To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Melissa A. McMaster entitled " An Exploratory Investigation of Three Division I African-American Athletes' Aspirations of a Career in Professional Football." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Human Performance and Sport Studies.

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An Exploratory Investigation of Three NCAA Division I African-American Athletes' Aspirations of a Career in Professional Football

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the possible factors related to career aspirations (dreams) of three African American male athletes with regard to their thoughts/attitudes about how cultural and social variables in life and sport have shaped them and their career aspirations. African-American male athletes from Division I-A football programs were interviewed to obtain a deeper understanding of their experience with sport socialization, academic achievement and how these may or may not have shaped their career aspirations. These interviews were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative research methods. The results revealed five themes that were poignant in the athletes' experiences: 1) *influences on self*; 2) *preparation in life*; 3) *emphasizing academics*; 4) *career choice*; and 5) *my thoughts on race*. Conclusions and recommendations for sport researchers and coaches followed discussion of the potential of qualitative research methodology for studies of this nature.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Consider the following scenario:

James, an African American male, always dreams of becoming a professional football player. He never aspires to be anything else. He knows from age eight when his dad signs him up for the pee-wee league that he wants to be just like Randy Moss, a famous, successful athlete who makes millions of dollars playing professional football. He doesn't come up with this idea on his own though; his parents and others influence him by telling him, "You could play in the National Football League (NFL) someday," or "You could be the next Randy Moss." At first, James's parents are more excited about him playing football than he is. He hears them say things like, "He could make it to the pros someday," or "He could make so much money that we wouldn't have to worry about money again."

In the beginning, James shows early promise of being a talented football player. At first, he plays football for fun and to be with his friends, but once he begins receiving recognition for this talent, things change. Playing football becomes more serious and scoring the most touchdowns and winning becomes most important. Once he realizes his potential as a football player that is all he focuses on.

When James enters high school, he never thinks much about his academics; he does just well enough to stay eligible. His parents and teachers seldom encourage him to get good grades. Mostly, they want to talk about football: how many touchdowns he scored last week or the next big game coming up Friday night. People often treat him like

just a football player and he is rarely told by anyone that he could be a great athlete *and* a good student. No one really emphasizes the importance of how getting good grades would help him get into college and have a successful career. He just figures his athletic talent will take him through. All anyone ever talks about is that he is going to get a football scholarship to a big-time football program at a NCAA Division I university. James always has goals for football, but never any goals as a student; it is more important for him to perform well as an athlete than as a student.

No one ever mentions the possibility that he might get injured or that he wouldn't get a football scholarship or that a poor high school academic performance would prevent him from getting accepted into college. James never considers the NCAA's clear educational agenda: "Hit the books or play somewhere else" (p. 3, Sailes, 2000) or that the NCAA eligibility requirements for incoming freshman to compete in college sport have risen since their inception in 1983 (Sailes, 2000). He mostly thinks about how playing college football would improve his chances of making it to the pros.

University football programs scout James during his sophomore season of football. Several NCAA Division I football programs are very interested in him. When it comes time to apply to those universities his junior year, his grades and SAT scores just make the NCAA cut: a cumulative grade point average of 2.5 balanced with an SAT score of 700 (Sailes, 2000). By the time James is a senior, he has signed a letter of intent at a major NCAA Division I football program and has been accepted to the university.

When James arrives at college, he has no idea what he wants to major in; he just wants to play ball. He knows that he has to choose a major that will be easy enough to stay eligible. He isn't thinking about choosing another viable career option – professional

football is the *only* option. Eventually, he decides to major in liberal arts. He isn't too worried about staying eligible either because he has heard from veteran players that student-athletes get tutors and that the coaches will bail them out if they really get into trouble.

James goes through his college career experiencing success at football and just staying afloat academically, just as he had in high school. His eyes are always only on one prize: playing professional football. He isn't aware that even if he makes it to the pros, he could get injured or that his football career won't last forever and he may need another career to fall back on.

At the end of James's junior year of college, he decides to declare himself eligible for the NFL draft. He is drafted in the fifth round by a successful NFL team. Often players drafted in the lower rounds have a likely chance of eventually getting cut. James manages to stay in the NFL for three years but is constantly traded from team to team. His NFL career ends when he gets cut from the last team and isn't picked up by any other teams. He considers trying to play in the Canadian Football League or overseas but he fears that it will be just as difficult as the NFL.

James is left in the following situation: an unfinished undergraduate degree in liberal arts with no scholarship to pay for finishing because the time frame to finish under his scholarship has expired. He is left with no other viable career options because one cannot do much with a liberal arts degree. This is not to say that James couldn't finish his degree or pick another major but this will take longer and cost more money. If James had earlier realized it was possible to be a successful student, things may have turned out

differently for him. He could have been a great athlete *and* successful at football, but also had academic goals and a major in a field that would have resulted in a viable career just in case professional football didn't work out.

This scenario is not meant to be stereotypical in any way and is only meant to be an example of what *can* happen to an athlete. Although this scenario is not factual, I consider it to represent some prevalent beliefs and attitudes about professional sport aspirations and expectations among African American male youth in this country. Sailes (2000) has suggested that the following stereotypes/assumptions are common for collegiate African American male student-athletes:

- Athletics take precedent over academics.
- African American male athletes aspire to a career in professional sport and do not think about other career options.
- African American male athletes have unrealistic expectations about the possibility of a career in professional sport.
- African American male athletes are not prepared academically in college to pursue other careers outside of sport.
- If African American male athletes do make it to the pros, they make no plans for retirement or for career ending injury.
- African American male athletes will not graduate or finish college if they leave early for the draft or are drafted.

There is a concern that certain groups, including African American male athletes, unrealistically aspire to a professional sport career. The reality is that the odds of a high school football player making it to the pros at all, let alone having a long standing career,

are about 6,000 to 1 (Sailes, 2000). According to the NCAA, out of the approximately one million high school football players in the U.S. (Schoemann, 1995, as cited in Sailes, 2000), about 150 make it to the NFL. Unfortunately, the African American male athlete's aspiration for a career in professional sport can be to the detriment of most individuals. Such a narrow focus on sport participation as a springboard to professional sport status often overshadows the African American male athlete's desire for educational attainment, leads to poor academic achievement, and results in lower graduation rates among African American males than among their European American counterparts (Sailes, 2000).

In a recent survey, Suggs (2001) found that the 1994-95 freshman class of athletes at 298 colleges and universities competing in NCAA Division I football produced a graduation rate of 43% for its African American athletes. Although overall, student-athletes have been shown to have higher graduation rates than non-athletes (Suggs, 2000), in many cases athletes have access to tutoring and other academic support services that are unavailable to other students. In spite of this, African American athletes graduate at a rate of 20 percentage points below that of non-athlete African American students. Thus, it appears that an unrealistic expectation toward a career in sport combined with a lack of academic achievement may limit African American male student-athletes' career choices.

Sociologist Susan Birrell (1989) advocates a Cultural Studies approach that analyzes the complex relations of dominance and subordination simultaneously structured along racial, gender, and class lines. Cultural Studies has pioneered the study of popular culture and the critical revaluation of high culture (Blake, 1997). Although sport has previously been negated in Cultural Studies research, such an approach appears

to offer good potential for deconstructing social issues within the sport domain. Using methods drawn from history, sociology, literary and film theory, feminist studies and psychoanalysis, Cultural Studies can be effectively applied to a range of Sport Psychology and Sport Sociology issues. For example, a Cultural Studies framework can be utilized to examine social justice issues such as racism, sexism, gender discrimination, sexual orientation discrimination, as well as problems dealing with class, power, and economic privilege. In the current study, I take a Cultural Studies perspective to examine African American male student-athletes' professional sport aspirations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the possible factors that contributed to career aspirations (dreams) of three NCAA Division I African-American football players. I was specifically interested in gathering information regarding these student-athletes' experiences of sport socialization, education and academic goals, playing collegiate football and athletic goals, career aspirations, careers in professional sport, and race. To achieve this purpose, I used a standardized interview format (Patton, 1980).

Definition of Terms

I adopted the following definitions for this study:

Academic achievement. Performing well in school (e.g., getting good grades, having academic goals) (Sailes, 2000).

Athletes. Persons playing sport who have or had previous or current high school, collegiate (NCAA Division I), and/or professional competitive athletic experiences (NCAA).

Culture. The grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages, and customs of any specific historical society (Hall, 1996).

Economic and social mobility. An upward movement in society, meaning advancement from a lower social and economic class to a higher class (Oliver, 1980).

Goal of qualitative interview. To derive the essence, structure, or form of human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Inductive analysis. A process of qualitative data analysis, involving immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important categories, dimensions, and interrelationships; begins with the exploration of genuinely open questions rather than the testing of theoretically derived hypotheses (Patton, 1990, p. 40).

Professional sport aspiration. The goal (dream) of having a long-term career in professional sport in the United States (Sailes, 2000).

Qualitative structured interview. A semi-formal, orderly human interaction between at least two persons in which the researcher has specified questions to ask and is prepared to develop new questions to follow any unexpected leads that arise in the course of the interviewing (Glesne, 1999). It consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words (Patton, 1980).

Qualitative data. Direct quotations capturing people's perspectives and experiences. Qualitative data include detailed, thick description and are the result of inquiry in depth (Patton, 1990, p. 40).

Qualitative inquiry. A method of research that focuses on the "things" that create an experience; it usually generated on the basis of an inductive analysis (Patton, 1990).

Race. Race refers to a category of people regarded as socially distinct because they are believed to share genetically transmitted traits thought to be important in a group or society (Coakley, 1998).

Race ideology. Naturalized ideologies created about racial groups regarding skin color, intelligence, character, and physical characteristics and skills (Coakley, 1998).

Race logic. The assumption that European American people are superior beings who deserve to be in the positions of power and control around the world (also social Darwinism) (Coakley, 1998).

Self-fulfilling prophecy. Tendency for expectations to elicit behavior that confirms the expectations (Merton, 1948 as cited in Harrison, 2001).

Socialization. An active process of learning and social development that occurs as people interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which they live, form ideas about who they are, and make decisions about their goals and behaviors (Coakley, 1998).

Sport socialization. A process that allows researchers to examine the relationship between sport and other parts of social life (i.e. family, individual, politics, economy, religion) and to look within social organization at the behaviors and social interactions in sport. There are cultural, structural and situational factors that affect the sport experience (Coakley, 1998).

Student-athletes. An African American male who is a member of a competitive athletic team and is also a student (enrolled full-time in high school or college) (NCAA).

Assumptions of the Study

I made the following assumptions in this study:

1) the personal experiences of student-athletes are important for obtaining an understanding of how cultural and social variables shape their lives and their career aspirations.

2) the participants in this study were able to effectively and honestly articulate their experiences as openly as possible and to reveal their thoughts and attitudes about how cultural and social variables have shaped them and their career aspirations.

3) the qualitative structured interview is a valid method for gathering an in-depth description of student-athletes' experiences.

