks can speak for the entire community. It is significant that Wiggins’ analyses include mainly headline events in collegiate and professional sport when the overwhelming majority of Black athletes never make it past interscholastic sport (NCAA 2011). In his final criticism of
Edwards, Wiggins argues that “it is significant that Harry Edwards himself […] devoted ten pages of one of his appendixes to a long list of black record holders in baseball, basketball, football, and track and field. The man who was responsible for much of the racial turmoil in 1968 and who spent a great deal of time trying to debunk the myth surrounding sport and upward social mobility merely reflected the view of black Americans who believed that the enduring legacy of outstanding black athletes was as exemplars and models of success rather than as political activists” (1997:122). It is apparent that undoing racialized thinking—specifically the unconscious association made between Black athleticism and success—remain to be a challenge for even the most well-intentioned people, scholars not exempt.

Joe Feagin (1991) examined the lives of affluent African Americans and his findings challenged the notion that class mobility could alleviate issues surrounding racial discrimination. In a later publication, Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) examined the experiences of Black students at predominantly white universities. Black student-athletes have several hats to juggle. As with all student-athletes, there is the major struggle of performing well athletically and educationally. Black athletes, also struggle to “fit in” socially in an all white environment. This same pressure is experienced by Black non-athletes entering PWIs. Feagin et al. notes that “on average, [black students] do not perform as well academically or adjust well psychosocially as white students (1996:7)”. He further notes “many contemporary critics of higher education blame the black students, their families, or community leaders for the students’ college troubles (1996:7). The findings from their research further supported the assertion that African Americans at PWIs continue to suffer from discrimination at the individual and institutional levels.
From the outset, Feagin and colleagues attempt to dissuade the “blame the victim” model that was in scholarly and public discourse in the 1990s. Similar to Edwards, Feagin and colleagues discuss the issue of institutionalized inequality. He notes that “institutionalized discrimination both reflects and molds the attitudes and ideologies many whites hold in regard to racial matters (1996:13).” Although there are no longer legal barriers preventing Blacks from entering PWIs, the white-supremest and racially oppressive legacies of these colleges persist. Walter Allen (1991) argued that US colleges have been settings for black “contest and struggle, as African Americans fought for full-citizenship and participation in the society. Historically, educational institutions and educators have been among the most active and effective instruments for the oppression of black people” (12).

Feagin et al. suggest that the legacy of institutional racism has permeated ideologies of every American. They state that “desegregated schools and colleges have taught, and still teach, black young people to be ‘Europeanized whites’ culturally, but without the privileges of that status (1996:13).” They went on to catalog contemporary examples of racism of PWI campuses as “racist joking, the recurring use of racist epithets, racist skits and floats by white fraternities, the neglect or rejection of black students by white professors, and racial harassment by white police officers (1996:13)”. They go on to note that “most damaging is the taking for granted by most white administrators, faculty, staff, and students that the campus is a ‘white’ place in which blacks are admitted, at best, as guests (1996:13).”

Doug Hartman (2000) examines the phenomenon of social alienation in bit more depth. Hartman argues that although collegiate athletics brings in the majority of Black
male students to PWIs, Black male student-athletes still appear to be suffering from a social alienation of a sort that is reminiscent of times when the academe was first being integrated. Bourdieu (1988) calls PWIs “golden ghettos” for Black athletes. On the one hand, these Black students get to attend the university—revered as a champion of liberal ideologies and an usher of upward social mobility—on the other hand the racialized socio-cultural climate of PWIs oftentimes discourages (and sometimes prevents) African Americans from assimilating into the social scene. Thus, Black athletes (like other Black students) often find themselves turning inward in search of support, and as a result become further isolated.

In a more recent publication, sport sociologist Billy Hawkins (2010) examines some of the physically, financially, and socially exploitative features of intercollegiate athletics. Hawkins, specifically, explores the experiences of Black athletes at predominantly White institutions of higher education. Hawkins’ argument is in line with other scholars such as Harry Edwards who have criticized the exploitative practices of the NCAA and PWIs. Hawkins is specifically intrigued by the many contradictions or paradoxes present in collegiate sport including, but not limited to, society’s love of Black athletes but loathing of Blacks, the hyper commercialization and commodification of “amateur” sport, and the practical limitations intercollegiate sports participation places on educational success and social integration.

Hawkins’ research on Black intercollegiate athletes is couched in the internal colonialism (or plantation) theoretical perspective. Hawkins states that “the goal of using

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5Critical of the socio-political climate and structural dynamics around collegiate athletics, Hawkins refrains from using the term student-athlete.
this model is to illustrate the structural variables and inequalities of predominantly White institutions—examine the crisis of institutional arrangements (2010:20).” Using NCAA reports, focus groups, think tanks, and personal and professional experiences (as a student-athlete and athletic administrator, respectively) Hawkins provides a structural explanation for individual failures and successes of Black athletes at PWIs.

Using this model Hawkins suggests that “the system of intercollegiate athletics has remained relatively consistent with other social institutions where the Black body is a valued commodity: a cog or a tool for capitalist expansion” (2010:11). Hawkins argues that “…athletic departments, like colonizers, mainly prey on the athletic prowess of young Black males, recruit them from predominantly Black communities, exploit their athletic talents, and discard them once they are injured or their eligibility is exhausted” (2010:13).

Hawkins asserts that the guise of amateurism is simply a rationalization of universities and that Division I intercollegiate athletics function more as a professional industry. He states that “similar to the military industrial complex and the prison industrial complex that consist of a network of organizations/universities, businesses, corporate vendors, and so on, who collaborate and are driven by a profit motive, NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics form an athletic industrial complex that functions similarly (2010:19).” Student athletes, regardless of race, experience some of the same stressors related to their participation in intercollegiate athletics. Hawkins referred to student-athletes as members of a working class or athletic labor force. However, Hawkins argued that the two racial groups (Black and White) cannot be seen as equals because race presents experiential disparities for Black students at PWIs. He stated, “The different
structural positions Black athletes occupy in relation to their White counterparts include stereotypical belief regarding Blacks’ intellectual inferiority and superiority, the differences in their demographic and academic backgrounds, overall college life experiences, mental health issues, and social support (2010:20-21).”

Hawkins also notes that within this “class” of student athletes there exists a fraction of Black athletes whose intragroup experiences are slightly different. Hawkins argues that practices that create stratification stifle efforts to organize around a common goal. This may be one of the main reasons we have not witnessed high-levels of political activism among athletes in contemporary society. Each Black athlete comes to the university with different goals and expectations, is ranked and tracked differently based on skill-level and position, and has differential amounts of social- and cultural-capital; thus based on these distinctions there are differential experiences for individual Black athletes at PWIs.

Similar to Edwards, Hawkins is also critical of the physical exploitation of Black athletes. Not only is the Black body highly-valued, it is also stigmatized, marginalized, and often ostracized. Hawkins notes that Black athleticism and physical prowess is celebrated and even admired in the sports arenas, such as football stadiums on Saturday afternoons. However, when these athletes take off their uniform and find themselves outside of the sporting context they are relegated to the status of other Black students, “invisible” (2010:6). This visibility dynamic is not only an individual phenomenon. Hawkins asserts that “within the context of intercollegiate athletics, the faces and voices change periodically, yet the goal of capital accumulation remains the same (2010:11).”

This revolving door of athletics—the lack of longevity within athletics for coaches,
players, and affiliated staff—highlights an ongoing trend of capitalist motives at the university which, more often than not, override educational ones. More importantly, it accounts for some of the social distress experienced by individual athletes and the inability to form a collective voice among their peers.

Hawkins concludes that “…many [PWIs] function like plantation systems that internally colonize and exploit the athletics resources of Black athletes, and too often they return to their communities either injured (physically or psychologically) or poorly educated, despite the athletic expenditures they have given to these institutions; they then become a burden on the community that bore the burden of nurturing and training that athletic talent (2010:19).” This “return” to the Black community is not purely speculative. As mentioned earlier, all Black athletes do not attain the athletic prominence promised to them since youth as only a fraction of high-school and collegiate athletes make it to the professional ranks. Some due to financial, educational, physical, and/or social issues will never finish college.

Le Crom, Warren, Clark, Marolla, and Gerber (2009) examined the factors that influence retention and attrition rates among men and women collegiate athletes. Their results indicated that supporting athletes through scholarship alone was not significantly related to retention; however, gender and sport type were significant predictors of retention with female and individual sport athletes retained at a higher rate than their male and team sport counterparts (14). Although not specifically examining race, their findings suggest that retention efforts need to be targeted at particular sub-sets of student athletes.
There is some evidence mainly in public discourse (i.e. 123HelpMe.com) that suggests that Black student athletes are among the privileged few—that is, more privileged than their non-athletic Black counterparts (Wiggins 1997). Wiggins notes that “black athletes perceived athletics as one of the areas in which they could realize a measure of success in American culture (1997:192).” These arguments highlight the fact that athletics serve as a way for Black males to gain a college education when that opportunity might not have been provided otherwise. However, dismal educational outcomes for Black male athletes suggest that simply having the access to an education or a chance to go pro does not supersede the structural (political, social, cultural, economic) factors that prevent these athletes from attaining upward mobility and being accepted by White America.

Make no mistake, having access to a college education is important for any marginalized group, but it is the quality of that education that should matter most. It is also important to note that the percentage of athletes who go from playing in high school to having a long and fruitful professional career is dismal⁶. Despite the overwhelming odds against them, a great deal young Black males continue to aspire to the ranks of the Lebron James’ and the Dwayne Wades, unintentionally sacrificing other forms of personal development in order to attain athletic supremacy. It is without a doubt, that athletics is perceived to be a “way out” for many young African American males. However, as the literature suggests, the majority of Black males who enter sport are cultivated physically through rigorous sport training and neglected in most other areas.

⁶According to the NCAA's Estimated Probability of Competing in Athletics Beyond the High School Interscholastic Level, there is less than a 0.6% chance of going from high-school to the pros in men’s basketball, football, and baseball.
As stated earlier, this emphasis on physicality undermines their educational and social development in college.

Although this literature review does not contain an extensive look at education research with regards to Black student athletes, it is of great importance to understand educational variables such as recruitment, enrollment, attrition, retention and degree attainment rates to explain the prominence of Black athletes. When looking at the literature on the experiences of Black students in higher-education and university athletics we see an interesting trend, an overwhelming amount of studies have suggested that race continues to influence the ways that Black college students are perceived and treated, and consequentially, rejected or retained. Previous research has explored both individual and structural factors related to the current state of Black collegiate athleticism. The role of a Black intercollegiate athlete seems to be at its best rewarding and developmental; at its worst it is arduous and constraining. What we still don’t know about in great depth is the social support that Black collegiate athletes receive at PWIs.

**Social Support**

Collegiate student-athletes have been identified as a group prone to wellness disparities (Watson and Kissinger 2007). Student-athletes take on a variety of competing and conflicting roles. Watson and Kissinger (2007) suggest that “[o]ften times, the convergence of these [roles] manifests as emotional, physical, or developmental difficulties for student-athletes (p.153).” Although the physical and physiological stress of sports is an important area for scientific inquiry, the stresses associated with the social environment and a lack of social support, especially for Black athletes, remains to be
explored in depth. In the following pages, the literature on social support will be reviewed extensively in order to further the understanding its applicability to the Black male student-athlete experience.

The beneficial properties of social support have practical implications for student-athletes. During the second half of the twentieth century the beneficial effects of social support in dealing with stress and illness caught the attention of many social and behavioral scientists (Cobb 1976; Thoits 1984, and Cohen and McKay 1984). The scholarship on social support includes definitions of social support, measurements of perceived and received support, causes and health implications of stress, functions of social integration, implications of having multiple roles, and ways in which support is affected by social network characteristics.

Cohen, Underwood, and Gottlieb (2000) define social support as “the social resources that persons perceive to be available or that are actually provided to them by nonprofessionals in the context of both formal support groups and informal helping relationships (p.4).” In this definition, Cohen et al. have incorporated several components of the concept “social support” that were originally proposed by contributing scholars in the field (Cobb, Thoits, Lin). Cohen and colleagues noted four distinct traditions to approaching research on social support: 1) The sociological tradition, 2) the cognitive tradition and the stress-buffering hypothesis, 3) the interpersonal process tradition and 4) the intervention tradition. It is important to note, that these categories are not fixed. That is, there is significant overlap in and interdisciplinary/mixed-methodological approaches in each area. Each of these traditions will be discussed briefly in the following paragraphs.
The sociological tradition of studying social support emphasizes the impact that social interaction has on overall well-being (Cohen et al. 2000). Cohen et al. suggested that the sociological significance of social interaction was originally presented by the sociologist Emile Durkheim (1951). In *Suicide*, Durkheim postulated that the breakdown in network ties (to family, community, and work) is detrimental to psychological wellbeing. Specifically, it creates *anomie* or normlessness. Anomie, occurs when members do not have strong ties or regular participation (social integration) within social networks. Although it may not be called by name in non-sociological research, this theory forms the foundation of structural-, network-, and individual-level analyses.

According to Cobb (1976), “social support is the information that leads a subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations (p.300).” Cobb proposed that if you have access to more social support then you can deal with esteem threats, emotional distress, loneliness, and practical problems created by stressors. The different forms of social support noted by Cobb include emotional, esteem, and network support. Emotional support (also known as expressive support) refers to love and caring, esteem support refers to the feeling of self-worth, and network support is influenced by strength of ties to others in the same network. In a later publication, Cobb (2010) suggests that there is a need to investigate the moderating effects of social support on the consequences of the following transitions: entry into primary school, entry into college, first job, marriage, residential change, and bereavement.

Peggy Thoits (1982) was one of the first to suggest that social support is stratified between and within social groupings. Thoits notes that “men have an inexpressive, stoic
style of responding to stressors and women have an emotional, expressive style. Men more often report controlling their emotions, accepting the problem, not thinking about the situation, and engaging in problem-solving efforts (1995:61-62).” These gendered differences may explain disparities in provisions of and requests for social support.

In addition, Thoits suggests that people with many social roles are at risk of more personal losses and more network events than people with fewer social roles. Thoits (1983) states that “integrated individuals benefit more from identity gain and also suffer more from identity loss than isolated individuals (p.174).” Thoits conceptualization of “isolation” entails an individual having only a few social roles. In other words, individuals who hold multiple roles can benefit from the being integrated into various networks, but they also have more to lose.

It has been speculated that members of disadvantaged social groups are especially vulnerable and emotionally reactive to stressors. Lin et al. proposed that “the direction of the relationship between stressors and social support becomes contingent upon differential reacting capabilities, which are probably related to the social standing of the individuals (class, status, etc.) (1979).” Thoits’ research further suggests that, “females, unmarried persons, those with lower education and lower income, and married women all have higher distress scores and significantly less available emotional support (1984:464).” In her research, Thoits also found that “nonwhites have significantly less support than whites (1984:464).”

There is evidence that suggests that marginalized individuals receive less support than their dominant group counterparts (Cite). However, Thoits’ findings suggest that the vulnerability of disadvantaged persons to undesirable events cannot be explained by the
joint occurrence of high stress exposure and low emotional support. This challenges the assumption that disadvantaged persons experience more harmful effects of stress (vulnerability) simply because they lack social resources (namely, emotional support) to overcome ongoing strain and unforeseen events. Thoits concludes that vulnerability to stress among disadvantaged persons then, must be a function of some factor other than a lack of emotional support.

Social support may not explain vulnerability to stress, but there is some indication that social support can mitigate the effects of stress. Thoits research yielded findings about disadvantaged people broadly, but her research has limited information on disparities in social support as it relates to race, specifically. Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, and Contrada (2009) stated that “no studies have examined perceived needs for support at different stages in the experience of ethnicity-related maltreatment (p. 76).” In the case of racial/ethnic minorities, the stresses associated with racial discrimination and maltreatment may taper with the provision of social support.

The scholars following the psychological (or cognitive) tradition emphasize the “buffering” properties of social support in dealing with various forms of stress and illness. Lin and colleagues (1979) were proponents of the “buffering hypothesis”. They argue that social support serves as a ‘buffer’ against the exacerbation of response to life changes by providing the information needed to reduce or eliminate drastic psychological or physical consequences of life changes. The buffering hypothesis suggests that individuals with a strong social support system should be better able to cope with major life changes and those with little or no social support may be more vulnerable to life changes, particularly undesirable ones. This hypothesis has been challenged by some
scholars including Thoits, but Lin et al. made several invaluable contributions to the scholarship on social support.

Expanding beyond the notions of emotional support, Lin and colleagues (1985) suggest that social support networks serve both expressive (emotional) and instrumental functions. For example, if you were to lose your job, you undoubtedly will experience a great deal of emotional stress. Expressive support can manifest itself as someone to talk to, affection, words of affirmation from network members, etc. Instrumental support, at the most basic level, is the support that gives you the practical tools needed to fix an issue. Using the job loss example again, if you lose your job you may require the support of members in your network that can provide new job opportunities, financial assistance, etc. This would be instrumental support.

It is important to note that several scholars have been critical of the empirical measurements of social support. Lin and colleagues (1985) state that “…[each definition] taps significant components of the concept of social support, but the lack of an integrated theory has prevented the standardization of measurements and comparability of empirical evidence (248).” Brondolo et al. (2009) further suggest that “variations in the conceptualization and measurement of social support make the results of studies examining the effects of support as a [buffer] difficult to interpret (76)”.

In addition, Freeman and Rees (2010) make two recommendations for how to carry out research on social support: (1) social support measures should be relevant to the situational context in which they are being used and (2) social support researchers should write new items to capture specific aspects of the support needs of the target population.
Additionally, Lin et al. (1985) argue that support can be further divided into perceived availability of support—perceived or cognitive support—and actual support received. They suggest that if someone is being provided with social support or has social support available to them, but they do not perceive it as such, then the full benefits of the support may not be experienced. In addition, Coyne and DeLongis (1986) note that “little attention has been paid to the circumstances in which both the perception of support and its supposed adaptation consequences arise (p.454).” The implication for measuring perceived support is clear. However, there is little agreement as to which empirical measurements most reliably capture and conceptualize perceived support.

Understanding and measuring perceptions of social support, albeit methodologically challenging, is a necessary component of the social support literature. Coyne and DeLongis (1986) suggest that having “an understanding of the circumstances in which perceptions of high or low support arise is a logical and strategic prerequisite to an understanding of how these perceptions are relevant to stress, coping, and adaptational outcomes (p. 458).” They go on to propose that “an unemployed homemaker with three children, a wealthy male eccentric who prefers to live by himself, and a college freshman who has just arrived on campus may be similar in perceiving a lack of support from their environments, but the processes by which this is relevant to their well-being are likely to be radically different (1986:458).”

Simply measuring a perceived lack of social support does not consider the various ways in which an individual processes information on social support. Understanding perceptions of social support, as well as received support, requires a close investigation of individual experiences but also structural/environmental characteristics. It has become
a truism in sociology that an individual’s location (both socially and geographically) influences their life experiences and thus, their social support. Thoits (1982) asserts that "life events may alter the support available to individuals, and support may decrease the likelihood of event occurrences (p. 155)."

Social support is influenced by both individual and network characteristics. There is some research that focuses on network structures as they relate to provisions and perceptions of social support (Wellman and Wortley 1990; Pugliesi and Shook 1998). Research on social networks and social support suggest that individuals’ personal characteristics are not solely predictive of provisional social support. Instead, network characteristics (size of your network, characteristics of people in your network, strength of the ties, embeddedness, etc.) are more predictive of the support provided to individuals. This line of research may have been influenced by earlier findings such as Lin et al. who suggest that “access to, and use of, strong and homophilous ties promote mental health (1985:260).”

In conclusion, social support can be defined as a pool of instrumental and/or expressive resources, received and perceived, provided by- and provided to members and groups within a social network. Social support can be thought of as a pool of resources that individuals can pull from in times of crisis and strain. Research suggests that social support has an interactive or direct effect, in addition to the buffering properties. Cohen et al. (2000 eds.) suggests that the importance of social support, and specifically social integration, was originally noted in the Durkheimian theory of anomie. Social interaction is very important to one’s day-to-day psychological well-being. Social location,
specifically membership in marginalized groups, seems to have an effect on social network structure and ties as well as the availability and perceptions of social support.

Understanding of Black student-athletes perceptions of, and experiences with, social support is an area seriously lacking in the literature. Social support disparities have been linked to gender and racial/ethnic minority status and it has been shown that occupying multiple social roles/statuses can directly affect types of social interaction and provisions of social support. In the case of Black male intercollegiate athletes at predominantly white institutions, it can be speculated that their experiences with social support have been directly affected by their marginalized social role and the characteristics of their social network.

In the following chapter on methodology, sampling, data collection, and analysis for this study will be discussed.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to understand how Black male collegiate athletes perceive social support at a predominantly white institution of higher education by conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with Black male athletes at a large Midwestern University. This research was designed to allow Black male student-athletes to describe their experiences at Midwestern University in order to illustrate their perceptions of available social support as well as to identify areas in which social support is lacking. In the following pages the data collection process, the sampling characteristics, and the methods of data analysis will be discussed.

3.1 Data Collection

In order to participate in this research the respondents must have been an active member of a NCAA sanctioned men’s varsity sports teams at Midwestern University, must have self-identified as Black or African American, and had to be at least 18 years of age. Three Black male student-athletes volunteered to participate who were known by the primary investigator prior to the start of this study. All three athletes agreed to participate in the interview and it was their willingness to participate in this study that allowed me to gain entree with the other Black student-athletes who became participants.

The sample (n=13) was recruited mainly using a snowball sampling method. I also relied on recruitment flyers to build the sample. (See Appendix A) Snowball sampling is a method of using a reference system to obtain contact information from potential respondents without recruiting individuals in the sample directly. A snowball
sample increases each respondent’s likelihood of being selected and minimizes personal bias or subjectivity when constructing a sample.

The flyers were posted in the athletic facilities and other places on campus that student-athletes are expected to be (dormitories, dining halls, etc.). Each recruitment flyer contained the contact information for the researcher along with a brief project description as well as inclusion criteria. Of the remaining respondents (n=10)—this number excludes the three preliminary interviews—eight were referred by their friends/teammates and two athletes contacted me after seeing one of the posted recruitment flyers on campus.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of Black male student-athletes, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data collection process began with the first interview in October 2011 and culminated with the final interview in April 2012. The interviews lasted anywhere from twenty-five minutes to sixty-eight minutes, with an average of forty-three minutes.

In order to ensure confidentiality, participants were encouraged to complete the interviews in a private conference room on campus. However, if they were uncomfortable interviewing on campus, they were given the option of selecting an alternative site. Three of the student-athletes decided to host the interview in their homes, off-campus. Prior to beginning the interview, each respondent was given a copy of the informed consent. (see Appendix B) The informed consent form was read aloud and each respondent was given the opportunity to ask questions before signing the consent form. Once all questions were answered and the signed consent form was returned, the primary investigator initiated the audio recording device and the interviews commenced.
Each interview (Appendix C) was prefaced by a brief introduction including several questions such as: “What made you decide to play collegiate athletics”, or “What made you come to Midwestern University?” Student-athletes were then asked to give their own definition of social support. Prior to drafting the interview guide it was decided that providing a scholarly definition of social support would limit the range of responses and possibly impact the “subjective truth” that emerges out of qualitative interviews. Thus, allowing the student-athletes to define “social support” was necessary for understanding their perceptions of the support that they receive.

The majority of the interview questions required respondents to speak on experiences with personal stressors and support related to academics, athletics, and social life at Midwestern University. Specifically, respondents were asked to recall experiences with stress and to identify individuals and/or groups of people who provide them with social support during those stressful times. Interviews concluded with several questions that asked for demographic information (See Appendix C).

Upon completion of the interview, respondents were asked to share contact information of teammates or other Black athletes who fit the inclusion criteria and who might be interested in participating. Individuals were then contacted to find out if they would like to participate. Additionally, informants were asked to take contact information for the researcher to share with other interested individuals. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. To ensure confidentiality and privacy each interview was given a code number and a pseudonym was assigned to each respondent.
Sample

Due to the potential of identifying the individual participants in this study, certain demographics that can be linked to individual student-athletes or their team sport are not included as descriptors. These descriptors include: athletic team, position played, hometown/city and in some cases the eligibility level or sports rank. For example, the rank of “redshirt-sophomore” in combination with other demographics may have the unintended consequence of revealing the true identity of the Black male student-athlete being interviewed. Given the remaining demographics that are permissible, the sample is further defined in the following tables. Table 1 shows the breakdown of years spent at Midwestern University. In some ways, this demographic gives a rough estimate of the academic and sports ranking of each respondent.