Limitations of the Study

Interviews were conducted with three athletes. According to quantitative methodology, this sample size is fairly small; however, it is not considered a limitation when conducting in-depth qualitative research. The aim of this research was to identify the structure of people's experiences -- not to make generalizations from a sample to other populations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Another limitation noted was the absence of an analysis of the academic support structure within NCAA Division I football.

Significance of the Study

This study was a qualitative investigation that attempted to specifically examine the career aspirations (dreams) of NCAA Division I African-American football players and to determine their thoughts/attitudes about how cultural and social variables have shaped them and their career aspirations. Gaining an understanding of the athlete's sport,

academic and career experiences should provide useful insights for athletes, coaches, and Sport Psychology consultants. For example, athletes may become aware of the importance of being a good student and not just a good athlete. In addition, athletes may realize the importance of choosing a viable college major and having other career options in case a professional sport career does not happen or last. Similarly, coaches and consultants may find ways of emphasizing the importance of strong academic performance, not just strong athletic performance.

It is important for Sport Psychology researchers to be aware of and understand how socialization, sport socialization, and social issues within sport may contribute to African American male athletes' unrealistic expectations of a career in professional sport. Often, these expectations are formed at a very young age; it is imperative, therefore, that significant others surrounding athletes (e.g., parents, coaches, consultants, role models) make them aware of the improbability of a professional sport career and encourage them to have other plans. The unrealistic expectation of a professional sport career is a significant social concern for African American male athletes both during their athletic careers and in everyday life. Understanding the significance of this issue can assist professionals in relating to athletes as whole people and not just as elite performers.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present study concerns NCAA Division I African American football players' experiences as they are relevant to career aspirations (specifically professional sport), academic achievement, sport socialization and race. The nature and scope of this study lends itself to the use of three different knowledge frameworks: Cultural Studies, Sport Sociology and Sport Psychology. Cultural Studies is highly concerned with social issues; therefore, it can be applied to social issues within sport (Birrell, 1989; Blake, 1997). Sport Sociology clearly emphasizes sport and sport-related behaviors as they occur in social and cultural contexts (Coakley, 1998). Because Sport Sociology considers sport to be a part of social and cultural life, it is relevant for examining social, economic, and psychological aspects of the lives of African American male athletes. The aim of Sport Psychology is to gain insight into the psychological needs and experiences of athletes in order to assist them with their athletic performance and to contribute to the quality of their lives. By studying the sport issues that affect African American male athletes, Sport Psychology professionals can better meet those individual's needs.

Several topics are of particular significance to this study. They include race and sport, racial stereotyping, identity, opportunity, athletic superiority, sport participation patterns, sport socialization, academic achievement, career choices, and professional sport as a career expectation/aspiration. Qualitative inquiry through interviewing, the research method utilized for this study, is also a significant area for discussion. In this chapter, literature dealing with the following themes is examined: 1) *Cultural Studies and*

sport; 2) *the African American male athlete*; and 3) *qualitative interviewing as a form of inquiry*.

Cultural Studies and Sport

The field of Cultural Studies has a broad scope and is meant to generate a critique of general culture, cultural practices, and cultural forms. Scholars in Cultural Studies investigate a wide range of topics and employ an equally wide variety of critical methodologies (Childers & Hentzi, 1995). Cultural Studies encompasses theories and methods associated with literary humanism, culturalism, structuralism, Gramscian Marxism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism (Andrews & Loy, 1993). Cultural Studies is concerned with issues of class, power, and economic privilege and gives more specific treatment to diverse topics such as subcultures, education, working class history, leisure, women's studies, ethnicity, and media studies.

To date, Cultural Studies has explored the world of sport in only a limited way. Most of the sport research within Cultural Studies has focused on the English game of football (soccer) and "football hooliganism," (Hall, 1984) and the relation of each to the working class culture of pre-war English society (Clarke, 1983). The crowd in professional soccer has continued to be the one area of sport that has received the most consistent attention of Cultural Studies theorists (Blake, 1997).

Sport studies. Even though few studies have examined sport from a Cultural Studies perspective (Critcher, 1971, 1974a, 1974b, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1994; Clarke, 1983), Cultural Studies provides a powerful framework for exploring social issues in the institution of sport. Andrew Blake (1997) discusses the importance of including sport in Cultural Studies work, emphasizing the fact that because sport is such a

large part of society and is important as a field of study within Cultural Studies, it cannot be left out of academic inquiry. Blake (1997) cites the work of several sociologists who take the role of sport in society seriously. Their work has moved the study of sport into the mainstream of sociological work and has joined the sociology of sport with the social and economic history of sport as an academic growth area. This growth emphasizes the importance of sport in other disciplines and shows that there is a place for sport within Cultural Studies.

It should be pointed out that Cultural Studies has not ignored sport altogether where sport is a component of other fields of study (Blake, 1997). For example, in the investigation of the media or the cultural construction of gender, sport has become an object of its own study (Whannel, 1992 as cited in Blake, 1997). There have also been useful studies of sport and the construction of both masculinity and femininity, and of masculine and feminine images in sport advertising (Messner & Sabo, 1990, as cited in Blake, 1997). Blake (1997) argues that in the end, "sport is important because it complements some of the most cherished assumptions of cultural theory: through analysis of sport, we can profitably work on questions of identity, pleasure and desire and the body; in ways which cannot be approached in other work" (p. 23).

The African American Male Athlete

When discussing social and cultural issues concerning African American male athletes, it is important to examine race within the context of sport. In the article, "Rethinking the Relationships Between Sport and Race in American Culture: Golden Ghettos and Contested Terrain," sociologist Douglas Hartmann (2000) proposes a new way of thinking about the relationship between sport and race in the U.S. by exploring

the contradictions of the usual ways of thinking about this relationship. The author focuses specifically on two very different views of the racial form and function of U.S. sport: (a) widespread popular beliefs about sport's positive, progressive role in struggles for racial justice, and (b) the critiques of these beliefs that have been fashioned by scholars since the 1970's (Hartmann, 2000). He suggests constructing a framework for rethinking the relationship between sport and race that is properly critical of the racial force of sport but does not overlook its more positive, progressive possibilities.

Earl Smith (2000) also shares sentiments about a need for a new way of thinking. According to Smith, "The institution of sport has changed considerably since 1955. The nearly fifty years of change at all levels of sport have remade the institution of sport in America. It is now a new arena for study and analysis, awaiting scholars to get more involved" (p. 45). Smith calls for work that understands the "new African American athlete" and recognizes that "the old forms of racial exclusion are no longer valid and their analysis needs serious updating and change" (p. 46). It is necessary for scholars to understand the changing nature of social relationships and the growing importance of sport in American culture. We need to carefully develop empirical research that clarifies the social, political, and economic complexities of life changes for African American athletes (Smith, 2000). Clearly, future research involving race and sport needs to reflect Hartmann's and Smith's assertions.

Hartmann (2000) echoed French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's insistence that sport be taken seriously and treated critically, because it "occupies an important and even privileged place in American culture insofar as racial identities, inequalities and ideologies are concerned" (p. 231). In addition, Hartmann attempts to follow the lead of

D. Stanley Eitzen (1999) by developing theories of the social force of sport that moves "beyond" the usual competing "myths and paradoxes" and focuses on the specific case of race with a more broadly conceived emphasis on sport's symbolic role in American culture. Although the present study does not deal specifically with racial injustice nor does it delve into sport's symbolic role in American culture, much of the discussion focuses on the various existing myths and paradoxes specific to sport and the African American male athlete. Also, an attempt is made to emulate previous scholarly critiques developed since the 1970's concerning beliefs about the African American male athlete's place and function within sport.

The myth of sport as the "great equalizer." Considering the past and current constrained racial relations in the United States, sport has been viewed as the "great equalizer" and a "way out of the ghetto" for many African American male athletes because it offers them opportunities and freedoms rarely found in other institutions in society. In a society plagued with racial inequalities, the athletic prominence and prowess of African American male athletes is a very striking and progressive feature. Although sport is one of the most integrated institutions in American life and offers opportunities and possibilities for racial resistance and change that stand out in comparison with other institutional realms, sport success becomes problematic when it reinforces and reproduces images, ideas, and social practices that are thoroughly racialized (Hartmann, 2000). Sport should be understood as "a 'contested racial terrain,' a social site where racial images, ideologies, and inequalities are constructed, transformed, and constantly struggled over rather than a place where they are reconciled or reproduced" (p. 230, Hartmann, 2000).

Some would argue that sport is one realm in America that provides equal opportunity for all people and is free of racial barriers. "Athletics," stated Jackie Robinson in his first autobiography, *Jackie Robinson: My Own Story* (ghostwritten by African American sportswriter, Wendell Smith), "both school and professional, come nearer to offering an American Negro equality of opportunity than does any other field of social and economic activity" (as cited in Early, 1998, p. 12). It is not so much that this is true as that Robinson believed it, and that most Americans today, African and European American, still do or want to. Believing that sport is the ultimate meritocracy is one important aspect of modern sport in a democratic society that saves us from being totally cynical about it (Early, 1998). Such athletes as Jackie Robinson, heavyweight champion Joe Louis and Olympic track star Jesse Owens showed us that sport can help vanquish the stigma of race.

It should not be assumed that all African American sport figures come from economically deprived backgrounds. Nor can it be assumed that sport is the best avenue for African Americans to improve their living situation is (Smith, 1995 as cited in Berry & Smith, 2000). Earl Smith (1995, as cited in Berry & Smith) critiques the movie and book about "Hoop Dreams," which chronicles the lives and high school basketball careers of two inner-city African American males, suggesting that basketball is the ticket out of the ghetto for African American youngsters. In this movie and book, basketball in particular and sport in general is presented to African American young people as the most likely way to achieve the "American Dream."

Smith's concern is that African American young people are, as a result, channeled away from other aspirations. Putting all their hopes on the one avenue of "escape" is

unwise because competition is fierce and may leave individuals greatly disappointed. The movie and book exploit the stereotypes about African American athletes, namely that sport is *the* way to financial success (Smith, 1995, as cited in Berry & Smith). By contrast, movies are not made about African American youth who score above 1100 on SAT exams and go on to successful careers outside of sport (Hochschild, 1995 as cited in Berry & Smith, 2000).

Lastly, Jay Coakley (1998, p. 257) has advanced the following sociological hypothesis to explain the achievements of African American male athletes:

When the Following Four Social Conditions Are Added Together:
A dominant racial ideology promoting stereotypes of "black males physicality"
+
A long history of racial segregation and differential treatment that limits socioeconomic opportunities for black men
+
The sense of desperation that comes with the feeling that life chances are limited
+
Widespread opportunities and encouragement to develop skills and excel in a few sports

↓

The Intermediate Result Is This:
A segment of the African American community believes that it is the biological and cultural destiny of black men to be great athletes in certain sports
+
Young black men are motivated to use every opportunity to develop the skills they need to fulfill that destiny

↓

And The Hypothesis that:
It is this sense of destiny, combined with continued motivation and opportunities to develop certain sport skills that leads to outstanding performances among black male athletes in selected sports

When discussing social and cultural issues concerning African American male athletes, an exploration of their identity and self-schema should also be included.