Table 1: Years at Midwestern University (N=13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Number of Athletes</th>
<th>Percentage of Athletes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents had attended Midwestern University for three or more years at the time of the interview. Although the “years spent” category can correlate with class or eligibility rankings, it is important to keep in mind that in some cases student-athletes transfer after competing at another institution. This factor obscures any estimates of respondents’ age, class or sports rank based on “years spent at Midwestern University” and does not jeopardize revealing their identities.
Table 2 is intended to give a frame of reference for the respondents’ home backgrounds. As you can see from the table below, respondents were recruited from all over the country.

Table 2: Respondents Home Region (N=13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Athletes</th>
<th>Percentage of Athletes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Coast</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Coast</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 gives a “first-generation” breakdown of the respondents in this sample. The overwhelming majority of student athletes in this sample were not first-generation college students. This an important demographic marker used when studying higher-education in many contexts.

Table 3: First Generation College Student (N=13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Gen Student</th>
<th>Number of Athletes</th>
<th>Percentage of Athletes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, Table 4 displays the academic majors of the respondents in this sample. The “other” category represents respondents with unique majors, which were not shared by any other respondent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Number of Athletes</th>
<th>Percentage of Athletes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Service Administration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation Management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is some evidence of athletes choosing to major in similar fields of study that fall within the same academic college. However, this may simply be a result of the snowball sampling method used to recruit participants.

**Data Analysis**

After the interviews were transcribed, references to the informants’ names were replaced with pseudonyms. To further assure anonymity, informants have not been identified by their sport-team affiliation and all findings will be presented in aggregate. Proper nouns that can be linked to the identity of the respondents in any way (e.g. dormitory names or coach names) were also replaced in the final transcriptions and write-up.

A method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used to analyze this qualitative data. This process consists of a three-step analysis. The first step is open coding, during which initial themes are located in the respondent’s statements. These
emergent categories were then axial coded—thematic linkages between categories were created. The third step involved selective coding which entails a general overview of the axial codes to look for similarities or differences between categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Using this method, several categories were identified. The findings from this analysis are presented in the following section.
CHAPTER 4: THE BALANCING ACT OF COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

Based upon the results of the qualitative interviews, this section interprets the findings and how they relate to the overall experiences of Black male student-athletes at Midwestern University. A major theme that emerged from the data suggests that being a student-athlete is not entirely good or bad, but rather consists of a combination of positive and stressful experiences. This dynamic will be referred to as the balancing act. The balancing act partially refers to the duality between the perceived benefits and stresses associated with athletic participation. It also is used to describe the role management that student-athletes undertake. Each component of the balancing act will be discussed in the subsequent pages beginning with a discussion about the benefits and strains of intercollegiate sports involvement.

Perceived Benefits and Formative Opportunities of Athletic Participation

There are many stressors associated with participation in intercollegiate athletics. However, in order to fully understand the experiences of intercollegiate student-athletes the benefits of athletic involvement must also be discussed. In this study, all of the student-athletes admitted that there are several benefits to playing sports at the collegiate-level. Three major themes emerged during the analysis process that led to the creation of the following subsections. The respondents said that having opportunities for personal growth and development, receiving positive recognition, and having the opportunity to meet people and expand their social networks are benefits of athletic involvement. It is important to note that the three categories of benefits discussed below are not all-inclusive. In other words, they may not represent the benefits of collegiate sports in its
entirety, but rather illuminate student-athletes’ perceptions of the most major benefits of their sports involvement.

*Personal Growth and Development*

A major theme that emerged from the interviews was the benefit of personal growth. Several student athletes noted that participating in collegiate athletics has allowed them to grow and mature. This growth and maturation process was viewed as a benefit of playing sports. Student athletes stated that experience of interacting with coaches, teammates, and other committed and driven individuals has helped them learn and grow inside and outside of the athletic arena. Some student athletes felt that their participation in collegiate sport has directly led to their own personal maturation as well as the development of a variety of life skills. One respondent, Harrison, commented on learning about time management:

I mean it sounds kinda cliché or corny, but I would say basically I came in a boy and, you know, going in to my last year and being on my way out I feel like I’m coming out as a man. I’ve learned so much from my experiences here that... I mean... applied to almost every aspect of life as far as time management skills, who you surround yourself with and who you call your friends, getting your priorities together.

Harrison and several other student-athletes suggested that participation in athletics made them better men. For Harrison, sports helped him grow-up. For other athletes, participating in sports gave them the opportunity to develop their character as an individual. Steven gives credit to his high-school coach for instilling the value of *good* character in him. Steven’s quote below articulates this best,
I think athletics makes me a better person. That’s the only reason I play, cause it makes me a better person. And it helps with like real life situations… When I was in high school my coach always talked about being a better person, being good. Being in tune with your mind, your body, and spiritually. That really rubbed off on me… That stuff really follows with you, like outside of sports.

The respondents spoke about having opportunities for personal growth and development as a result of their athletic involvement. The student-athletes believed that their experiences in sports allowed them to grow and develop in their personal lives. One area of personal growth that emerged from the data was the opportunity to receive a college education. The student athletes in this research not only recognized the societal value of a college degree, they also expressed a belief that a college education can make them more well-rounded individuals. They expressed a great deal of gratitude for the opportunity to go to college and view college as a necessary component to their own future success. Although in most cases today receiving a college education is a prerequisite for post-college employment, the student athletes in this sample viewed a college degree as more of a marker of personal success rather than a means to an end (i.e. to get a good job), as stated by Deonte.

Whatever [his sport] takes me and however it takes me I’ll attend both. But most importantly is getting my degree. And I feel like I’m close to getting that and I’ll take pride when I get it.

Another student-athlete, Jerome, supported this belief that collegiate athletics was a means to getting a college education.
Honestly, this was the only way I could see me going to college. It was the only way possible that college was gon’ get paid for. So, in order for me to go to college and become successful I was going to have to get an athletic scholarship, and in my case it happened to be [his sport]. So that’s what made me pursue my collegiate career. And I just didn't want to be one of those guys trapped without a job. You know you can’t get nothing with no high school degree no more… so you got to get a college degree

Note the expression of Deonte who says he’ll take “pride” when he finishes school, or Jerome who says playing sports was the only way for him to get to college and become “successful”. Pride and success are powerful words that the student-athletes use to describe their education—an area that many people believe student-athletes neglect.

In a similar vein, despite the previous evidence that suggests participation in collegiate athletics undermines academic achievement (Edwards 1970), the majority of student-athletes in this sample said that they have internalized the importance of getting a college education. For example, Mike indicated the importance of a college degree when he said,

I hope to get a free education first and foremost. And then, just take my talents to a new level and hopefully succeed to the next level where ever that may be.

Mike’s statement shows that he has internalized his role as a student-athlete. When asked why he came to Midwestern University, Jordan responded,

I just thought it would be like a good decision for me and my future. Like, be able to get a free education.

James also noted the importance of coming to and finishing college,

I'm getting an opportunity to go to college, I don't want to mess it up. I got people back at home relying on me, so that's big for me. It's just I don't want to let anyone down.
The participants all held the belief that there are benefits to their participation in collegiate sports. For some, receiving an education is the most important benefit as well as a mark of personal success. Several respondents also noted the importance of the recognition that they receive. In the following section, the findings on sports recognition as a benefit will be discussed.

*Adulation and Recognition from Sports*

Many of the student-athletes in this sample suggested that playing sports brings a great deal of publicity and notoriety from individuals and groups within the university and surrounding communities. Most of the recognition noted by the athletes in this sample comes from people described as “fans” of Midwestern University athletics. As you will read in the following chapters, recognition from sport is only positive in some instances. However, for many of the respondents the adulation and praise they received based on their membership to an athletic team is viewed as a benefit to playing sports. In the following statement, Romero suggested that support from fans is very important.

> It’s lovely… it's not like big time schools, but the students here they enjoy it. The faculty they enjoy it… they enjoy us. And I enjoy them coming out to the games… It's a good experience.

Mike further represented this belief when he said,

> We have great fans. The student section is out of control as usual at the games. And that’s always good. That’s what we like to have because we feed off of energy.

Jordan also expressed the benefits and importance of the adulation that student-athletes receive from fans. He said,

> Seein’ all the fans in the crowd cheering for you… That’s a good experience.
The above-referenced statements of these student-athletes describe the joy of their experiences and how fan recognition makes them feel. These student-athletes are not singled out and given recognition, but instead they are recognized as aggregate members of an athletic team who are loved and adored by the university and surrounding community. The final thematic category that will be discussed in this section has to do with social networking. Although socializing and social networking can be seen as forms of social support, the data included in the following subsection specifically relates to the perception of social networking as a benefit of athletic participation.

**Meeting People and Post-Sports Opportunities**

Several student athletes viewed social networking opportunities and post-graduation athletic/career prospects as primary benefits of being a student-athlete. Although not stated by name, many of the student athletes in this sample viewed sports as a means to increase their *social capital*. Basically, the student athletes viewed their participation in collegiate athletics and affiliation with their teams/coaches to be a resource for their own future successes. For example, when discussing the benefits of meeting people Aaron said,

"Networking in your field of study... You can meet people out there like sponsors and boosters. And you know people who follow the sport. And whether you keep playing the sport or not, after that you know these people, so they might be able to help you out in the business world."

For Aaron and other athletes their participation in sports leads to increased exposure/recognition which can lead to the formation of social ties and allegiances. Tony
and Mike individually agreed that people naturally gravitate to you if you play a sport which presents several opportunities to connect with individuals outside of athletics.

Tony: people ask you ‘oh you play ball?’ and you meet people. You know what I'm saying? You meet people outside of the team, because everybody is interested in what’s going on in the team. They want to know, so you meet other people.

Mike: I think it’s a good aspect to be an athlete. A lot of people know you. A lot of people look up to you, so that's always good. So, you just got to make the right decisions.

Although the majority of the respondents suggested that they would love to “go pro”—to secure an athletic career at the professional level—their statements captured the belief that participation in athletics can prepare them for life after collegiate sports, even if playing at the “next level” is not an option. This belief was clear in Harrison’s response:

You’re never guaranteed an [professional] contract. So, I definitely wanted to go somewhere that I knew I would be fine if sports didn’t work out. So, in that aspect I was correct. I have a tremendous amount of opportunities to pursue after my [athletic] career is over here.

While the student-athletes in this research articulated some positive aspects of participation in athletics at Midwestern University, it is not all glitz and glamour. In the next section the stressors associated with athletics participation will be discussed. Again, the balancing act broadly represents the duality between the pros and cons of collegiate athletic participation. More specifically, one component of the balancing act refers to the stress, and subsequent management of that stress, experienced by intercollegiate student-athletes.
Perceived Stressors of Athletic Participation

The student-athletes in this sample noted that there are several stressors associated with being a student-athlete. Mainly, student-athletes are expected to be masters of role management. Student-athlete role management, or “the balancing act”, is associated with three overlapping roles: athletics, academics, and social. The social location of student athletes can be found at the intersection between the three different statuses of “athlete”, “student”, and “social actor. Managing these various roles place a great deal of strain on student-athletes. Each role individually carries with it expectations that oftentimes contradict or conflict with other role expectations. For example, the time commitment alone can be so demanding that student–athletes commit more time to their sport and neglect other areas, as noted by Harrison:

I definitely feel like it’s a struggle. One aspect is social life and academics and [athletics]… Balancing all three. I feel like it’s almost like you have to focus on two. And it’s either going to be social life and [athletics], or academics and [athletics], but something’s going to have to give. You can’t balance all three and be successful in all three.

Aaron’s statement below echoes the same sentiment as Harrison and other athletes in this research,

Being a student athlete you got to dedicate your time elsewhere, you know, because you got to do school work and… the rest of your day is basically [his sport]. And sometimes that wears you down, you get tired…

The multitude of role expectations does not create harmony for student-athletes. Instead strain and stress are often the end result. In the following pages findings on academic, athletic, and social strain are presented respectively. Understanding the types of strain that are experienced by student-athletes will better illustrate the relationship between stress and social support (to be discussed in a later chapter).
Academic Strain

The student-athletes in this sample felt that their sports-participation resulted in academic strain and stress. Although tangentially related to athletic strain, academic stressors have more of an impact on student-athletes performance in the classroom. The response when talking to the respondents about their experiences with class was not overwhelmingly positive. Deonte immediately responded, “stress from school is always stressful!” The entire dynamics of the interviews changed once students were asked to discuss their experience with collegiate academics. Deonte further elaborated upon these experiences when he said,

I would say it’s very stressful because you have to do early morning workouts. Ya know? Your schedule is pretty much based around your [his sport] schedule. So, if it takes you taking eight o’clock classes everyday just so that you can fit the schedule that you have for [his sport], then that’s what you have to do. Ya know? You don’t have a decision like most students do, ‘Oh I don’t take eight o’clock classes.’

The fixed athletic schedules do not allow the students very much liberty in selecting class times. Student-athletes in this research noted that they are usually required to practice twice each day: once in the early morning before classes, and once after their last afternoon class. This athletically-packed day can compromise the student-athletes’ ability to focus in class. Steven articulated this best when he said,

Being a student athlete is hard. ‘Cause I'm the type of person who was always on my grades. Like, if I don’t get a good grade it will ruin my whole day, but it's hard to keep it up because you be tired after practice. We practice two times a day. So, you tired, you want to sleep in class, but you can't just sleep. After practice you got class. You just fall asleep in class… It's just hard. I guess it's more mental than anything...
Practice is hard, class is hard, and participants indicated that when the two are combined they are nearly impossible to maintain. The expectations for student-athletes to perform well academically are high. The stakes of them not performing well are even higher. Several of the student athletes in this sample recognized that there is little leniency for under-performing in the classroom. As stated by Harrison,

> Anybody on this campus that is in [his major] program are basically my competitors. And there is no mercy on me for being a student-athlete I still have to keep up with these people that are not student athletes. So, that can be stressful at times too.

Martin furthered this concern,

> Being a student athlete it’s tough, because you gotta carry the same course load as everybody else. But then you got [his sport], you got practice, you got coaches, you got the same homework, the same projects. So, it’s definitely tough, but that’s the whole point why you got a scholarship you just got to suck it up and do it.

It is evident that collegiate student-athletes experience academic strain due to the conflicting demands of athletics and academics. These are strains that the typical undergraduate student may not experience in the classroom.

The participants in this research also expressed having troubles interacting with faculty at Midwestern University. Student-athletes noted that some professors can be very supportive, but that there are many who seem to be unhelpful or even hindering. Many student athletes echoed the experiences voiced by Aaron:

> You might miss something because we're traveling for games. And so when you have to go speak to professors or something, some aren't as lenient or understanding. So, that can put you in a situation like ‘well what am I supposed to do now?’ because they're not willing to help you out.
Jerome felt that professors were harsher and less lenient on student athletes.

We got a lot of teachers that don't like us, as far as staff. Yea, It's a lot of staff that don't particularly give a care about athletics. You know what I mean?

Jordan also mentioned that talking to professors was a challenge,

Going to talk to the professor.... That’s stressful, because sometimes, the professor don’t want to talk to you, sometimes…

Finally, some of the athletes expressed having trouble with the college-level coursework. This created a great deal of strain academically. Romero was one of the more vocal respondents on this issue of difficult coursework.

I went to [an inner-city] public school and [inner-city] public schools they ain’t the greatest, they ain’t the best, but I had it made in high school. Like, I didn't have to do nothing. So, when I got here it’s like a smack in the face, it’s like you got to study. And I struggled at first learning how to study, learning how to get prepared for tests. Do homework, write papers. I ain’t never wrote a paper in my life until I got here… ain’t never read a book until I got here… ain’t never opened a book up until I got here! So, it was learning how to study. It was learning how to be a student, honestly.

In addition, Jerome indicated that academic tasks not directly correlated with career goals were stressors.

My thing was the writing the papers thing. Like, I’m not an English major you know? I really wasn’t down with the big ass reports. I'm not an English major and I’m not no journalist. So, that was a big thing in college with me.

Improving one’s writing skills is a valuable form of human capital. However, several athletes expressed some contempt for being expected to excel in an area that is outside their comfort zone. Jason also noted that he struggles with writing and reading.

Academic stresses? Papers. Probably papers, reading, cause that’s something you have to practice too. You got to get good at reading and understand the… actually the effort to understand it.
Academic issues are not the only stressors for student-athletes at Midwestern University. Strain associated with athletic participation will be discussed in the following section.

**Athletic Strain**

Athletic strain can be thought of as unpleasant events and occurrences that result from sports participation. These strains include physical pain and the time commitment to sports. Athletic strain is a major component of the balancing act. The strain from athletics can lead to complications in other areas such as academics. When asked about stressful situations as a result of athletic involvement, Jordan responded,

> Pain. We be sore. We get bruises every day. It’s just our bodies just be beat down... After you done beat and sore and all that, you don’t wanna… you don’t wanna go to class, or you don’t wanna do nothing. You jus’ wanna go back home and lay down because your body is that beat down… But we still have to… we gotta go to class and everything. So we gotta fight through it.

Jason further supported Jordan’s comment that physical pain creates stress. He said,

> It's gruesome… we go through gruesome workouts. You lift and you run and after all that is done you actually practice. And, you know, you sore and everything like that. It’s just a lot of time spent on athletics.

Other athletes also indicated that the time commitment to their sport is a primary athletic stressor. In his comment, Harrison was representative of the majority of the athletes in this research.

> I feel like every day is stressful, as far as time management skills… I mean, every day I wake up at six o’clock to lift weights, then it’s a full day of classes, and then its practice, and then you might have to meet with a tutor or whatever. Every day is a full day. Like there is no sleeping in between classes and taking a nap, you know? It’s just so fast paced. I mean, you’re going from one thing to the next thing to the next thing. So, I mean, if you’re not organized being a student-athlete would eat you up and spit you out. You wouldn’t be able to keep up.
Jason also added that the time commitment to his sport results in stress.

It’s a tough experience. Because at times you feel good, at time you just get sick of trying to balance your school work and your athletic performance out. You know what I mean?

The responses above indicate that athletic stress is primarily related to the physical demands of sports as well as the time commitment to athletics. The final component of the balancing act has to deal with social stressors. In this following section social strains will be discussed.

**Social Strain**

Student athletes felt that they were unable to participate in the university social scene in the ways that non-athlete students could. For the majority of the participants in this research, this was seen as an unfortunate downside of committing to their sport and intercollegiate athletics. Deonte’s statement below begins to shed light on the issue of social marginality experienced by Black male athletes which will be further discussed in the next chapter. However, what is important here is that Deonte and other athletes expressed there being somewhat of a social disconnect between athletes and non-athletes at the university.

Deonte: As an athlete sometimes we miss half the things that’s going on in school because of being in our sport. So, half the time we don’t even know about things that’s going on. And if we do nine times out of ten we got practice or game or we probably in a hotel. So, there is a disconnect but it’s not like its we’re disconnecting ourselves from [social events] purposefully. It’s because of the job and the task that we have to do.
As Steven pointed out, some people might take it the wrong way, but when you’re a athlete you just… I’m just always about getting what I need to get done. So I might not be social all the time. But when you’re just a student you have more time to socialize and stuff. And sometimes they get the wrong idea, like you’re not trying to mess with them or whatever… They might get that idea like "Oh he stuck up now because he's on the team now" or whatever. "He don’t come around". But it’s not even like that, we got a schedule.

Another theme that emerged in the category of social strain was perception that there is a heightened sense of negative social exposure for student athletes. The recognition and adulation noted above as a benefit becomes a double edged sword when it prevents student-athletes from fully participating in the social scene at the university. When discussing social strain Martin said,

You have to watch pretty much everything you do. You know what I'm saying? Like, We can't just do the same thing as regular students cause as soon as you get caught it’s going to get blown up just cause you're a student athlete. You know what I’m saying? Like, I have a lot of friends that do wild stuff, but I gotta be careful if I’m with them... I gotta watch my back... Cause if we all get in trouble I'ma be the one that gets picked-out out of everybody...

Student-athletes who are conscious of this heightened exposure/scrutiny may be able to avoid deviant and potentially dangerous situations. However, the scrutiny also carries with it a great deal of stress and anxiety that limits the enjoyment of social outings. The comments of both Mike and Aaron are representative of the majority of participants in this research regarding how student-athletes are perceived by others.

There's always a couple people that don't like athletes cause they're so called "stuck up" or they think they’re above everybody else. Which, I really don’t see that. I mean, athletes are athletes and we can’t help that we play a sport. That’s what we want to do…So, there's always a couple people that think that you don't deserve what we're getting. (Mike)
If people recognize you as a [student-athlete] either they like you or they don’t. Cause there's so many different stereotypes about black student athletes here, athletes period, in general. So, it can go either way. (Aaron)

It is not clear whether or not the individuals who dislike the student-athletes present an immediate threat to the well-being of the student-athlete, but it is evident that student-athletes are aware of the way they are being perceived by others.

The experiences of Black male student athletes include both positive and negative aspects. Respondents noted several benefits of their sports participation including having opportunities for personal growth, receiving recognition and adoration, and also having opportunities to meet and network with people outside of athletic. The respondents also mentioned that their sports participation leads to many stressful incidents. Mainly, respondents reported being stressed because of the difficulty managing their roles as athletes, students, and social actors. In this way, the balancing act of collegiate athletics may be one of the most difficult tasks student-athletes undertake.

The participants in this research also note that in addition to the three roles they are expected to balance, Black student-athletes also have to deal with race-based stressors. In the following section, examples of race-based strain and marginalization of the Black athlete that emerged from the data will be discussed.
CHAPTER 5: THE MARGINALIZED BLACK ATHLETE

It is rough being a black athlete here... Ain’t really nothing for you... It’s already tough being a black student, it’s even tougher being a black male, and it’s the toughest of the tough being a black male athlete. (Kevin)

This section focuses on experiences of marginality among Black male collegiate athletes. The above statement made by Kevin perfectly summarizes the experiences described by the other Black male athletes in this sample: it’s “rough”. In the previous chapter on the balancing act data was presented that suggests that the experience of student-athletes can be strenuous. For Kevin, and the other athletes in this sample, Black athletes at the university have the “toughest” time. The racial identity/role of the Black athlete is yet another spinning plate in the balancing act. The following categories document difficulties experienced by the respondents that particularly relate to race. There are three categories within this chapter including: academic-, athletic-, and social-marginality.

**Academic Marginality**

Each respondent was asked to speak about their experiences related to academics. As shown in the previous chapter, every athlete expressed a strain or stressor related to academics. However, upon further reflection respondents noted that there were several academic stressors that were primarily a result of race. Racially-based academic stressors have been included in this section as another form of marginality experienced by Black male athletes at Midwestern University.
In some instances the respondents had to deal with stereotypes associated with Black athletes. Kevin said,

    You always have that connotation when you go in any class that ‘oh he’s an athlete so he’s dumb’, but I think that especially being a Black male that’s an athlete that’s just a bad reputation that precedes you.

Kevin expressed a great deal of contempt for the stereotypes associated with being a Black athlete. Jason also suggested that stereotypes of Black athletes causes problems interacting with people in the academic setting,

    For some reason, here, it’s a stereotype of black folks just doing the wrong thing… if one black person did something wrong then all of them did it wrong. And don’t have dreads! You know what I’m saying? It’s just immediate, aw man, just look for something bad.

Overcoming said stereotypes places a great deal of strain on student-athletes who are also trying to manage the difficulty of college-level coursework as well as the challenge of forging relationships with professors and peers. Discussing experiences with academics Deonte said:

    You really got to recognize the situation that you’re in that it’s a different culture and the community’s a lot different. So, you have to change your mentality and mind frame of thinking. Which is sometimes it’s hard, sometimes people can adjust and adapt, and sometimes people can’t. And those people that can’t they tend to have a hard time going through class or dealing with teachers because they want to do the same thing they did at home.