According to Sailes (2000), the identity of the African American athlete in America is shaped and influenced by several social and cultural factors. Some of these factors include but are not limited to sport socialization, sport participation patterns, academic achievement, self-schema, and racial stereotyping. In the following sections, each of these factors is discussed.

Self-schema. African American male athletes' identity as an athlete can be influenced by their self-schema and thus affect their sport socialization and sport participation patterns. Fiske and Neuberg (1990 as cited in Harrison, 2001) defined a schema as a cognitive structure that contains knowledge about expected attributes of a certain category as well as links among these attributes. The individual cognitive structures that come together to create the self-concept are called "self-schemata" (Harrison, 2001). Harrison (1995 as cited in Harrison, 2001) postulates a psychosocial premise to explain the observed differences in participation patterns and performance in differing sports and physical activities. Harrison argues that race constitutes a universal self-schema that anchors an individual's sport and physical activity choices in domains that are considered self-defining. These self-schemata serve as catalysts for developing skills and abilities viewed as appropriate for one's social group. While these theories may offer explanations for what is observed, they do not diffuse the propensity to stereotype people of different races for participation and superior performance in particular sports and physical activities (Harrison, 2001). For example, if an African American male athlete directly identifies with a physically superior/intellectually inferior self-schema, not only may he view this as the "appropriate" self-schema for him, but stereotypes may also ensue that cause him to disregard other possible identifications and self-schemata.

Sport Participation Patterns. Opportunity, sport socialization, and sport participation patterns shape African American male athletes' beliefs and values about the role sport plays in their lives. Most sport sociologists agree that the misrepresentation of African American sport participation can be attributed to socioeconomic reasons (Sailes, 1984). Eitzen and Sage (1978 as cited in Sailes, 1984) contended that African American participation in sport could be explained by exploring the cultural constraints (race, socioeconomic class) placed on them in American society which stem from sport and society's opportunity structure. Rudman (1986) examined the relationship between race, social structure, and sport orientations of African American and European American athletes. One of his findings suggested that African Americans turn toward sport more than do whites as a way of coping with limited social and economic opportunities.

Several factors may explain the dominance of African American males in certain sports. Traditionally, from the early days of professional baseball in the mid-nineteenth century and of professional boxing in Regency England, sport was seen by poor and working class men and boys as a way out of poverty or at least out of the normally backbreaking, low-paying work the poor male was offered (Early, 1998). Considering that African American males consistently make up a disproportionate share of the poor and marginalized in America, it is logical that they would view playing sport as a viable option to changing their life situation. The dominance of African American males in boxing can be explained that fact that it is the Western sport with the longest history of African American participation (Early, 1998). Moreover, it is sport that has always attracted poor and marginalized men and instruction was within easy reach because most boxing gyms were located in poor neighborhoods. According to Early (1998):

> African American male dominance in football and basketball is not simply related to getting out of the ghetto through hard work or because of lack of other amusements but to an institution more readily available to blacks in the inner city that enables them to use athletics to get out. Ironically, it is that institution which fails more often than it should in fitting them for other professions: namely, school (p. 15).

African American males athletes tend to gravitate toward sports that have public facilities available, such as football, basketball, and baseball, track and field and boxing, because they are easily accessible (local parks, community centers) and fairly inexpensive to play (little equipment is needed). The lack of facilities, instruction and programs for such individual sports as tennis, swimming, and gymnastics, denied African Americans access to and prevented them from developing those interests or skills (Sailes, 1984). Greendorfer and Ewing (1981 as cited in Sailes, 1984) labeled the availability of facilities and activities "opportunity set" and found that African Americans' sport choices were more greatly influenced than European Americans by opportunity set.

Racial stereotyping in sport. African American male athletes are often racially stereotyped, both physically and intellectually. Stereotypes tend to assign membership based on phenotypical characteristics. The most salient identification form uses the biological concept of "race," which encompasses a very generalized assessment of skin color (Loring-Brace, 1994; Montagu, 1964, as cited in Johnson, Hallinan & Westerfield, 1999). In America especially, the concept of "race" most often means black versus white. To stereotype suggests that we impose characteristics on people based on their perceived group membership (Oaks, Haslam, & Turner, 1994, as cited in Harrison, 2001). For example, people make social assumptions and predicate judgments about African American male athletes' athletic and intellectual abilities based on their knowledge of

perceived traits of their social category: being an African American male athlete. Hamilton & Trolier (1986, as cited in Harrison, 2001) contend that stereotyping becomes maladaptive when traits or characteristcs that extend beyond the actual differences between categorized groups are inferred.

Racial stereotypes of athletes represent "overgeneralized beliefs about the causes of athletic success and failure" (Stone, Sjomeling, Lynch & Darley, 1999, p. 1213). There are both positive and negative stereotypes of African American male athletes. The most prominent negative stereotype is that African American male athletes are physically superior to other athletes. In addition, the possibility of athletic superiority carries with it the suggestion of intellectual inferiority. Coakley (1998) calls this stereotyping "race logic" and "race ideology." Race ideologies are created about racial groups regarding skin color, intelligence, character, physical characteristics and skills and race logic is to used perpetuate these ideologies. Stereotypes of African American athletic superiority and intellectual inferiority are considered to be a Western ideology (Coakley, 1998) and if firmly established in American folklore (Hoberman, 1997, as cited in Harrison, 2001).

Historically, racial stereotypes have been shaped by hypotheses and theories developed to explain the "natural" physical abilities of African American athletes and perceived performance differences between them and European Americans (Miller, 1998; Wiggens, 1997, as cited in Harrison, 2001). Often in the sport world, exceptional performances by European American athletes are attributed to effort, hard work, and intellect, while similar performances by African American athletes are attributed to athletic prowess or possessing "natural" ability (Harris, 1997, as cited in Harrison, 2001). People tend to forget social and cultural factors and use racial ideologies and race logic to

explain the successes and failures of African America athletes' performance by attaching perceived genetic explanations to them. In addition, the belief that African American athletes are naturally gifted physically but are not intelligent may also reflect the general cultural stereotype about the innate intelligence of African Americans (Steele, 1997). Ultimately, this racial stereotype has influenced the thinking of American society and has formed the origin of today's African American athlete stereotype (Harrison, 2001).

A popular perception is that African American male athletes are genetically better equipped to participate in sports like basketball, football, baseball, and sprinting events, but not in sports like swimming, tennis, ice hockey, golf, gymnastics and skiing (Cunningham, 1973, as cited in Johnson, Hallinan, Westerfield, 1999). In addition, some studies have suggested that African American athletes may possess longer legs and arms relative to overall body size, less body fat, greater muscle mass, narrower hips, different heel structure, more fast twitch fibers, wider calf muscles, or a greater ratio of tendon to muscle when compared to European American athletes (Cunningham, 1973; Malina, 1972; Tanner, 1978, as cited in Johnson, Hallinan & Westerfield, 1999). Given less emphasis if the fact that superior athletic performance can be attributed to many other factors besides genetic traits such as mental traits, coaching, equipment and facilities, training regimen, diet and practice time. Edwards (1971) contends, "There are no differences that make any difference. Athletic skills are essentially culturally linked capabilities. It is racism, not genes, that explains the domination of Black athletes" (p. 38).

The media plays a major role in perpetuating race ideologies by displaying images of strong, healthy, wealthy, and socially powerful African American athletes such as

Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, and Shaquille O'Neal. Often, the media constructs both verbally and visually, images of African-American athletes as physically superior and tends to ignore their mental capabilities. These images can have an influential impact on the stereotypes of African American athletes. Govan (1971) traced the history of the African American athlete in America and demonstrated that racism and the perpetuation of sport myths regarding African Americans has been harmful. He discussed how the role of the mass media has perpetuated myths about the African American athlete that has been detrimental to them. These myths make the claim that African American athletes are physically superior and intellectually inferior to European Americans.

Although exceptional professional athletes are well known in America due to extensive media exposure and popularity, they are not an accurate measure for judging the distribution of athleticism among the entire African American population because they seldom represent the entire group (Myers, 1993, as cited Harrison, 2001). An example of a strong counter argument to the African American sport stereotype is evident in the myth that exists concerning African Americans' success in professional sport. One stereotypic myth is the idea that sport is the way out of poverty, particularly for African American youth (Eitzen, 1999, pp. 136-138, as cited Harrison, 2001). Coakley (1998, p. 313) reveals that less than 3,500 African Americans are estimated to be making a living as professional athletes. Surprisingly, as of 1996, there were over 30,000 African American physicians and almost 31,000 African American lawyers. There are many more successful African Americans in careers outside of sport, but few receive the media attention that athletes do (Harrison, 2001). Thus, the stereotyping process can be

predisposed if television provides most majority citizens with their only exposure to African Americans and when inaccurate portrayals of African Americans are displayed (Harrison, 2001).

Several authors (Coakley, 1998; Edwards, 1972; Gaston, 1986; Harrison, 1998, Hoberman, 1997, as cited in Harrison, 2001) have stressed the importance of dispelling the African American athletic stereotype in order to ameliorate the damage it does to young African American males. The belief that African American male athletes are inherently better athletes than European American or Hispanic American athletes can trap young African American males into certain occupational molds and limit their economic mobility (Davis, 1990, as cited in Johnson, Hallinan & Westerfield, 1999). According to Harrison (2001), "the damage is done when countless young African Americans engage in unconscious racial stereotypic thinking and actions that funnel them into focusing on preparation for a very limited number of opportunities in professional sport – to the exclusion of opportunities in other more attainable careers" (p. 110).

Stone, Sjomeling, Lynch and Darley (1999) assert that the prevailing ideas about the real and perceived disparity in sport participation and performance among African Americans forms the foundation for the development of stereotypes, and more importantly, strongly influences analyses and assessments of performance. Since the sport domain provides a porous site for the formation, development, utilization and maintenance of racial stereotypes about African American male athletes, it is important to recognize that actual and possible detrimental consequences can result from them (Harrison, 2001). For example, racial stereotypes can actually have a negative effect on the athletic performance of African American male athletes. Claude Steele (1997)

introduced the theory of *stereotype threat* which states that when a negative stereotype about a group becomes salient as the criterion for evaluating performance, individual group members become concerned that their performance may confirm the validity of the negative stereotype. Steele (1997) postulates that the threat of being stereotyped, that is, the fear or anxiety in response to the possible negative judgments of others, or one's own actions, will depress performance in domains where members of a group are negatively stereotyped. Stone et. al (1999) found that salient negative racial stereotypes about African American athletes have the potential to cause poorer athletic performance in these groups relative to their performance of athletic tasks in a positive or neutral context. In addition to affecting African American athletes' athletic performance, racial stereotyping also affects their intellectual performance and the expectations placed on them by others. Steele and Aronson (1995) explored the stereotype threat in the standardized test performance of African Americans. Their results suggested that African American participants who were vulnerable to judgment by negative stereotypes about their group's intellectual ability scored lower on standardized tests than other participants (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Stereotyping can influence an individual's expectations of the behavior of others as well. Negative stereotypes about African American male athletes can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, the tendency for expectations to elicit behaviors that confirm the expectation (Merton, 1948 as cited in Harrison, 2001). Horn and Lox (1993, as cited in Harrison, 2001) and Martinek (1981, as cited in Harrison, 2001) suggest that the self-fulfilling prophecy exists in sport. These researchers suggest that coaches and physical education teachers who hold stereotypical views about the abilities of athletes by race,

exhibit differential expectations of the abilities of athletes from different racial groups (Solomon et. al, 1996, as cited in Harrison, 2001).

According to Coakley (1998), it is risky to try to explain athletic performance in a range of sports and across positions in those sports by identifying biological traits in a group of people, because racial categories are biologically meaninglessness. Racial categories are not biologically based; they are cultural creations based on social meanings given to physical similarities and differences. It is essential to understand that performance in different sports depends on a wide variety of different physical and mental traits and abilities, combined with the opportunities to develop and display them. Several sport sociologists (e.g. Carlston, 1983; Coakley, 1998; Harris, 1997; Harrison, 1998; Majors, 1990, as cited in Harrison, 2001) postulate that "any real difference between African American and European American sport performance is predicated on the differences in the social environments and influences that affect their lives" (Harrison, 2001, p. 107,). Assumptions based on racial ideology and race logic are problematic because patterns of discrimination are often the end result. Before assumptions or stereotypes are advanced, people should remember that people of color around the world have diverse genetic traits, diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds, and diverse records of achievement in a diverse range of sports and other activities (Coakley, 1998).

In conclusion, African American male athletes have had difficulty maintaining their racial identity due in part to the way European Americans stereotype African Americans. As a result they risk losing their sense of who they are when they are labeled and grouped as a race of people. Marable (1986) suggests that the essential tragedy of

being African-American and male is the inability of African-American men to define themselves apart from the stereotypes impounded on them by the larger society. Such stereotypes influence the way African-American males develop their definition of self. This definition of self is fairly limited; due not only to stereotypes, but also, to a lack of role models in the African-American community outside of the fields of entertainment and sport.

Edwards (1973) suggests that, "Young Blacks are encouraged toward attempts at 'making it' through athletic participation, rather than the pursuit of other occupations that hold greater potential for meeting the real political and material needs of both themselves and their people" (p. 44). There is a need for African-Americans to develop a broader sense of self as well as aspirations to succeed in a variety of occupations. Anderson and South (1993) argue that, "If the label African-American does have the potential for eliciting a new interpretation of identity, it must allow for a more multidimensional identity" (p. 87).

Qualitative Interviewing as a Form of Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry is a method of research that focuses on the "things" that create an experience and is based on inductive analysis (Patton, 1990). Qualitative research is committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative researchers emphasize the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape the inquiry. These researchers seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In order to give meaning to the experience, participants are chosen because they represent

the same experience or knowledge and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the general population (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Qualitative inquiry seeks to produce data that yields detailed and nuanced descriptions of people's perspectives and experiences (Patton, 1990, p. 40); for this reason, such methods are oriented towards exploration, discovery, and description. An inductive approach is used in qualitative inquiry in an attempt to make sense of the phenomenon of interest without imposing preexisting expectations on its meaning or mode of operation (Patton, 1990). Qualitative analysis involves an immersion into the details and specifics of the data to discover important categories, themes, and interrelationships. Such an exploration begins by asking genuinely open questions rather than by testing theoretically derived hypotheses (Patton, 1990, p. 40).

In one method of qualitative inquiry, structured interviewing, the researcher develops specified questions in an interview guide to probe into the participants' experiences by asking each participant the same questions using the same sequence. According to Glesne (1999), "the intent of such interviewing is to capture the unseen that was, is, will be, or should be; how respondents think or feel about something; and how they explain or account for something" (p. 93). Although probing in structured interviewing can be less flexible, there are several advantages to this type of interview. One advantage is that structured/standardized interviewing minimizes the variation in the questions posed by the interviewer. It also reduces the possibility of bias that comes from having different interviews or different people (Patton, 1980). Ultimately, the goal of the qualitative interview is to derive the essence, structure, or form of human experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Qualitative data gathering procedures. The data derived in the present study are in the form of direct quotations obtained from the participants that capture their perspectives and experiences. The general procedures were consistent with the five steps of qualitative inquiry discussed by Pollio et al. (1997). It is important to note that while methods of qualitative procedures are rather generic, the obtaining of data is quite different. Specifically, the five steps included are: 1) *choose topic*, 2) *interview participants*, 3) *transcribe interviews*, 4) *develop thematic structure in a research group*, and 5) *prepare final report* (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 60). In the following sections, each of these steps are discussed in more detail.

Choose topic. During the initial stages of choosing a topic the focus is on the investigator. At this point, the researcher seeks to determine the reasons for his or her being interested in the specific topic under consideration. The researcher reflects upon aspects of his or her own personal history that may have led him or her to be intrigued by a particular topic.

Interview participants. The interview is the method by which the researcher attains an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences (Kvale, 1983). The role of the researcher/interviewer is to provide an environment in which the participant feels free to describe personal experiences in detail (Thompson et al., 1989). The primary focus here is on the participant. The researcher (interviewer) should attempt to develop an equal relationship with the participant; that is, without differential levels of power or authority. In the ideal case, an interviewer does not attempt to control the interview or the participant in any way. The goal is to simply listen and record what the respondent has to say. This method is meant to allow the participant to share the things that he or she wants

to share.

Transcribe interviews. Audiotaped interviews are transcribed into a hard copy (text) for data analysis. The researcher should conduct this process because it gives her an additional opportunity to become familiar with the data. In this phase of the process, the text becomes the primary focus.

Develop thematic structure. In this step the researcher attempts to develop a thematic structure. This involves reading each transcript, both to discover meaning units and to gain a sense of the whole transcript. A cluster of initial thematic meanings is derived from this process. One way in which to develop a thematic structure is to conduct the thematic interpretation within a context of an interpretive research group.

During group thematizing, the focus continues to be on the text, and the process of thematization takes place on the basis of hermeneutical principles. Hermeneutics is "the study of understanding, especially the task of understanding texts" (Palmer, 1969, p. 9). The thematizing process involves moving from the whole of the text to a part of the text, back to the whole text, back to another part of the text, and so on (Johnson, 1998). Initially, each transcript is read separately to get a sense of the "whole" as well as to identify smaller units of meaning. Following this, different transcripts are related to each other and common patterns are identified.

During group interpretation, global themes are identified. These themes capture figural aspects that emerge from participants' descriptions of their experiences (Kvale, 1983). Themes are identified across interviews, and support for each theme is accessible in each transcript. That is, the researcher should be able to locate specific passages in

each transcript that represent or reflect a clear statement of the theme (Thompson et al., 1989).

Prepare final report. The research community for whom the researcher is presenting his or her work serves as the main focus when preparing the final report. The major themes that are identified across interviews are presented as the results of the investigation. Additionally, direct quotes from interviews should be included since they allow readers to develop their own interpretations of what the participants discussed in the interviews (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984). The role of the researcher is to provide the reader with sufficient information to allow him or her to decide as to the applicability of the data and findings to his or her own particular field.

Sport socialization, academic achievement, and the career aspirations of African-American athletes are all important aspects of their life experiences.. Knowledge of these experiences can contribute to the field of Sport Psychology and assist consultants in their work with African-American athletes. Sport Psychology offers a useful framework for exploring this topic because it strives to enhance the lives of all athletes. Cultural Studies offers a scholarly framework for this study as well, since it is highly concerned with social issues that concern all people.

Qualitative research in sport studies. The use of qualitative methods of inquiry and published literature exploring African American males' professional sport aspirations is somewhat limited and that which does exist dates back 15-20 years. Most of writing and research within Sport Sociology on issues related to African American male athletes was published between the late 1960's and the mid-1980's. Not only is the literature somewhat dated and limited, but most of the research conducted within applied Sport

Psychology and Sport Sociology was quantitative in nature. More recently, qualitative research has begun to emerge as a viable tool of Sport Psychology researchers who are interested in examining athletes' experiences.

In the past decade, qualitative studies have been conducted that have explored athletes' sources of enjoyment (Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1989), burnout in competitive junior tennis players (Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1996), and the psychological response of injured athletes to season-ending injuries (Udry, Gould, Bridges, & Beck, 1997). In 1989, Locke noted that qualitative research traditions hold great promise for application in sport and physical education. Hanson and Newburg (1992) proposed that more Sport Psychology issues be examined using naturalistic inquiry and qualitative methods. Strean and Roberts (1992) stated that, "we need more qualitative data-gathering procedures and interpretive work" (p. 60). They also acknowledged that new methodologies have the potential to help Sport Psychology researchers understand athletic performance and the merits of psychological interventions. Given the lack of qualitative research within sport studies, its proven usefulness and application to sport, it is important to continue to conduct qualitative research with African American athletes to better understand their life experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the following methodological aspects of the study are described: a) *participants*; b) *design*; c) *measures*; d) *procedures*; and e) *data analysis*.

Participants

This study included three African-American males athletes who played NCAA Division I football. All three participants were first generation college students. These student-athletes were selected based on the following criteria:

- They were/are past/current NCAA Division I African-American football players/student-athletes.
- They have either recently been drafted by teams in the National Football League (NFL) or hope to be drafted next year.

They were willing to discuss their career aspirations (dreams), thoughts and attitudes concerning how cultural and social variables have shaped them. Background information about each participant was gathered from a demographic questionnaire administered after the interview and is presented in Table 1. Demographic Information. For purposes of this study, all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

- Michael is a 24-year-old professional football player in his first year in the NFL. He graduated in fall 2000 with a degree in business planning.
- Sean is a 22-year-old senior majoring in psychology. He will leave college in spring 2002 to enter the NFL draft, but he plans to finish his degree in summer

Table 1. Demographic Information

Participant	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation	Family Member's with a College Degree	Mean Family Income	Received Athletic Scholarship to College
Michael	Supervisor	Supervisor	Cousin	Over $50,000	Full Scholarship
Sean	Child Care	State Worker	None	Below $20,000	Full Scholarship
Derek	School Teacher	Truck Driver	None	Doesn't know	Full Scholarship

2002.

- Derek is a 22-year-old professional football player in his first year in the NFL. He left college in spring 2001 to enter the draft but plans to graduate with a criminal justice degree in spring 2002.

Design

A Form B was prepared and presented to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval prior to initiation of the study (see Appendix A). Upon approval, the participants were contacted and requested to participate in a 30-45 minute structured interview. We then scheduled the interview at the student-athlete's convenience and location.