Deonte and several of the other respondents noted that they have trouble dealing with the academic demands of college—whether it is dealing with professors or completing assignments. Group projects and peer interaction were another stressor pointed out by the student athletes in this sample. Both group projects and social interaction can be stressful because of the aforementioned stereotypes as well as the lack of social
integration into the university community (to be discussed below). Jason and Kevin both explicitly expressed concern with group work. Jason, who mentioned being concerned with stereotypes earlier, said,

The only other thing I can say is probably just interacting with others, because everybody not just going to accept you for who you are. You know? A lot of times you have group assignments and you got to break through that ice before you get anywhere.

For Jason, aside from writing and reading, the most stressful part of group work is the social interaction that is required. Social interaction was also an issue for Kevin, except Kevin was mainly concerned with razing stereotypes associated with Black student-athletes. Kevin noted that this continues to be a challenge and a stressor.

Kevin: Being a black athlete in a group project sucks. ‘Cause I’m the type I don’t like anything handed to me. Like I want to put in my work, you know, at the end of the day put in the time. But I’ll have the different students. Nine times out of ten it’s a Caucasian female and she says oh, just sit back I’ll take care of everything...

AG: You think they say that because… When that woman said it did she say it kind of like “I know you have a lot on your plate… So, I got it.”?

Kevin: Nah, it was “you’re not that smart”… I mean they love you. They love you for your friend, but they don’t want you doing their homework.

Some of the athletes in this sample were uncomfortable taking ‘freebies’ while others admitted that they appreciate the students taking a load off of their shoulders by volunteering to complete their assignments. The ways in which various student-athletes may respond to this situation is not as important as the insight that their responses have provided. From their perspective, the stereotypes of Black athletes’ academic aptitude causes their peers to view them as academically inept and to regard their ideas unfit for inclusion in group assignments.
In addition to academic strain as a result of stereotypes and academic unpreparedness a significant amount of respondent’s mentioned that within athletics there are also stereotypes of Black athletes, a disproportionately high expectation placed on Black student-athletes for athletic excellence, and a perception that coaches show favoritism toward white athletes. These are examples of yet another form of marginality. Athletic marginality will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

**Athletic Marginality**

The recognition for athletic excellence (or adulation), is noted in the previous chapter as a benefit of sports-participation, but not every respondent viewed this as a positive experience. In fact, the heightened expectations of Black athleticism at the university have not resulted in athletic dominance for everyone with dark skin pigmentation. Instead it has led to a deal of resentment among many of the Black male student-athletes. Jason was resentful of this almost “model-minority” expectation. In speaking with him about it he said:

> Everybody expects you to be good at sports. And every Black person is not athletically talented. Not the way they want you to be.... Depending on what sport you playing. You might be playing football, but you might be better at basketball… Or even diving! But they wouldn't know that, they just think you good at football.

Jason felt that his athletic potential was being hindered due to role-restrictions that are based on misconceptions of Black athleticism. Mike also made a statement that captured his perception of the extraordinarily high expectations that are placed around Black athleticism:
If you not really performing in a great way then you probably not going to get as much support unless you're really standing out... That's compared to a white athlete. Because you know, they're proud that the white player is getting the time and getting the performance and everything... For instance, [a star Black player], he's going to get a lot of publicity because he performs great... And then there's a couple of white athletes that don't have to work as hard and they will still get as much support... Even more sometimes!

Recalling events from the past athletic season Harrison also commented on this double-standard:

When you break it down to a level playing field and you have an African American player of mediocre talent, and a Caucasian player of mediocre talent, they’re definitely going to go with the Caucasian player. Definitely, hands down. And it’s not fair because the African American player can be playing better at the time than the Caucasian player but they’re still going to ride or die with this Caucasian player. I don’t know why, but they do that. I know for me that was the case for me last season.

For Harrison, and several of the student athletes in this sample, “celebrity” and “adoration” are unfitting descriptors of their experiences as Black male student-athletes. Jordan also stated that Black athletes seem to be scrutinized more than their white teammates. Jordan said that the white players are viewed as the “goodie goodies”.

They all think we the bad guys. And they think all the white boys is the goodie goodies, and, they do everything right... they get looked at different. We all get watched, looked down on. They get praised. You know? From coaches, fans... And um... and the head coach... Put him by himself. (laughs)

It is evident that Black student-athletes perceive the high-stakes based on their athletic performance to be strenuous. Among all of the student athletes in the sample, there was a perception that experience-/performance-levels influence treatment on the team. If the quality of performance dropped, and as a result student-athletes are treated differently, then this may have negative consequences for Black athletes who are not “high-
performers”. This detail may be insignificant to the well-being of Black student-athletes that are cut-off from athletic esteem if they are able to gain refuge in the social scene outside of athletics. However, as noted in the following section social marginality is an issue for many Black athletes at the university.

**Social Marginality: Meeting, Dating and Relating**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, participation in collegiate sports requires a huge time commitment. The time commitment devoted to athletics oftentimes removes student-athletes from non-athletic extracurricular activities. The quotes above illustrates another unsettling reality of the experiences of student-athletes at Midwestern University. During the interviews almost every student-athlete expressed having difficulties navigating the social scene at Midwestern University. These difficulties lead to yet another situation of marginality for Black male athletes: social marginality. Three themes emerged during the analysis of social marginalization including the integration in to the Black student community, integration into the White student community, as well as marginalization in the dating scene. The findings from this section will be discussed in further details in the subsequent pages.

*Integration into the Black Student Community*

The majority of student-athletes in this sample expressed that they are somewhat disconnected from the Black student community. There weren’t any questions in the original interview guide that asked about social integration. However, this ‘social disconnect’ was mentioned in the very first interview and in almost every subsequent
interview. During the analysis process it became apparent that the social integration (or lack thereof) of Black male athletes into the Black student-community was a major form of marginality.

Some of the respondents stated that Black student athletes don’t socialize with Black non-athletes because they have not had the opportunities to meet them. When discussing his freshman year, Kevin was adamant about not being able to integrate into the Black student-community,

You also miss out on learning what college is, because we been here since the summer… in the summer time that’s when most of the freshmen athletes are introduced to this campus, but ain’t nobody here in the summer. So, then fall comes and they like “alright we still living this life, it’s a whole bunch of people around, but I don’t get to see them I don’t get to meet them”… So, the freshman is just like “I don’t know what to do. I can’t go to the bars. I don’t know where the parties are.” So, as a black male who I’ma go with? The white football players that know where the parties at. And that’s why people always wonder why the black football players aren’t around at black parties… cause they don’t know where they at!

Aaron’s statement echoes a similar sentiment,

The first quarter here is all the parties all the events and we're always gone or in practice… So, I would go to parties and stuff but I wouldn't really know people, because I didn't have an opportunity to meet them… that’s just how it is.

There was also a group of respondents who believe that it is difficult to interact and be involved in the Black student community because their coaches do not push them or encourage them to participate in non-athletic extracurricular activities. Jerome’s statement shows how disconnected he feels.
We got the multi-cultural joint in the student center, that’s about it. (laughs) And I ain’t been in there once. You know what I’m saying? I don’t even know what’s going on in there. Like our coaching staff don’t inform us on the multicultural events. You know, we don’t see it unless we walk through [the student center]… Us athletes feel like we're really out of the loop as far as the Black community here. We don't know what's going on unless we hear. You know, by word of mouth. We feel like we don't have no involvement in anything that deals with our culture here. All we do is play sports. Like, that's all we really- they don't try to get us involved in nothing else.

Romero also felt he was unaware of the resources available to Black students at the university.

Shoot maybe athletics don’t do enough to make the Black athletes fit in enough. Not necessarily fit in, but maybe they don’t go out of their way as hard… Maybe us Black athletes don’t reach out into those resources like Black students on campus do.

Overall, the respondents felt disconnected and marginalized in the Black student community at the university. In the following section the experiences of social integration into the White student community will be discussed. The contrast of these two experiences will allow us to better understand the phenomenon of social marginality experienced by Black male student-athletes at Midwestern University.

Integration into the White Student Community

As discussed in the previous section, the Black student-athletes perceived there to be a disconnect between themselves and the Black student community. Several student-athletes admitted that the challenge of integrating into the Black community at Midwestern University causes some Black male athletes to gravitate more toward their white peers who seem to be more accepting and welcoming of the Black athletes. Harrison, stated that it seems like his Black student-peers are resentful.
I definitely feel like it’s easier for an African American student-athlete to fall into hanging out with Caucasians because Caucasians are more acceptable to African American athletes because they love our talent on the field or on the court and when you come to campus they’re basically welcoming you with open arms. And then it’s like if you’re trying to hang out with the African American culture that are not athletes and they’re shunning you and they’re resenting you, what are you gonna do? Are you going to keep trying to go hang out with these people that are your people where you’re being ridiculed? Or are you going to go hang out with somebody that’s accepting you for who you are and building you up with positive things because they like what you do?

Harrison’s statement is profound. For him and other student-athletes, the Black student community is perceived as an unwelcoming group. Romero also held the same belief,

Sometimes at the black party more than at the white parties sometimes that I’ve been to, they look at us like "oh they the [his sport] team they think they run shit". Compare to going to a white party, they embrace you. You know what I mean? They be like "Oh he’s on the [his sport] team, they cool.

In addition, Kevin noted that the Black student community is unreceptive and even resentful of Black athletes who spend time with White students.

I mean, most of my teammates bounce back and forth, but 80% of the time they’re going to be with the white folks. And the thing they deal with is, “Oh y’all athletes ain’t shit cause y’all don’t mess with us. Y’all don’t care about the black community”. Like people come at my neck like that… that’s the attitude that the community takes and it’s just rough. And that’s a whole other stressor in the back of your mind. “Oh, you only messing with white girls now? Oh, you done changed. What’s up with that?” Like that might be the biggest stressor!

The comfort that Black athletes feel when hanging out with their white teammates did not emerge on its own. With their comments, Martin and other respondents suggested that it is all a learning process.
Martin: As a black man it's always gon be that fear. Just fear of the unknown, fear of how people are going to accept you. Of course you’re different, of course you’re from the inner city, of course the inner city kids don't know how to talk to the white people like that... So it's one of those things like it’s like a learning process...

For some of the athletes interacting with their white peers is a learning process. For Mike, it is a skill that was acquired prior to coming to Midwestern University.

I'm from a predominantly white town. So, the black to white ratio here is about the same that it is at home… So, it wasn’t no culture shock for me. I know how it goes. I know what I can do and what I can't do.

Social integration into the white community does not mean full acceptance or assimilation for every athlete. Black student-athletes experience a great deal of both pandering and exclusion in the predominantly white student social scene. They are allowed to participate in the white social scene, but not without limitations. In the next section the experiences of Black student-athletes in the dating scene at Midwestern University will be presented. This final dynamic will allow us to more clearly understand Black male student-athletes experiences with social marginality.

*The Dating Scene*

The dating scene category is related to the experience of marginality among Black male student-athletes at the university. According to the respondents, and contrary to popular belief, the student-athletes finding partners to date is not effortless. Several of the respondents mentioned that among students at the university there is a false notion that the student-athletes have the privilege of dating any woman they choose. According to Aaron, student-athletes have to work for the women they want just like every other man on campus.
People think just because we play football, or play basketball, or baseball that you automatically have a flock of females that would want you, but that's not really the case. You got to work for everything you get just like every other guy.

In addition, Kevin mentioned that it is hard for athletes to talk to women on campus mainly because of negative stereotypes associated with student-athletes.

Nine times out of ten when a Black girl comes to college she gets told two things: Don’t date a Greek, don’t date an athlete. So, when they come in with that they come in with a pre-conceived notion of the Black athlete that’s why it’s so hard for them to get into the social scene.

James also experienced trouble dating because of preconceived notions many women hold about athletes,

I hate that! Like, the chick I date now said before she didn't want to date athletes. Like why can't I be a regular man? You know? I just happen to play sports. But It's just the situation and things that happened in the past. I was talking to this one girl and she just happened to say "oh, you an athlete I can't talk to you!" Like, I'm just trying to have a conversation. We can't be friends or nothing!?