Measures

The structured interview attempts to capture the perceived experience of the person in terms of his or her own words and is the major way in which the interviewer obtains an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences (Kvale, 1983). The focus was to explore each athlete's sport history, aspirations, goals, academics, racial identity and career plans (see Appendix D & Appendix E).

At least two potential risks to the validity of the interviews exited. First, given the high exposure of major collegiate sport at the participants' university, the athletes may

have felt that any information given about football may exploit them and make them vulnerable to the public. Second, being interviewed by a European American female may have been problematic for the participants if they perceived a difficulty with race and gender differences prevented them from being totally honest or if they did not understand the purpose of the study.

In lieu of the first potential risk, I took measures to protect the participants by keeping their names anonymous and their experiences confidential. There was not an occurrence of the second potential risk.

Procedures

Initially, I asked each of the participants to read a letter of information which explained the purpose of the study and their role as a participant (see Appendix B). I then asked each participant to review and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix C). Next I constructed an interview guide (Appendix D) which I followed during the actual interviews. The interview guide was approved by the Thesis Committee prior to conducting the interviews. The interview stage of this study consisted of one structured audiotaped interview with each participant which lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a private, quiet room located at the student athletes' University. The flow of the interview went smoothly. The participants most often responded immediately to a question and stop speaking when they felt they had answered the questions to the best of their ability. I made sure to let them complete their thoughts before I interjected with any response to their answer or the next question. Once the audiotaped interviews were transcribed, the participants were debriefed to ensure that their responses were presented the way they intended. A copy of his transcript was sent to

each participant. None of the participants felt that any aspect of the content of the transcribed interview needed revision and therefore, indicated no changes when he returned the transcript.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved the transcription and thematization of audiotaped interviews as well as the development of major themes. Each of these steps is discussed in the following sections:

Transcription and thematization. After the interviews were conducted, each audiotaped interview was transcribed into a hard copy (text) for data analysis. The transcriber was asked to sign a pledge concerning confidentiality to ensure the protection and anonymity of names and the maintenance of confidentiality of materials (see Appendix F). Following transcription, an interpretive research group was organized to assist me in thematizing the transcripts. Each member of the research group was asked to sign a pledge of confidentiality (see Appendix G).

Initially, the interpretive research group read all three transcripts separately to interpret the whole of each transcript. Then the group read the transcripts line by line to get a sense for the meaning units within the transcript. A cluster of initial thematic meanings ("meaning units") was derived from the parts of the text. Following this, separate transcripts were related to each other and common thematic patterns were noted and identified.

Development of major themes. During group interpretation, major themes were identified. These themes were derived from all of the transcripts and attempts were made to interpret commonalties among the experiences described in each transcript. Themes

were identified across interviews and support for each theme was determined from the individual transcripts. The interpretative group achieved consensus on all major themes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the results of the participants' experiences with academics, athletics, career aspirations, careers in professional sport, and race are presented and discussed. The purpose of this study was to explore possible factors related to the career aspirations (dreams) of NCAA Division I African-American football players. Major themes and subthemes resulting from the data analysis are presented along with supporting quotes from the participants themselves. Lastly, each theme and subtheme is discussed in light of previous research.

Results

Major themes. Five major themes prompted by questions in the interview guide comprised the participants' thoughts and attitudes about how cultural and social variables in and out of sport have shaped them and their career aspirations. The themes were: 1) *influences on self*, 2) *preparation in life*, 3) *emphasizing academics*, 4) *career choice*, and 5) *my thoughts on race*. Each theme is described in turn and displayed along with relevant subthemes in Table 2. Major Themes.

Theme 1: influences on self. The first major theme, *influences on self*, involved the participants' thoughts about how role models, family and expectations of others have influenced them. This theme was comprised of two subthemes: *Theme 1, Subtheme 1: significant others* and *Theme 1, Subtheme 2: expectations*.

Theme 1, Subtheme 1: significant others. Children develop athletic participation patterns early in life. There are several social and cultural variables in the sport socialization of

Table 2. Major Themes

Major Themes	1) *influences on self*	2) *preparation in life*	3) *emphasizing academics*	4) *career choice*	5) *my thoughts on race*
Subthemes	1) *significant others*		1) *"mandatory" academics*	1) *professional football career*	
	2) *expectations*		2) academic *goals I have*	2) *other avenues*	

African American males that influence their participation or non-participation in sport. Those variables include family, peers, the mass media, school, coaches, role models, athletic departments and the perception of the opportunities for economic and social mobility through sport. Emmel (1977, as cited in Sailes, 1987) found that for African Americans, peers, significant others (sport heroes), personal sport values and perceived opportunities for sport participation were the main variables influencing male's sport choices during the sport socialization process. Michael and Derek, respectively, stated that their family members were significant in influencing and encouraging them to play sports.

> I think my mom. I was always outside and a little troublesome child so she took me to the recreational centers and got me involved in sport. (Michael)

> My parents really. My dad always played different sports with me just around the house. I always did a lot on my own and I played organized sport a little bit. Really, it was my parents. (Derek)

Oliver (1980) explored the issue of the family's belief that sport is a viable channel of upward mobility for their children by surveying parents whose children were

involved in a summer baseball program. He found that African American parents were more likely than European American parents to see sport as a means of economic mobility for their children.

Each of the participants indicated that family members were role models to them:

> My parents have always been role models to me. Now that I am older, I just look up to them more. Now that I am on my own I look up to them when I need help in different situations because I know they have been there. I even had a lot of family members that were role models to me. I always wanted to grow up to be like them. . . . My older brother has always been a role model to me because he has always been my big brother and always had my back with everything. I wanted to be like that. I wanted to be like him for my younger brother who looked up to me. So he was my role model. (Derek)

> I had a couple cousins who were kind of my role models. They were older than I was. They were people I looked up to that taught me how to do things. (Michael)

> Role models. Really my mom. My dad wasn't in the picture at the time but he kind of rolled in later on but it was my mom and the rest of my family. Now my dad's in my life so he's a big influence. My high school coach. I looked up to him and he kind of showed me the way. (Sean)

According to research done by Hayes and Mendel (1973, as cited in Sailes, 1987) and Picou, 1978 as cited in Sailes, 1987), African American youths tended to be influenced by a greater variety of significant others (non-family members) than European Americans during their early socialization process. The decline of adult influences throughout the early elementary years gives way to the emergence of the importance of influences outside the family. Similarly, Hopson (1972, as cited in Sailes, 1987) found that for African American athletes, non-family adults and peers exerted the strongest influence upon the athletes' acquisition of sport roles. Consistent with the finding, Sean stated:

> I had a mentor at the my local community center named John Smith. He thought I should play football because I was always one of the big kids out there. He thought if I stayed with it, I could be good.

Derek had a similar experience:

> My coach encouraged me to play football. He always encouraged me to come out for football because he saw what kind of athlete I was on the basketball court. He thought I could do well on the football field. I thought I would give it a chance and it worked out.

While assessing the importance of the relationship between athletes' socioeconomic status, the influence of significant others, and academic achievement relative to adolescent career goals, Lee (1983) found that coaches' encouragement was a significant factor in the athletic expectations of a professional sport career among the total group of participants and the subgroup of African American and European American starters in his study.

African American male athletes often have role models that are professional athletes. In addition to having family members as role models, each of the participants in this study talked about professional athletes who served as role models for them. Sean said:

> Growing up I saw a little bit of Reggie White in me. I saw him when he played at Tennessee. Also, Shaquille O'Neal. When I was in junior high, I saw him playing basketball and they're people I kind of looked at growing up.

Derek said:

> I also had role models that played in the NFL. I liked Horace Grant when he played for the Bulls. I also like Jerry Rice. I liked athletes that were level headed.

Michael didn't see any professional athletes as role models while he was growing up but when he was older, he had a few that he felt resembled his style of play:

> While growing up I didn't really look up to anybody famous. I didn't really follow all of those sports. But now, probably football wise I like Derrick Brooks. He plays for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and baseball wise, I like Ken Griffey, Jr. I like the their style of play. I think that when I play I resemble some of the things that they do.

Professional athletes are more likely to serve as role models for American male youth than for other adults (Johnson, 1991 as cited in Sailes, 2000). Specifically, African American males are more likely to have African American professional athletes as role models than do their European American counterparts (Sailes, 1987) and play the same positions as their sport heroes. Eitzen and Sage (1978 as cited in Sailes, 1987) assert that having only African American sport heroes and role models partially contributes to the disproportionate overrepresentation of African Americans in some sports and virtually none in others. The participants in this study had some professional athletes as role models but their family members were the most significant role models for them.

Theme 1, Subtheme 2: expectations. The participants reflected on the expectations they thought others had of them. They all seemed to feel that most people in their lives had high expectations of them:

> I think they expect me to do well. A lot of people have seen me do well throughout my years growing up and would like the same for me in college. I know they expect me to keep going and keep striving for what I believe in and keep achieving my goals. (Michael)

> I think they have a lot of expectations. Just being big and standing out in front of the crowd and all eyes are on you. You have to have a positive influence. You have an influence on the little kids so what you do, they see and it will affect them. I learned that growing up myself. (Sean)

> I think there are a lot of expectations when you're in college. My coaches expect me to do different things. Out run this person or out run that person. Just to be dominant on the field. My mom she just expects me to be myself and to do what I think and to try not to be something that I am

> not. No one really has any high expectations of me because I like to put those things there for myself. (Derek)

Theme 2: preparation in life. The second major theme that emerged from the data was *preparation in life*, which describes the participants' thoughts about how they have been prepared for life, the "next level" and for professional football. This theme had no subthemes.

The athletes thought that college and football prepared them for many things in their lives:

> The greatest benefit of playing football in college to me is just getting ready for the next level, showing me and preparing for the real world. I think college is preparing you for the real world out there and that's what coaches try to teach to you and try to guide you and you learn from that. (Sean)

The athletes shared how they thought college prepared them for the NFL:

> I think it's given me a lot of self discipline, in the classroom and also playing for University X. Both have given me knowledge, knowledge of the game, I know the game really well. A lot of discipline to do the right things. . . . To me, it was important to perform well in football because it was a great deal to just go out there and be able to perform at a high level because in college you get to play somebody that's at your level or above you. You have to rise to the occasion and try to prepare. (Michael)

> What we do here is basically like the NFL. We practice like we're in the league. They do things that NFL teams/people do. Coaches prepare us for that and they just prepare us for the next step. College prepares you for the business world and that's how it is. (Sean)

> Really it's hard to say [how college has prepared me for the NFL] because I haven't done much in the NFL yet. I've had a few practices so far. College prepared me a lot for the NFL just really like the transition I made from high school to college. The game is a lot faster. It just prepares you more for the next level. I think just coming out of University X that running the type of offense I've ran, we've ran here, is kind of the same as what the NFL teams run so it's been easy for me to adapt more and things like that. So really coming from University X has prepared me the most. (Derek)

The participants revealed how they thought college prepared them for life after the NFL:

> As far as life after the NFL,] it's prepared me as far as my classes, it's prepared me for the things I want to do after football. The classes and courses that I have taken has gotten me ready to do a lot of different things in life such as banking and dealing with money, those kind of things. (Michael)
> [As far as life after the NFL,] first of all I'm going to have my degree and what you learn in college is suppose to take you to the next level. It's suppose to prepare me I guess to be a better person. They teach you in college how to relate to people out there. There's just a lot out there that they're teaching. (Sean)

> [College has prepared me for life after the NFL by giving me] my degree really. I'll get my degree. When football is over with then I will be able to do some of the things I have wanted to do that I've always wanted to do. I think college really is a stepping stone for the rest of your life. I know that football, the NFL is your career but football doesn't last forever and you have to be able to do something else and college allows you to do that. (Derek)

Some researchers and scholars believe that African American male athletes unrealistically focus their future goals on a professional sport career, believing that sport can elevate their economic and social mobility. Given that approximately two-thirds of African Americans playing NCAA Division I-A football come from impoverished backgrounds (Sailes, 1987) and there is such a high number of African American professional athletes, it appears that this is a realistic expectation. For example, Oliver (1980) found that despite the odds against it, members of the lower or working class are more likely to view sport as an avenue for social and economic mobility.