Additionally, several respondents noted that it is difficult for Black athletes to talk to Black women specifically because of the perception that Black athletes only date or are attracted to white women. Echoing this same sentiment Martin said,

Black girls here definitely get mad when they see you talking to the white girls, I would say.

This was the first, but far from the last, time that this was brought up. Many of the respondents held the perception that Black women were uninterested in them or resentful that they only dated white women. Jerome was quite expressive when discussing dating,

I know our Black sisters don’t like the fact that we be messing with all these white girls. But, you know, like, what the fuck?! What can you say? It's only eight of y'all here, man! [laughs]. Nah, but seriously though…
Several of the respondents in this sample did admit to dating primarily white women. However, a few of the respondents said that they are not always able to talk to or date white women either. Martin is one of the respondents who expressed interest in dating someone outside of his race, but admits that he does not know how to approach white women.

I'm cool with these girls that live next door to me, two white girls. And I was like ‘I'm sacred to... I don't even know how to talk to y'all sometimes’, cause you feel like you gon come off a little too strong. And I think that's definitely something that affects relationships..

Martin’s comment shows his anxiety in approaching white women he is interested in. Romero also noted a similar situation of nervousness and timidity when interacting with white women.

Sometimes the white girls... They've never talked to a black guy. They be still scared to talk to us... So, you got to go with more subtle and gentle approach. You got to talk more proper a little bit. You can't just go up to them like back at home. It's a lot different.

The data suggests that Black student-athletes at the university are marginalized from the White and Black student communities. Because of the time commitment to sports they are unable to attend social gatherings as often as other students. As a result, student-athletes are not as integrated into the university student community and must rely on affiliations made through athletics to navigate the social scene. Respondents expressed the desire to socialize with the Black student community, but remained unfamiliar and disconnected. Many respondents admitted to socializing with White students, but expressed feeling further ostracized from the Black community as a result. And although the respondents held the belief that they were received well by many students at the university, they felt that they were excluded from fully participating in the student
community and expressed having difficulties with dating and interacting with their student peers.

The marginalization of Black male student-athletes at Midwestern University is of great concern. In addition to the stressors mentioned in chapter four, the respondents expressed feeling marginalized in various ways academically, athletically and socially because of their race. The implications for social support are clear. Student-athletes are vulnerable to stress and therefore, would benefit from social support. In the following chapter the findings on the respondents’ perceptions of social support will be discussed.
CHAPTER 6: PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Student-athletes devote a great deal of time and energy to their sport. As noted in the previous chapters, their participation in sports at times can be stressful. However, there are often agents of support who are there to assist student-athletes through these stressful times. The findings in this section discuss the respondents’ perceptions of the social support that is available to them and the social support that they receive at the university. This chapter has been divided into three sections: team support, fan support, and human agency. At the onset of the interview respondents were asked to give their own definition of social support. These definitions provided the foundation for their answers regarding social support. In the following pages, the various providers of support at the university will be discussed.

In chapter four, it was argued that student-athletes experience academic stress. The respondents admit to receiving academic support, but their answers were widely varied. During the analysis it was determined that there was not enough data available to categorize academic support into a comprehensive section. Additionally, respondents have suggested that they receive social support from family members and friends back home. However, one of the goals of this research is to evaluate the social support that student-athletes receive from the university community. Thus, the support from family and friends outside of this context are not discussed here in order to focus on the experiences of student-athletes with social support while at the university.

Additionally, findings on disparities and limitations in social support will be presented. The student-athletes in this research suggest that there are various contextual factors that influence how social support is allocated. The contexts which lead to
disparities in support include in-season versus off-season changes in support as well as the business model of collegiate sport. In the following pages the findings on perceptions of social support are presented and discussed.

**Team Support**

The overwhelming majority of the student-athletes in this sample reported that they received the most social support from various individuals within their team. Respondents said that they receive social support primarily from coaches and teammates. These agents of support create the team support category. Team support has been further broken down into two sections: coach support and teammate support.

*Coach Support*

For many of the respondents coaches were seen as a source of social support. The support that coaches provided was mainly expressive. That is, the coaches give words of encouragement to build up the confidence of their student-athletes. Jason said that the social support he receives from his coaches is mainly the “encouragement to get better.” Jordan also mentioned that his coaches provide him with emotional and esteem support.

> Coaches, they give me social support. They want me to be the best I can be. So they’ll try to lift me up every day they see me. Or, give me a compliment when I messed up.

Several respondents noted that their coaches always check on them to make sure they are doing well. For these athletes, the coaches inquiring about their well-being was seen as a form of social support. As stated by Martin,
Not everybody has a relationship with [head coach], but I think I might be one of the few that, ya know, anytime he sees me he's checking up on me... I had hurt my back... so I had to go to the chiropractor... And he was like, anytime I'd see him, he's like "how you doing? How's your back? Do we need to hold you out? What we gotta do to make sure that you're ready to play this year?" you know? So he definitely shows support.

Martin perceived the extent of the relationship with his head coach was his coach’s concern for getting Martin ready to play again. Martin’s statement also suggested that the head coach only has a relationship with some of his players. These are important dynamics of coach support. It was mentioned several times that the assistant coaches and position coaches—who respondents said spend more time with the players—provide the most social support and that the head coach has less of a supporting role. In the statement below, Kevin described his experiences with coach support and almost immediately credits his position coach as the primary provider of social support.

They call. They check up on us see how we’re doing… ask if we need anything... My position coach. You have your head coach, and you’ll talk to him like once every blue moon, you really only talk to him if you get in trouble… I mean, our head coach, I mean, we know him… if you see him you say ‘what’s up,’ you’ll have a conversation with him… But he’s there to make sure the whole program is running the correct way.

Kevin was not the only student athlete to note that the head coach plays more of an administrative role. Tony suggested that the head coach doesn’t provide as much social support, and he also excuses this as a necessity to making sure the program runs smoothly. Tony noted that if you really need him, the head coach is available, but most support comes from the assistant coach.

You get support from some of them, some of them you don’t. Probably would be more so from the assistant coach... The head coach is there, but he can only do so much, he's trying to watch everybody... But you can go to him if you really need to.
Several of the respondents noted that their head coach was somewhat removed from the players until they are in need of assistance or reprimand. Romero said that his position coach was the only one who checks on him, and there’s no telling whether or not the other coaches care.

Out of everybody [the position coach] gives the most social support. He asks how your mom’s doing. That's the only coach I know on this team that will call your mom and ask how she's doing… Coaches can be on your good side and you cool with them or you hate them. But I wouldn't say you get any social support honestly.

Romero’s statement above sheds light on the issue of superficial relations that players have with the coaching staff. This will be discussed further in the section below, *strictly business*. In the next section the findings on teammate support will be presented and discussed.

**Teammate Support**

Unlike the mixed feelings about coach support, the respondents in this sample agreed unanimously that their teammates are primary providers of social support. Some respondents mentioned that their teammates can provide instrumental of social support, but they mainly give emotional support. The following statements illustrate the perceptions of teammate support held by the student-athletes in this sample. These statements include the respondent’s perceptions of their relationship with their teammates as well as the types of support that are provided. Martin offered a comment that was representative of the other respondents when he said,
My teammates are probably the biggest supporters because you know we go through everything together... I live with two of my teammates so it's just one of those things.. I think we support each other because we know what each other is going through at all times for the most part. So I mean, we always have each other's back. Like, I sat down and talked to my roommate for like two hours the other day about his girl problems he was having.. But it's stuff like that.. They're like my family, they're like my brothers you know? And it goes way beyond [athletics]! We party together, we hang out together, we do dumb stuff together. So it's one of those things like we always there for each other we always support each other.

Although Martin discusses his relationship with his roommate specifically, the conception of the team as a second family was found in several interviews. Kevin also expressed feeling like his teammates were members of a family.

We stick together, you ain’t never gon see another [his sport] player leave another one hanging. And I mean that’s evident anywhere, like it’s a family. If I bleed and sweat with you… we lose, I cry with you.

As the above quotes suggest, student-athletes view their teammates as family. A few respondents have even compared the team to a fraternity or brotherhood. Harrison statement below captures this notion,

Yeah there is Greek life here on campus but I feel like the team is also like a frat in itself. I mean, there are players that have came through the program that I know I can talk to, you know, after I’m done graduating as far as job opportunities. Um, you know other players on the team have also had similar experiences to what I’ve had. To where, you know if I ever feel like I’m going through something as far as with the [his sport] team or on the field issues with the coaches I can talk to my teammates and know like nothing will get said back to the coach. You know? They’re there to pick me up. They can relate to how I feel.

The sentiments of closeness and familiarity with teammates were found in almost every interview. Jerome’s statement below captures this belief.

Playing a sport is like a fraternity, that's how we look at it. Like this is our family, our team.
Not only were the respondents’ teammates credited for the social support they provide they were also acknowledged for the significance of the relationship they had with respondents. Respondents said that they receive social support from coaches and teammates. In the following section, the social support provided by sports fans at the university will be discussed.

*Strictly Business*

Another theme that emerged from the data was one about the superficiality of athletic relationships. Many of the student athletes in this research suggested that their teams—including teammates and some coaches—were a major source of social support. However, several student-athletes also suggested that there are limitations to what you can or can’t expect from the coaches in the form of social support. Several athletes stated that they can only go to the coaches for sports related issues. In these cases, the coaches and athletic staff were extremely helpful. However, several student athletes believed that coaches did not give social support outside of athletic or academic related stressors. The perception held by some of the student-athletes in this research was that coaches were only supportive in order to fulfill their job requirements. Romero’s statement below captures this belief,

I don't care what nobody says. This is a business, bro. You would think that "oh it ain’t that fortune five hundred", but nah bruh at the end of the day it’s about the money. So, what they worried about is, they trying to find somebody to replace you. They trying to get the better recruit that's better than you was… they trying to come up.
As crass and cynical as Romero’s statement may seem it was not the only one of its kind.

In the statement below, Martin also noted that the relationship that he has with his coaches appears to be strictly about sports.

I never felt like I could really talk to him because he was one of them like old white dudes... I can’t really… I'm not going to talk to you. He's always yelling! I've seen him react. I seen him communicate with other players who were going through something and how he handled that situation... and I was like why would I talk to him? It’s just one of those things... he's an older white dude... Ya know? And you feel like they're just all about [his sport], but I mean we go through the same thing as everybody else goes through.. We got family problems, everybody does... We got school problems, you know stuff goes on, but then you feel like when it's [his sport] time it's about [his sport]. So, you just feel like you just got that [his sport] relationship...

Several student-athletes in this research expressed being restricted to a sports-only relationship with their coaches. For many respondents, the impersonal relationships they have with their coaches did not totally prevent the exchange of social support, but rather limits the types of support available to them. The respondents believed that their coaches cared, but that the coaches mainly cared about sports. The following exchange with Deonte is representative of similar experiences noted by other athletes. Deonte’s statement showed how respondents can credit their coaches with providing social support while also acknowledging the limitations to that support,
AG: Do you receive social support from your coaches? And if so, which ones?

Deonte: I would say, all of the coaches. I would say they genuinely... not genuinely.. but they care for you. They care for your best interest. I would say the next best thing to your parents or family or friends, is your coaches. When you bring problems to them, they know that it's critical that they resolve that problem in a rush.

AG: Ok. Why did you say not “genuinely”?

Deonte: (smacks lips) Because you know.. (laughs) Genuine, is, that’s a next step help. Genuine is like I passionately care about you. You know what I mean? Yeah coaches, ya know, they really don’t.. I don’t want to say they don’t, but ya know, they live lives too... And you know it’s a hundred some players, so they can’t sit there and say I genuinely care about you. Because it’s like, ya know, they get students every year. So, genuinely is like too strong of a word. Ya know? Not down playing any coaches... I feel like they gotta do their job and they can’t be worrying about your feelings everyday you come and tell them something. I feel like at some point you gotta stand up and be a man. And say, I know these coaches care about me, but to a certain extent. Genuinely, I would say is, I would say, more of their family standpoint. They *genuinely* care about their wives or their kids and things like that. So I wouldn’t really use that word.

When discussing their relationship with their teammates respondents said that they are like brothers or family. However, when it comes to the coaches there seems to be a barrier preventing student-athletes from getting too close. For some, it seems that the lack of familial relationships with their coaches is to be expected. Steven makes a deliberate effort not to get too close to his coach.