It should be pointed out that there are some benefits to the belief that sport can contribute to upward economic and social mobility. Sport participation can provide direct and indirect ways to elevate economic and social mobility for groups that may otherwise remain immobile. Often though, when people hear the phrase "African Americans can

achieve social and economic mobility through sport," they automatically assume that this is in reference to obtaining professional sport status. Conversely, sport can provide many other benefits and avenues to African American male athletes irrespective of an aspiration toward a professional sport career. For example, sport can contribute to physical, social and educational development among high school student-athletes (Harris, 1993; Sabo, 1988 as cited in Sailes, 2000) and can reduce the incidents of rebellion, delinquency and drop out (Polk & Schafer, 1971 as cited in Rehberg & Cohen, 1975). In fact, some student-athletes perform at higher levels in the classroom and beyond than their nonathletic counterparts (Leonard, 1998 as cited in Sailes, 2000). Other high school athletes believe that participation in high school athletics could possibly foster educational, social and life skills, benefits and opportunities that would facilitate the transition to "purposeful productivity" and expand future job possibilities (Harris, 1993 as cited in Sailes, 2000; Oliver, 1980).

Theme 3: emphasizing academics. The third theme major, *emphasizing academics*, dealt with the participants' attitudes about the importance of education, the role it played in their lives and their academic goals. This theme was comprised of two subthemes: *Theme 3, Subtheme 1: "mandatory" academics* and *Theme 3, Subtheme 2: goals I have. Theme 3, Subtheme 1: "mandatory" academics*, reflected the participants' attitudes about the importance of their education in their lives. *Theme 3, Subtheme 2: goals I have*, addressed their goals for their education and their academic performance.

The educational attainment and academic achievement of African-American male athletes has often been scrutinized and the lack of the two is highly criticized. In the 1980's, several studies showed that this group of athletes were the least prepared for

college (lowest high school GPA and SAT/ACT scored), had the lowest GPAs in college, had the highest tendency to "cluster" easy courses in easy majors, and were least likely to graduate compared to all student-athletes (American Institutes of Research, 1988; 1989; Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987; Eitzen, 1987; Sack, 1987/88; Spivey & Jones, 1975 as cited in Benson, 2000). Still today, African American male athletes measure low on all levels of academic success. However, the athletes in this study did not seem to fall into this category as evidenced by the following subtheme.

Theme 3, Subtheme 1: "mandatory" academics. First, it should be noted that no analysis of the academic support structure of NCAA Division I football was conducted during this study. However, the participants felt that it was important for them to be a student first and an athlete second. Sometimes, however, they felt that others did not expect that from them. Michael had thought about playing both professional football and baseball right out of high school but did not do so because he thought that it was important to go to school. It was also important for Michael, personally, to be a good student:

> It was very important to me. My academics really became first. A lot of times people say you're a stupid athlete and then there's a lot of times people say athletes get by with a lot of things but there are some athletes out there that are students first and that make good grades.

It was also important to Derek to perform well in school.

> I think personally that it is really really important to me. It boosts my ego and let's me know that I can do work at the college level. I know a lot of black kids get down about not being able to perform at the college level. It was really important to me to be an athlete and a student.

For all the participants, school/academics played a major role in their lives and toward the pursuit of their career goals:

> Well, what role they play is if I didn't have it I couldn't play so I took that as if I didn't have these many hours I can't play football. It was like that all the time in high school so that's why I was in class every day. The first one in class. I took my work really seriously. When I got home from school, I did my homework. (Sean)

> Just wanting to play any professional sport you had to get good grades to stay on the team in college. I think that you have to realize that if blow your knee out the next day, your career is over and if you mess around in school or you can't get back in or if your grade level is too bad to bring back up then those are things that you have to look at from that stand point too. I think really academics are a big part. You always want to start off on the right foot because if you have to leave you want to be in good standing just in case you have to come back. (Derek)

Theme 3, Subtheme 2: academic goals I have. The participants had several academic goals that formed their intellectual performance in college:

> My number one goal as a student-athlete was just to do well on the field and off the field. That was my main goal. In other words, I wanted to perform well in football and in the classroom and to get good grades. My number one academic goal as a student-athlete was probably maintaining a 3.0 grade point average throughout the 4 ½ years I was there and I was able to do that. (Michael)

> My number one goal is to get my diploma. Nobody in my family had it or got it. My mom didn't go to college and my dad didn't finish high school so that's my goal, that's the reason I'm here at University X. And next year just coming back [to finish school]. . . . My academic goal is basically stay above a 2.5 and trying to get on the honor roll and be on top. That's one of my goals. I did it my freshman year and my classes got harder and it was tougher to stay on the honor roll. But I'm doing well.

> My number one goal as a student-athlete was really to graduate from college. I really haven't done it yet but I'm not far. I only have 15 credits left. Just to graduate is my goal. I mean no one else in my family graduated from college so I want to be the first. I just want do that for myself and for my mom and the rest of my family. . . . Basically when I was in high school, I was sometimes an A/B sometimes B guy. I knew my expectations for myself was to go out and get A's and B's but that's everyone's expectations. I'd just go out there and do my best. I knew the classes would be harder and I just wanted to do the best that I could, get as much help as I could. Even if I left with a C I knew that that was the best that I could do. (Derek)

There are several factors that contribute to African American athletes' poor academic performance. According to Benson (2000):

> . . . some of the literature has connected the poor academic performance of some Black student-athletes to problems within the society at large, suggesting that these students' underachievement may be caused in part by the way that schools are structured to maintain the prevailing social and economic order (p. 225; Edward, 1984; Eitzen & Purdy, 1986; Henderson, 1986; Ruffer, 1971; Spivey & Jones, 1975 as cited in Benson, 2000)

This literature is not consistent with the data in my study. The participants in my study were good academic performers and emphasized their academics. One example of factors from society at large affecting African American male athletes is social class. Social class can affect the quality of education one receives and the development of educational values which significantly influence educational achievement (Sailes, 2000). Many African American athletes come from impoverished backgrounds and do not have access to "quality" education. In the impoverished class, education is often devalued and academic achievement is criticized because reaching educational achievement for African Americans means that they are trying to be white (Fleming, 1984 as cited in Sailes, 2000). This idea creates a dilemma for African American athletes who want to maintain their racial identity but achieve academic success. Regardless of what social class the participants came from, they valued their educational attainment and academic achievement. Each participant was not in conflict about their identity because they all identified with being an athlete and a student.

The data resultant from this study is not consistent with the literature previously discussed. Overall, the athletes in this study put an equal, if not stronger emphasis on academics than on athletics and had goals to excel at both. All three participants realized

the importance of having a college education, thought about other career plans and had interests outside of a career in professional football. They were all academically prepared to pursue other careers outside of professional sport. One has already graduated from college and the other two plan to graduate next year. It is important to be aware of issues surrounding African American male athletes' academic performance, but more important to develop solutions to help them be better students, identify themselves as students and athletes and understand the realistic possibility of their abilities to be high academic achievers and achieves a college degree attainment (Benson, 2000; Lee, 1983).

Theme 4: career choice. The fourth theme, *career choice*, depicted the participants thoughts about being a professional athlete, what a professional football career has to offer and what they want to do outside of football when they retire from the sport. This theme was comprised of two subthemes: *Theme 4, Subtheme 1: professional football career* and *Theme 4, Subtheme 2: other avenues. Theme 4, Subtheme 1: professional football career*, reflected the participants' thoughts about being a professional football player and having it as a career. *Theme 4, Subtheme 2: other avenues*, dealt with participants' plans outside of professional football and their other interests.

Theme 4, Subtheme 1: professional football career. As has been discussed throughout this entire paper, many African American male athletes aspire to be professional athletes. Although they may view this as a valid option, there are many societal and life factors that can contribute to an unrealistic expectation of a career in professional sport. For many African American males, professional sport appears as a viable option that is relatively free of racial barriers (Edwards, 1984, as cited in Sailes & Kuperminc, 1997). In addition, professional sport offers one of the few avenues of upward social and

economic mobility in which African Americans can be judged on their ability instead of the color of their skin (Sailes & Kuperminc, 1997). All three participants didn't specifically aspire to be professional football players and they did not realize that they could be until relatively recently.

> It really wasn't my dream. I was a really smart kid. I really didn't think about it until my sophomore year [of high school] that's when I started really thinking about professional ball. . . . That is when I really knew that I was going to go to college to play football or baseball. (Michael)

> I really didn't know [that I wanted to be a professional football player]. It just kind of came to me. I was doing well and coach said I could be one of the great football players. I didn't believe him but he always said things and when you say things they can come true. I realized my junior year in high school when I was involved in that and I realized I can play this sport and I can be successful. . . . Really one of my dreams was playing both sports [football and basketball], being successful at both. It was kind of hard and I settled down with just football. And it just became my dream. (Sean)

> To be honest it really hasn't hit me yet (laughs). Honestly, I really didn't think that it would happen. . . . I really didn't expect it but it happened. It hasn't really hit me yet. I guess I'll need to play a game before it'll really hit me. I didn't really have a dream of being a professional football player. I wanted to be a professional basketball player before I did football. So my love for football wasn't really there. I didn't have a dream to do that but I had a dream to be a professional athlete not just a professional football player. It's working out pretty good. I can't say how my life has been because I really haven't been through it yet. (Derek)

Lee (1983) examined the athletic expectations of high school students participating in sport to determine whether or not these expectations were realistic given the sport career opportunities available. His study examined the unique contributions of athletic participation, socioeconomic status, the influence of parents and coaches, academic performance and race in predicting the athletic expectations of African American and European American male high school athletes. Lee (1983) found that 36%

of the participants in the subgroup of African American starters responded that they expected to become professional athletes compared to 14% of European American starters.

Participants described what they thought a career in professional football offered:

> I think the longevity of the game. Really just your self image. A lot of people see you in a lot of different ways. I think when they see you play football and then see you off the football field, people think of you in two different ways. I think that if you can put that all in one category, one positive image, then that can change a lot of people's perceptions of you. (Michael)

> I think it's kind of lost the fun. You have to go out there and have fun. It's really not obvious. The fun is kind of there but not really. It's a real business. It just shows you the business aspect of the world and it's just like going out to a job. You have to wake up every morning, you have to practice, you have to work, you
> listen to your boss, we have to listen to our coaches. (Sean)

> I think it can offer a lot of things. It's not only football things, it's just different things such as how to be on time for things. We have to be on time for meetings, for games, etc. I also think it can make you aware of what a smart person is. (Derek)

Interestingly, Michael discussed professional football in the context of it being a job; he did not think that the NCAA should mandate that athletes not be drafted by to the NFL until they earned their degree:

> I really don't think that's a big issue because there are a lot of people in college that stop going to college to go to work. Playing any professional sport that's a job too and they're getting paid to do that. So I don't see why they would prevent somebody from getting a job.

Derek viewed professional football as offering more opportunity and thought that there were more opportunities in professional football than professional basketball:

> Playing football there are more positions to play, pro teams are bigger than basketball teams. There is a better chance, better opportunity to play football than basketball.

Theme 4, Subtheme 2: other avenues. Participants all had other careers they thought about pursuing other than professional football:

> Right now, after football, I'm thinking about going into banking. Probably owning a bank one day, trying to start a bank, something along those lines. I chose banking because my cousin back home, he's a loan officer in one of the banks back in my hometown. I just talk to him a lot about my situation and loan processing, and also buying land, building houses. (Michael)

> Well, I always liked to work and be hard working. I used to do construction work with my stepdad and my brother and I always liked that. People said I should be in the business of interior decorating because that's one of my favorite things. I like to clean, I like to decorate and put things in places and make things look nice. (Sean)

> Of course I have [thought about pursuing other careers]. A professional basketball player but I even wanted to be a doctor. As far as sport and everything, I want to own my own rec. center and help kids out a lot. Those are basically all the things I've always wanted to do. I wanted to be a doctor and I wanted to coach basketball. (Derek)

Each of the participants in the present study discussed their career plans for after retirement from professional football:

> I want to go into banking. I want to own a bank or do something along with building houses. Something like that. I also want to open up a recreational center in a couple different cities. Just where the young kids can come, somewhere they can go after school to have fun, play basketball, things that I can help them out with. (Michael)

> Well, I plan to have my own business and I plan to have my own foundation. I'd like to have a couple of businesses in my hometown. Just make plans and God will give them to me and that will take me to the next level. Just have money set aside and invest it. (Sean)

> Yeah, like I said one of the big things I want to do is to coach basketball. I just have a great love for basketball and the game and another thing I want to do is open a rec. center. I like working with kids and just really give back to some of the people that helped me. Some people helped me, guided me in the right direction and helped me get to where I am today. So there are thousands of little kids out there that I can help and guide them in

> the right direction to help them get off on the right foot. Who knows about where they started out, they may start in the gutter and acting wrong and they have to feel like they can continue. I want to get them out on the right foot and let them know that they can make it. (Derek)

Sellers and Kuperminc (1997) sought to determine whether African American male college student-athletes unrealistically focus their career goals on professional athletics to the detriment of their academic pursuits. They considered the professional athletic aspirations of 702 African American male student-athletes, mostly underclassmen, from 42 NCAA Division I universities using the concept of goal discrepancy to identify individuals whose professional athletic aspirations were inconsistent with their current status as first team members of their respective football or basketball programs. The results revealed that only 5% of the participants were goal discrepant student-athletes. Institutional characteristics, such as intensity of the athletic program and segregation of the athletes from nonathletic students, were stronger predictors of goal discrepancy than personal characteristics, such as socioeconomic statue or precollege academic preparation (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997).

Michael and Derek, respectively, shared their thoughts about attending college if they didn't play football:

> Yes, I would have still attended college if I couldn't play football. Simply because I want to have a living. There are a lot of things I want to do outside of football and college has prepared me for that.

> Yes, I would. Like I said earlier, I want to graduate. I will graduate eventually. I like the atmosphere here and I like the people I've met here. I think if I had a life without football, I would probably still have the same type of goals. I would be the same type of person.

The belief that African American male athletes' predominantly aspire to professional sport careers is a blanket assumption that isn't consistent with the results of the present

study. Although the participants may have aspired to be professional athletes at some point in their lives, it wasn't the only thing they thought about doing. In fact, they did not realize they wanted to be professional football players until later in their high school or college careers and they expressed the feeling that a career in professional sport wasn't really their dream.

It should also be pointed out that the participants' professional sport career aspiration was not an unrealistic expectation for any of them. Not only were/are they all starters for a very successful Division I football program, they knew the importance of a college education, considered other career options and made other plans for their lives. It could also be said that they did not have an unrealistic expectation, because two of them are professional football players in the NFL and the other one will be. However, it might be considered an unrealistic expectation if these athletes "put all their eggs in one basket" and never thought about other plans. Fortunately, these athletes have not done that. At the very least, if their professional football career does work out or if they retire, they will all have their college degrees to fall back on as well as other career alternatives they have contemplated.

Theme 5: my thoughts on race. The final major theme, *my thoughts on race*, reflected the participants' attitudes about race in their lives. No additional subthemes comprised for theme. The participants discussed their feelings about how race affected their lives and discussed stereotypes they thought people had of them as African American athletes. They also commented on whether or not they had experienced racial barriers throughout their lives:

> Not too many. Even though there are a lot of different races on our team everybody pretty much gets along. It's a team thing and everybody understands that. We all hang out together so we really don't have that problem. (Michael)

Opportunities for African American male athletes within professional sport is limited and the existence of racism and racial discrimination in sport gives way to even fewer opportunities. Edwards (1982) discussed racial discrimination in sport in an article entitled *Race in Contemporary American Sport*. In this article, he argued that sport is inextricably intertwined with the ideological and structural relationships in society and that it reaffirms and reinforces the racist characteristics of them. He further noted that opportunities for success are unequal among African American and European American athletes and concluded that people who believe that sports provide opportunity for African Americans need to remember that sport remains a racist institution. The responses of the participants in this study were not consistent with researchers previous assertions that sport is a racist institution or that racial discrimination exists.

Sean experienced racism during an incident in high school:

> The only racial thing I experienced was in high school when I was playing in a championship game. After we beat them, the coach and the assistant coach in my hometown just said "You would lose to a bunch of niggers. Your mothers are this." It kind of hurt and I lost respect for the coach but you know that was just one of the racial things I've experienced. There's a lot out there.

Surprisingly, all three participants did not feel that race had influenced their career options or choices in any way:

> I don't think it's influenced them or made any big difference. What I want to do in life has no bearing on what your race is. You are going to be dealing with all sorts of people. (Michael)

> Really I don't think about race or anything like that. There's good white people in the world, there's good black people in the world, bad, but it's mixed. It's the same so you can't say all white people are bad, they're not. There's good ones and there's bad ones. I have seen my share of both and I guess that's just the way the world is. With me, I treat everybody like I want to be treated. I treat people with respect and that's just me. (Sean)

> I really don't think about race much. I just go out and see everybody as being equal. About race, I wouldn't be sitting here doing this interview with you. It's just different things. Different people see things differently but I just see me as me and you as you. You're your own person, I'm my own person. I try not to stereotype. That's what I think is really holding everything down, holding everyone back. I don't really get into race too much. I just like to go with the flow. (Derek)

Michael described his perception of how others saw him as an African American athlete.

> About being a black athlete, people might perceive you as a great athlete and not a student at all. The majority, I would probably say 80 - 85% of our team is black and a lot of us, some of them, are not great students but are great athletes. Some of the other white guys are great students but not great athletes. I think that just has a way of its own to sort out on both sides.

In summary, the current participants' experiences seem to be consistent with some findings of research conducted with African American male athletes and professional sport career aspirations. However, the results appear to be inconsistent with other research, specifically, those dealing with the stereotypes and race ideologies that are attributed to African American football players. In particular, the present results conflict with several social and cultural assumptions and stereotypes of African American male athletes and their careers and life aspirations.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMEDATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this final chapter, conclusions are be offered along with recommendations for coaches, Sport Psychology professionals, and sport science researchers.

Conclusions

Assumptions and stereotypes are commonly made about African American male athletes' academic performance as well as their life choices, specifically that they aspire unrealistically to professional sport careers and consider no other alternatives. Based on the results of the present study, the following conclusions are offered. The three African American male athletes in this study: 1) aspired to be professional athletes, but it wasn't the only career choice they considered; 2) did not have an unrealistic expectation for a professional sport career because they had the opportunity to pursue a professional football career; 3) once they become professional athletes, made plans for after retirement or if they got cut or injured; 4) realized the importance of having a college education and had interests outside of a professional football career; 5) put an equal or stronger emphasis on academics as athletics and had goals of excelling at both; and, 6) were academically prepared to pursue other careers outside of professional sport.

Recommendations for Coaches

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations for coaches are offered. Coaches should: 1) become aware of the social and cultural stereotypes made about African American male athletes; 2) try to not make assumptions or cast stereotypes on African American male athletes' mental and physical capabilities or life choices based

on social and cultural perceptions and race ideologies; 3) make efforts to break social and cultural stereotypes made about African American male athletes; 4) emphasize the importance of being a good student and of choosing a viable college major; 5) foster and reward good academic performance and guide struggling athletes to seek academic help if they need it; 6) point out the significance of completing a college degree and of considering several career paths; and, 7) encourage athletes to be well-rounded, having interests and friends outside of football.

Recommendations for Sport Psychology Professionals

The results of this study also suggest several recommendations for Sport Psychology professionals. Currently, very few Sport Psychology graduate programs include coursework in Cultural Studies. Martens, Mobley, and Zizzi (2000) have only recently addressed the issue of multicultural training. In their proposal of multicultural training for graduate students in applied Sport Psychology, these authors stress the importance of being sensitive to racial and ethnic differences among athletes. This multicultural training should also include awareness and recognition of race ideologies and social and cultural stereotypes that exist within sport.

Sport Psychology professionals should understand the significance of race ideologies in sport as well as the social and cultural stereotypes that exist for various racial and ethnic groups. Professionals should not stereotype any individual, should acknowledge stereotypes when they exist, and should make efforts to abandon them. Lastly, it is important for Sport Psychology professionals to acknowledge that athletes are "whole people" by showing an interest in athletes; lives outside of sport.