The coach up here, like I can talk to him but it's like I don’t know, it’s just like... I never wanted to get too close to... I know not to get too close to a college coach, ‘cause they'll just use you as a means. You know? To better they team.
The respondents’ perception of their relationship with coaches is of great significance. Although they express the receiving social support from their coaches, the perceived superficiality of their relationship can prevent them from requesting social support.

In chapter four it was mentioned that a major benefit of sports-participation is the recognition and adulation that student-athletes receive from fans and members in the university and surrounding community. Not only did respondents perceive this as a benefit of their athletic participation, they also identified fans as a major provider of social support. In the following section, “fan support” will be discussed.

**Fan Support**

Fans have been identified as individuals from the university and surrounding community who come to athletic events and loyally follow the team. In most cases, the fan support described by the respondents is a form of esteem support. The fans boost the confidence of student-athletes by making them feel important and that their efforts and commitment to sports is worthwhile. Fans come out to games and practices, give words of praise when they see the student-athletes in person and, in some cases, befriend the student-athletes. Some of the student-athletes explicitly call these supporters “fans”, while others simply describe the support from members of the university community without applying a label. Regardless of what the title is being used, the fans are an important support agent for student-athletes. Aaron’s statement below is illustrates this sentiment held by many student-athletes.
I feel like we do get a lot of social support because of the community and the students here. They show a lot of support to us… During the season it's a lot more, I guess I can say, intense because we are playing every week. And they’re watching and they know when we got games. So, they'll either be supportive you know asking us about it, wishing us good luck, this that and the other.

A few student-athletes note that the fans have helped or supported them in various ways. Although the fans may not provide instrumental support in the traditional sense, Deonte and other respondents believed that their availability and willingness to talk to you is a form of practical or instrumental help.

Ya know, fans they love you. You can never not get support from fans, because you have some diehard fans at [Midwestern University]. And they really help you. They’ll be there to talk to you if you need help with anything. I feel like fans go above and beyond help when you need it. So fans is key, and I really appreciate fans as much as anything else.

For the student-athletes in this sample the recognition and adulation they receive is a major source of esteem. Some of the student-athletes became quite animated when discussing fan support. Jerome’s use of profanity in the statement below shows how open he is to discussing the fans which have, for him, provided a major source of esteem support.

Everywhere I go I see people. [My girlfriend] gets mad like, "how many people do you know!?". (laughs) Shit I can't help it, muthafuckas know me, I like that shit. You know? That’s one of the reasons you do it so muthafuckas can point you out, you know? That’s the type shit I feed off of.

Jerome notes that he “feeds” off of the recognition he gets from the fans. The participants expressed having personal reasons for pursuing collegiate sport including getting an education. Being recognized and adored by others for something that they are willingly put their blood, sweat, and tears into is an added bonus.
One of the themes that emerged from the data on social support was the shift in social support that occurs during the athletic off-season. Several respondents suggested that they receive more support during the season from fans. During the off-season, this support decreases drastically. The support from outside athletics changes with the athletic season. Student-athletes in this research suggested that when their sport is not in season the amount of recognition they receive outside of athletics drops significantly. Specifically, student-athletes noted that the fans seem much less supportive during the off-season. Jordan said that during the off-season he feels “invisible.”

Aw man, when you in-season... When you playin’ and doin’ good everybody love you... They love you! But when you not doin nothing, you just chillin’ and just goin’ to class... Like, you not... you just... you invisible... The fans, ya know, they kind of forget about you.

Jordan’s statement is profound. Mike also notes that he feels unnoticed during the off-season.

I think the community, they probably support more in season. Because you know that’s when they come to see us play. That's when you really hear from them, you really see them. And then out of season, you know, they're... I mean, they're absent. I guess. I haven't heard form a lot of the community since the seasons been over. You know, we've heard a couple "good jobs" about the [post-season] game and everything, but I mean I think it’s more support in season.

Jason said,

Well during the season there’s a lot of fans. There’s a lot of hopes for you to succeed. Everybody want a winning record everybody want to win. That’s the point of playing the game, you know? So there’s a lot more clapping involved during the season than off season. Off season, well at least here, no one really notice you unless you have your [Midwestern University] gear on. Or even if you don’t, They don’t really acknowledge you like that.
As mentioned earlier, recognition and adulation from sports is extremely important to many student-athletes at the university. Unfortunately for them, during the off-season the recognition they receive drops significantly. During their athletic season, student-athletes are praised and adored for their sports performance. For many of the respondents in this research this recognition serves as a major supply of esteem. This seasonal shift in recognition—with the most significant drop occurring during the off-season—has the potential to leave Black student-athletes devoid of a major form of esteem support for the greater part of the academic year.

Although every respondent perceived there to be an availability of social support from various providers, several respondents suggested that they only rely on themselves for social support. The ways in which student-athletes support themselves will be discussed in the following section on “self support”.

**Human Agency**

Several of the student athletes in this research stated that they are self-reliant when it comes to dealing with stressful situations. This self reliance in dealing with stressors illustrates the athletes’ utilization of *human agency*. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) define human agency as “social actors [who are] capable of critically evaluating and reconstructing the conditions of their own lives” (964). The reliance on agency is both an initial response to stressors and also a response to perceived lack of social support. In other words, some of the students athletes including those who perceive there to be available support will still rely on themselves to get through stressful times. Others are almost forced to rely on themselves once they perceive there to be limits in the availability or provisions of social support from outside actors including coaches,
teammates, and others in the university community. Martin’s response suggests that his
use of agency is more of the former.

Honestly, for the most part I stay to myself... because I've been in a lot of
difficult situations by myself and I haven't had anybody that I could really... I just don't like to voice stuff like that. I like to be able to handle it
on my own, but lately I've been trying to talk to my girlfriend a little bit
more let her know what's going on... It's rough. I'm kind of a macho man
in that sense. Like, I don't like telling people what I'm going through
cause I've gone through a lot and I've only been by myself sometimes... I
just go in my room, blast my music, I'll be good. It doesn't take much. I
just need some time to think about it… let it go.

Deonte also stated that alone time, listening to music, and/or working-out is the best
remedy for mitigating the effects of stress.

The stressful situation between classes and [sports] sometimes it’s like I
just need a break I’m just go work out. I’m go run, or I’m go lift, or
I’m go swim and just listen to music ya know? So, I would say my stress
reliever is that. And that gives me all the comfort I need, it gets my mind
to a point where everything is just blank and I’m not thinking about
nothing. And when I come back to, I can mentally solve the problems on
my own.

Student athletes have suggested that sometimes there seems to be a lack of social support
available to them. Several student-athletes suggested that social support is only provided
to those athletes who seek it out. The old adage “closed mouths don’t get fed” really
captures the sentiments of these student-athletes.

Aaron: To get social support you have to initiate it, you have to be
outgoing, you have to make friends, you know be a part of groups and
stuff like that. Because if you don’t really know anybody nobody really
gon be there to socially support you as an athlete.

Martin’s statement below echoes this sentiment,

It’s definitely tough, but that’s the whole point why you got a scholarship
you just got to suck it up and do it.
Although it is not the same type of agency mentioned earlier, Aaron’s and Martin’s view of the self as the catalyst in the exchange of social support exemplifies the belief in individualism held by many of the respondents.

The respondents’ perceptions of social support allow us to better understand how the relationship between stress and social support affect the experiences of Black male student-athletes. Although respondents identify several providers of support, the areas of support in which disparities lay are of great concern. For one, the perceived superficial relationship between respondents and their coaches may prevent Black student-athletes from fully tapping into to the team support available to them. The respondents’ experiences with stress and marginality—partially a result of their athletic involvement, partially a result of their race—leave them in need of increased team/athletic social support. Secondly, it was mentioned in chapter four that recognition and adulation is a great source of esteem for student-athletes. So, the seasonal shift in fan support discussed above is another area of concern. The respondents’ admit that they thrive off of the adulation they receive from fans, but the drastic drop-off of fan support during the off-season left some athletes feeling isolated.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

This empirical study documents the experiences of Black male student-athletes at a predominantly White university. Although this study is exploratory in nature, the findings provide vast amounts of insight. Overall, the data reveal that Black male student-athletes occupy a marginalized position while at the university as a result of their race and role as student-athletes. Park’s (1928) marginal man theory is utilized throughout this study to understand the relationship between stressors and social support among of Black male collegiate athletes. Specifically, this study examines the ways in which their perceptions of stress and social support shape their overall experiences at the university.

The data in chapter four, suggests that being a student-athlete is not entirely good or bad, but rather consists of a combination of positive and stressful experiences. This dynamic is referred to as the balancing act. The benefits of athletic participation include having opportunities for personal growth, recognition and adulation from members in the university community, and opportunities to meet and network with others. The data on benefits of athletic participation were included in order to better understand the Black athlete experience. It would be misleading to only report the strains associated with athletic involvement, as there are many benefits for student-athletes.

One of the many insightful findings within this section was the respondents’ emphasis on the importance of education. Adler and Adler (1985) note that contrary to popular belief, most athletes enter college with optimistic and idealistic attitudes about their academic careers. However, their athletic, social, and classroom experiences lead them to become progressively detached from academics. As a result, they gradually resign themselves to inferior academic performance. Unlike Adler and Adler’s work, this
study does not involve an empirical measurement of academic performance. However, one of the most important conclusions reached in this project is that the overwhelming majority of the respondents were upperclassmen who still expressed the desire to perform well academically. These respondents understood that their obligation is to be students first and athletes second, but felt unable to focus fully on their studies or social lives. As noted by Adler and Adler the structure and competing demands of collegiate athletics often undermines academics. Whether or not respondents perform poorly in the classroom is beyond the scope of this research. What the data do suggest is that the respondents understand the importance of successfully finishing college and obtaining their degrees. Furthermore, respondents believed that they have an opportunity to achieve this ideal at Midwestern University.

While the participants in this research articulated some positive aspects of participation in sports, their experiences with stress and marginality suggest that it is not all glitz and glamor. The stressors associated with athletic involvement include academic, athletic, and social strains. One of the most significant findings from this section is that the strains experienced by student-athletes are exacerbated by the multiple roles they occupy. Again, the balancing act only partially refers to the dichotomy between the perceived benefits and stresses associated with athletic participation. It also is used to describe the role management that student-athletes undertake. Respondents felt that successfully balancing academics, athletics, and their social life was an impossible feat. Respondents were aware of the importance of performing well academically, but felt unable to commit fully to their studies and reported often experiencing strain when their commitments to athletics conflicted with the demands of academics. The balancing act of
collegiate athletics may be one of the most difficult tasks student-athletes undertake, because it is constant and it is inescapable.

The respondents in this research suggested that they felt pressure to participate in social activities, to excel academically and athletically. The expectation is that they balance all three of these areas, but as noted by several respondents, oftentimes one of the three areas usually gets neglected. The strain associated with the balancing act may primarily be a result of an overemphasis on athletics at the university. Edwards (1970) noted that Black student-athletes at the university are expected to “eat, sleep and drink athletics.” He suggested that the overemphasis on sports undermine academic and social experiences of Black collegiate athletes. Respondents are overwrought by the many demands they face, but have come to accept it as an expected part of their role. Edwards would argue that the strain associated with role management is partially a consequence of the contradiction of college athletes as amateurs because in reality, their commitment to their sport resembles that of a full-time job.

The findings about The Marginalized Black Athlete in Chapter 5 may be some of the most profound. Data in this chapter reveal that Black male student-athletes perceived some of their experiences with stress to be, at least in part, due to their race. Respondents noted feeling marginalized academically, athletically, and in the social scene at the university. In the classroom, respondents noted that they are often treated differently by their white classmates. Some respondents said that their student peers would offer to complete group assignments without requiring them to contribute. This was upsetting for some of the respondents who felt perfectly capable of making valuable contributions.
Respondents were mindful of and offended by their classmates’ perceptions of them as academically inferior and inept.

Within the team setting, respondents perceived there to be more pressure for Black athletes to perform well athletically and that coaches often show favoritism to their White teammates of “mediocre” talent. This notion also echoes sentiments made by Edwards. Edwards (1970) noted that at predominantly white universities “everyone expects a black athlete to excel athletically, and if he does not, he has let down the coach, the school, and the entire ‘Negro’ race” (1970:10). Many of the respondents noted that this heightened expectation to excel athletically causes a great deal of stress and disharmony.