Future Directions for Sport Science Researchers

Sport science researchers should be aware of the biological meaninglessness of race (Coakley, 1998) and try not to explain athletic or academic performance based on biological traits. Further, several potentially productive areas for further qualitative research include: 1) a longitudinal investigation (from early childhood to adulthood) of African American males' sport socialization, sport experiences, schooling and career goals; 2) an investigation of an entire team's attitudes about their expectations of a professional sport career; and, 3) an investigation of coaches' attitudes about the importance of fostering education and degree attainment on their athletic teams (Sailes, 1993). In this way, professionals can critically examine whether African American male athletes are socialized toward an unrealistic expectation of a professional sport career or whether coaches are aware and concerned about the futures of their athletes outside of sport.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

FORM A

IRB #_____

Certification for Exemption from IRB Review for Research Involving Human Subjects

A. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR & THESIS ADVISOR:

Principal Investigator: Melissa A. McMaster, M.S. Candidate (Sport Psychology)

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Leslee A. Fisher, Assistant Professor

B. DEPARTMENT: Dept. of Educational Administration and Cultural Studies

C. COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR & THESIS ADVISOR:

Principal Investigator:
Melissa A. McMaster, M.S. Candidate (Sport Psychology)
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Thesis Advisor:
Dr. Leslee A. Fisher, Assistant Professor
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D. TITLE OF PROJECT: An Exploratory Investigation of the Aspirations Among NCAA Division I African-American Athletes of a Career in Professional Football

E. EXTERNAL FUNDING AGENCY AND ID NUMBER (if applicable): N/A

F. GRANT SUBMISSION DEADLINE (if applicable): N/A

G. STARTING DATE: Upon CRP approval

H. ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE: July 12, 2001

I. RESEARCH PROJECT:

1. **Objective of Project:** The objective/purpose of this study is to examine the following two experiences of NCAA Division I African-American Football Players:

   - Their career aspirations (dreams).
   - Their thoughts/attitudes about how cultural and social variables have shaped them and their career aspirations.

2. **Subjects:** The subjects who will be asked to participate in this study will be three NCAA Division I African-American football players. The age of all participants will be 18 years or older, from a variety of undergraduate classifications (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). The participants in this study will be chosen because they have either recently been drafted by teams in the National Football League (NFL) or will be drafted next year.

3. **Methods or Procedures:**

   Upon approval, the principal investigator will do the following:

   - Contact the three to five NCAA Division I African-American football players selected for the study to gain permission for their participation in a one-hour semi-structured interview and to schedule the interview at the student-athlete's convenience.
   - Read a letter of information (Appendix B) to the participants and explain the purpose of the study and their role in participating.
   - Ask the participants to sign a consent form (Appendix C).

   During the one-hour semi-structured interview, the principal investigator will ask the participants to respond to questions listed in the Interview Guide (Appendix D).

   Following the one-hour interview, the participants will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire (Appendix E). Upon completion of the demographic questionnaire, the participants will be informed that they will be contacted after transcription of their interview has been completed to review their interview responses to ensure they reflect what the participants intended.

   Prior to the transcription of the interviews, the transcriber will be asked to sign a pledge (Appendix F) concerning confidentiality. In addition, each member of the research team who will review and verify the principal investigator's interview themes will also be asked to sign a pledge of confidentiality (Appendix G). These pledges are necessary to ensure that

the participants will be protected and anonymity of names and confidentiality of materials with names will be obtained and maintained by the transcriptionist and the research group.
The principal investigator has identified two potential risks to the research participants. First, given the high exposure of major collegiate sport at the student-athletes' University, the athletes may feel any information given about football may exploit them and make them vulnerable to the public. Second, being a European American female interviewing African-American football players may be problematic for the participants if they perceive a race difference or do not understand why a European American female wants to interview African-American males.

In lieu of the first potential risk, the principal investigator will take measures to protect the participants. The subjects will be protected and anonymity of names and confidentiality of materials with names will be obtained and maintained. In lieu of the second potential risk, the principal investigator will address directly any concerns brought up by the participants regarding any race and gender differences.

No payment will be provided to the participants and participation in this study will be voluntary. Incentives for participation will be restricted to personal feedback about findings of the study.

Lastly, no individuals will have access to names and/or data because the survey is anonymous. Although, the following people will have access to the data:

- Melissa A. McMaster, Principal Investigator
- Dr. Leslee A. Fisher, Thesis Advisor
- Dr. Craig A. Wrisberg, Thesis Committee Member
- Dr. Joy DeSensi, Thesis Committee Member

4. **CATEGORY(s) FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH PER 45 CFR 46:**

Paragraph (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, **unless**: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; **and** (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

J. CERTIFICATION: The research described herein is in compliance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and presents subjects with no more than minimal risk as defined by applicable regulations.

Principal Investigator_____ _____ _____
Name Signature Date

Student Advisor_____ _____ _____
Name Signature Date

Dept. Review
Comm.Chair_____ _____ _____
Name Signature Date

APPROVED:
Dept. Head_____ _____ _____
Name Signature Date

Appendix B
Letter of Information to the Athlete

My name is Melissa McMaster. I am currently a master's degree student in Sport Psychology working with Dr. Leslee A. Fisher and Dr. Craig Wrisberg. For my master's thesis, I would like to examine NCAA Division I athletes' professional sport aspiration. More specifically, I will ask you during a one-hour semi-structured interview to respond to several questions related to the following:

- Your career aspirations (dreams).
- Your thoughts/attitudes about how cultural and social variables have shaped you and your career aspirations.

Prior to the one-hour semi-structured interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form which verifies your agreement with the following:

- The research procedures have been explained to you.
- Any questions that you may ask have been answered to your satisfaction.
- You know that you may ask now, or in the future, any questions you have about the study or the research procedures.
- You have been assured that records relating to you will be kept confidential and no information will be released or printed that would disclose your personal identity without your permission.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Following the one-hour semi-structured interview, you will be asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire. Once your interview has been transcribed, you will be contacted to review your responses and to ensure they reflect what you intended.

I realize that your time is extremely valuable. I thank you for taking the time to assist me with my study.

Sincerely,

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Appendix C
Athlete Consent Form

I acknowledge that the research procedures described on the attached form have been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been informed of all procedures in the study. I know that I may ask now, or in the future, any questions I have about the study or the research procedures. I have been assured that records relating to me will be kept confidential and no information will be released or printed that would disclose my personal identity without my permission. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time.

_____ _____

(Signature of Participant) (Name of Participant)

_____

(Date)

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Appendix D
Interview Guide

Background

1. What was the first sport you ever played and how old were you?
2. When did you start playing football?
3. Was there anyone who initially influenced/encouraged you to play sport?
4. Who were your role models while you were growing up?
5. Who are your role models now?

Aspirations

6. When did you know you wanted to be a professional football player? Was this your dream?
7. What do you feel a career(s) in professional football has to offer?
8. Are there any other careers you thought about pursuing? If so, what was it/were they?

Athletics

9. What was your number one goal as a student-athlete?
10. How important was it to you personally to perform well in athletics?
11. What do you consider to be the greatest benefit of playing football in college?
12. What expectations do you think people have of you?
13. Would you still have attended college if couldn't play football? Why or why not?
14. Most of us know that football players must attend college to be eligible for the NFL draft. What are your thoughts about the NCAA mandating that student-athletes not be drafted out of college until they earn a degree?
15. How has college prepared you for the NFL?
16. How has college prepared you for "life after the NFL"?

Academics

17. What was your number one academic goals as a student-athlete?
18. What role did school (academics) play in the pursuit of your career goal?
19. How important was it to you personally that you perform well in academics?

Race

20. What racial barriers have you experienced as a student-athlete?
21. How do you think race has influenced your career options or choices in any way?

Career Plans After Professional Sport

22. What are your career plans after you retire from professional football?

Appendix E
Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age _____

2. Home Town, State _____

4. Undergraduate classification (circle one)

   Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate

5. Year of participation in UT football (circle one) 1 2 3 4 5

6. Undergraduate major (please list) _____

7. Undergraduate minor (if applicable; please list) _____

8. Mother's occupation (please list) _____

9. Father's occupation (please list) _____

10. What family member(s) have received a college degree? (circle one)

    Mother Father Sister(s) Brother(s) Other _____

11. Mean family income (circle one)

    Below $20,000 $10,000-$20,000 $20,000-$30,000

    $30,000-$40,000 $40,000-$50,000 over $50,000

12. Did you receive an athletic scholarship to pay for your education? (circle one)

    Yes No

    If so, how much (circle one)

    ¼ ½ ¾ Full

13. Do expect to finish your undergraduate studies and graduate with your degree? (circle one) Yes No

    If so, when? (please list)

Spring _____ Summer _____ Fall _____

Appendix F
Transcriber's Pledge of Confidentiality

As the transcriber for this research project, I understand that I will be hearing tapes of confidential interviews. The information on these tapes has been shared with the principal investigator (Melissa McMaster), with the understanding that all material remains strictly confidential. Recognizing this confidential aspect of the interviews, I hereby pledge to keep all of the information on these tapes in the strictest confidence, sharing it with no one other than Melissa McMaster or Dr. Leslee A. Fisher, her co-investigator and thesis advisor. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a breech of the ethical standard to which I herein pledge myself.

_____ _____

(Signature of Transcribing Typist) (Name of Transcribing Typist)

_____

(Date)

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Appendix G
Research Team Member's Pledge of Confidentiality

In accepting membership on the research team for Melissa McMaster's thesis, I understand that I will be reading transcripts of confidential interviews. The information contained in these transcripts has been shared with the principal investigator (Melissa McMaster), with the understanding that all of the material remains strictly confidential. Recognizing this essential aspect of the transcripts, I hereby pledge to keep all information in these protocols in the strictest confidence, sharing it with no one other than Melissa McMaster, Dr. Leslee A. Fisher, or members of the interdisciplinary research group in which she participates. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a breech of the ethical standard to which I herein pledge myself.

_____ _____

(Signature of Research Team Member) (Name of Research Team Member)

_____

(Date)

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VITA

Melissa Anne McMaster was born in Salem, Oregon on February 2, 1974. She attended six elementary schools from kindergarten to fifth grade in Grinnell, Iowa, Sterling, Illinois and Urbandale, Iowa. She went to Urbandale Middle School from sixth to eighth grade and graduated from Urbandale Senior High School in Urbandale, Iowa in May, 1992. In August, 1992, she entered the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Fall, Iowa and in August, 1993, she left UNI to enter Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa where she played a year of collegiate softball as a walk-on. In May, 1997, she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism and Mass Communication/Public Relations from Iowa State University. From January, 1998 to May, 1999, she took three graduate classes in the Department of Exercise & Sport Science at Iowa State University. In the August, 2000, she began her master's program in Sport Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. During this time, the Department of Exercise Science & Sport Management employed her as a Graduate Teaching Associate. As a Graduate Teaching Associate, she was a recipient of the A.W. Hobt Teaching Award in April 2001. Also during this time, the Men's and Women's Athletic Departments employed her as an Academic Tutor. In January, 2002, she will complete her Master of Science degree in Education with a specialization in Sport Psychology and Cultural Studies and officially graduate in May, 2002. Her future plans are to work as an Academic Coach for high school athletes and to pursue either a doctoral degree in Sport Psychology or a law degree specializing in Sport Law and/or Media Law.

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