In the social setting, respondents also felt that they were marginalized and discouraged from engaging in activities at the university such as socializing with non-athletes peers and dating certain women. At the university Black athletes are in constant engagement with their predominantly-white team affiliates. The time they commit to athletics prevents Black student-athletes from fully integrating into the university student community. As a result, many student athletes hover in a marginal zone. In general, they socialize and interact with their white student peers, but they are not fully integrated or allowed to participate in many social activities because of their racial identity. Similarly, respondents indicated that they are not welcomed by the Black student community because their athletic involvement has limited their opportunities to interact and socialize with other Black students. In this case, racial similarities do not mitigate unfamiliarity. In other words, Black athletes are not welcomed based on the merit of their race, but rather
based on who they know in the group and how much of an effort they make to be involved.

Although not examined in detail in this study, previous research suggests that the Black student community at predominantly white universities is generally close-knit and operates within the confines of racial discrimination at university (Feagin et al. 1996). Black students create their own safe haven within an unwelcoming and sometimes hostile environment. In an ironic turn of events these Black spaces created to be inclusive of racial minorities end up excluding Black student-athletes. Edwards (1970) notes that “outside of the athletic arena… the life of the Black athlete is lonely, monotonous, and unrewarding.”

Additionally, respondents felt that stereotypes prevented them from successfully navigating the dating scene. Respondents noted that there are not many Black women at the university who are available to date. Respondents also felt that it was hard to approach Black women because they were told not to date student-athletes and therefore made it harder to gain initial rapport. Additionally, some respondents noted that they were unable to date white women, because they did not know how to talk to them. Other athletes, who did date outside of their race, noted that Black women disliked the fact that they dated white women. Edwards was one of the first to note that Black athletes at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) are marginalized from the dating scene. Edwards asserted that a “problem centers around the choice of dating partners on a white campus” (1970:15). The data in from this study suggested that Black male athletes have struggles navigating the dating scene at Midwestern University. There are a limited number of
Black women available to court and cultural barriers exist that prevent them from dating white women.

Overall, Black male student-athletes experience a great deal of pandering and exclusion while at the university. They are loved and adored for their athletic talents, but are excluded from fully participating in many university student activities. They are integrated and welcomed into the university community as members of predominantly-white athletic teams, but they are continually marginalized academically and socially, sometimes even within their teams. These findings echo some of the same sentiments presented by Edwards (1970) when he stated that “[a black athlete] may be a big hero on the field or on the court, but in street clothes and even in the team locker room, he resumes his status as ‘just another nigger’” (p. 16). The respondents’ experiences with stress and marginality—partially a result of their athletic involvement, partially a result of their race—leave them in need of increased team/athletic social support.

The concluding findings chapter on perceptions of social support is also of great importance. Earlier it was mentioned that student-athletes are marginalized academically and in the social scene at the university. However, this detail may not be detrimental if student-athletes are being adequately supported within their teams. We know that student-athletes spend a great deal of time with their athletic teams and findings suggest that student-athletes believe that they are supported by their teammates and coaches. However, the data reveal that student-athletes relationships with their coaches are superficial at best. The perceived superficial relationship between respondents and their coaches may prevent Black student-athletes from fully tapping into to the team support available to them.
Another major finding from this section is the seasonal shift in social support noted by the respondents. The data suggests that receiving recognition from fans is a major source of esteem for Black student athletes. When asked to define social support at the outset of the interviews, the majority of the respondents included fans in their definition. Fans are important to student-athletes for many reasons, but mainly because they boost the confidence of the athletes and reassure them that their efforts are worthwhile. Unfortunately, fan support is not constant. The seasonal shift in fan support illustrates how the drastic drop-off of fan support during the athletic off-season affects the reported wellbeing of student-athletes.

Respondents all noted that their teammates provide a great deal of social support. For the most part, this support is constant. Because of the regular interaction with their teammates, many student-athletes form friendships and bonds that transcend race and athletics. Respondents reported that their teammates mainly provided emotional support. This means that student-athletes’ two main supporters at the university—teammates and fans—provide limited instrumental support, because student peer fans and teammates do not have the ability or wherewithal to “fix” the various forms of stress noted in Chapter 4. However, respondents believe having them there for reassurance does “help”.

Although the respondents mentioned that there were some forms of social support available to them, the overwhelming majority of respondents suggested that they mainly deal with stressful situations without requesting social support. In this way, student athletes exercise human agency in order to deal with strain. These findings are not unusually if we consider Thoits’ (1995) research. Thoits asserts that men are usually inexpressive and stoic, and that this may influence the frequency with which they request
social support. Perhaps the respondent’s reliance on self support is a manifestation of gender norms that tell men they must be self-reliant and engage in their own problem solving efforts rather than ask for help from others.

According to sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1988), the reliance on human agency may be a response to a lack of social integration into the university community. Bourdieu used the metaphor of a “golden ghetto” to describe predominantly white universities. On the one hand, Black student-athletes get to attend the university—revered as a champion of liberal ideologies and an usher of upward social mobility—on the other hand the socio-cultural climate of PWIs oftentimes discourages, and sometimes prevents, African Americans from assimilating into the social scene. Thus, Black student-athletes often find themselves turning inward in search of support, and as a result become further isolated. In this conception, the reliance on human agency is a direct response to marginality.

This research study illuminates many areas of the student-athlete experience previous unexplored in the literature, but it is not without its own limitations. One of the biggest limitations of this project is its reliance on a convenient sample. This sample was constructed using student-athletes from only one university. It would be beneficial in the future to broaden the data collection pool. Additionally, this project does little to explain sport specific experiences of Black male student-athletes. Because of the limited number of Black male athletes at Midwestern University, and the potential of exposing their identities, student-athletes are not identified by sport. However, a sample that controlled for sport would be able to provide even more detailed accounts of sport-specific experiences.
While the current study has limitations, the research suggests other avenues for further sociological inquiry. Again, it may be informative to more rigorously explore the sport-specific experiences of Black student-athletes instead of looking at the athletes as an aggregate. Student-athletes experiences with social support may vary depending on the type of sport they play. I would speculate that a Black student-athlete who is member of a “big money” sport would have slightly different experiences than Black athlete who played Lacrosse or another smaller sport, but the only way to determine that would be to control for “sport” during the data collection and analysis phase.

Future studies should also consider doing a comparative study of Black student-athletes’ perceptions of social support at various institutions. The marginal man theory suggests that structure and culture play a vital role in the development of marginality. A comparative study that controlled for structural and cultural similarities between athletic institutions would be able to further analyze the experiences of marginality among student-athletes. These studies could compare large public universities to private universities or compare the experiences of Black male student-athletes at predominantly white institutions to those at historically Black colleges. Additionally, it would be insightful to have a longitudinal study similar to Adler and Adler’s work on Basketball players in which Black student athletes were followed throughout their tenure at the university. The time spent at any given university may affect the student-athletes’ experiences and their perceptions of marginality, stress, and social support.

Finally, in order to fully understand the experience of Black student-athletes there would need to be a study that assesses the experience of Black female athletes. This could be comparative in nature, or simply replicate the current study using female
respondents instead. It would be interesting to see how Thoits’ research on social support and gender would apply to this type of study.

Overall, this current research is important because it expands the application of the marginal man theory and contributes to the existing literature on Black athletes as well as the literature on social support. In the end, it is my hope that this study will not only contribute to the burgeoning body of empirical knowledge that is the sociology of sport, but that the findings contained will inform university personnel on how to effectively integrate Black male student-athletes in to the university community so that they may capitalize on all forms of social support that are available to them. Black male student-athletes experiences with stress and marginality at the university will not be alleviated without the intervention of proper forms of social support. It is much needed, and for their services to the university, much deserved.
REFERENCES


http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=10904


APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER


Seeking Black Male Student-Athletes to be Interview Participants in a Research Study on “Social Support”.

Research Participants Must:
- Be a current member of a men’s varsity sports team at OU.
- At least 18 years or older.
- Self-identify as Black or African American.

If Interested...
Contact Alan Grigsby at 740.807.1707 or ag113006@ohio.edu
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Social Support for Black Male Student-Athletes

Researchers: Alan V. Grigsby

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

There has been previous research on black athletes in collegiate sports, but seldom do we have an opportunity to learn about black student athletes at predominantly white colleges and universities. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer several questions related to your perceptions of, and experiences with, social support. You will also be asked to respond to questions relating to demographic information (example: academic class rank, hometown, etc.).

You should not participate in this study if… you are not currently a member of a men’s varsity sport team at Ohio University, you do not identify as African-American or Black, and/or you are not 18 years of age or older.

Your participation in the study will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no anticipated risks for participating in this discussion. All of your interview responses will be confidential and anonymous.

Benefits

For decades scholars and university personnel have been interested in the experience of Black students at predominantly white colleges and universities. The insight provided about the perceptions of social support for Black student-athletes can be useful for university coaches and administrators in developing policy to better assist their student-athletes.

This research will be an opportunity for Black male student-athletes to share their stories as well as participate in important research that will help us to better understand the student-athlete experience. While the findings of the research may not directly impact your current experiences as an athlete, they will be a part of a project that has the potential to improve the experiences of future Black student-athletes.

Confidentiality and Records
In order to protect each respondent, the findings will be reported in aggregate and no athlete will be connected to his sports team. Coach and affiliated athletic staff will not receive the names of athletes participating in this study. We may need to address each other on a first-name basis in the interview, but all names will be replaced with pseudonyms when the final transcript is written. All tape recordings will be destroyed upon the completion of this project. This informed consent form will remain in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s office.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact

Alan V. Grigsby (Primary Investigator)
Office: Bentley Annex 143
Email: ag113006@ohio.edu
Phone: 740.807.1707

Debra Henderson, PhD. (Thesis Advisor)
Office: Bentley Annex 137
Email: henderd2@ohio.edu
Phone: 740.593.1382

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_________________________________________________________ Date __________

________________________
Printed Name______________________________________________________
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Social Support Semi-Structured Interview

(Preliminary Questions)

1. What factors influenced your decisions to play collegiate sports?

2. What factors influenced your decision to bring your talents to Ohio University?

3. What other schools did you consider? Why did you decide not to attend there?

4. What do you hope to gain through your sports participation at OU?

5. Can you please describe your experiences as a student-athlete at OU.

I would like to ask you about your experiences with social support while a student-athlete at Ohio University…

6. First, what does the term “social support” mean to you? (How would you define it?)

7. Were there promises of social support when you were being recruited to OU?

8. Do you believe that you are provided with adequate amounts of social support?

9. Are there people who are there to support you on a regular basis? Who are they?
10. Have you ever experienced stressful situations as a result of your athletic involvement? (either in season or not)

If so, explain.

If not, why?

11. When things get stressful, who do you go to for help? How helpful are they?

12. Is there a difference between in-season and out-of-season stressors?

13. What, if any, academic stressors have you experienced?

14. How do you handle academic stressors?

15. Do you receive social support from your coaches? Which ones?

If so, please describe the social support that you receive from your coaches?

If not, explain.

16. Do you receive social support from your teammates?

If so, please describe the social support that you receive from your teammates?

(Which teammates are the most supportive? Upperclassmen or same-class peers?)

If not, explain.

17. How does the social support during the season compare to the off-season support?
18. Do you believe that your position on your team or class rank affect the types of social support you receive? How so?

19. Do you think that the non-black athletes have different experiences than black athletes with social support? How so?

20. Do you think that black women student-athletes have different experiences than black male student-athletes? How so?

21. Do you think that black students who are not athletes have different experiences than black student-athletes? How so?

(Demographic/Concluding questions)

22. How much of your time would you say is involved with athletics, either indirectly or directly, during the season?

(For example, practice and games=direct, hanging out with teammates on the weekend= indirect)

23. Is this different when you are not in season?

24. Where is your hometown located?

25. Are you a first generation college student?

   If yes, go to 26

   If no, has anyone in your family participated in collegiate sports?

26. How many years have you been at OU?
27. What is your sports rank (RS-Freshman, senior, etc.)

28. What is your academic class rank?

29. What is your major of study?

30. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experiences as a black student-athlete at Ohio University?