

**INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE COLLEGE ATHLETE TRANSFER PROCESS:
THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN OF COLOR
IN THE NCAA TRANSFER PORTAL**

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ABSTRACT

In 2018 the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) adopted the Transfer Portal (NCAA. 2021b). The online database was designed to help the compliance process as athletes were transferring from one institution to another. As the literature review demonstrates the modernity of the transfer portal impacts the quantity of available scholarship.

This dissertation explores the experiences of women of color who have navigated the NCAA transfer portal. Through 10 semi-structured interviews with athletes meeting the study's inclusion criteria, the research was able to identify emerging themes which followed the phases of Turner's theory of Liminality (1969). During the preliminal phases athletes encounter various obstacles that discourage retention and negatively impact their emotional well-being. These feeling prompted their decision to enter the transfer portal and the liminal state.

After leaving their initial institution, the existing in the transfer portal and liminal phase introduced an additional set of challenges for the women of color in the sample. These included an overall lack of transfer portal knowledge, negative feelings, and juxtaposition to recruitment. The identified challenges could be combated by the athlete having a positive external support system. These positive external sports allowed for a smoother transfer process for the athletes in the sample.

As the athletes exited the portal they enter the post-liminal phase. This period of incorporation was riddled with barriers to positive transitions as well as facilitators to reaggregation: some of which are directly rooted in intersectionality.

The study emphasizes the need for cultural competency among athletic staffs and the broader social structure. Women of color face unique challenges related to their ethnic and racial identities as well as across gender lines. The findings from this study allow for a richer understanding of how they navigate those challenges. The recommendations and implications provide guidance for addressing the intersectionality that shapes their academic and athletic transfer experience. Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of creating inclusive and equitable environments in college athletics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND TOPIC RELEVANCE	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	19
CHAPTER 3 MATERIALS AND METHOD.....	35
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS	53
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	86
REFERENCES	112
APPENDIX.....	129
VITA.....	150

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: <i>Participant Demographics</i>	143
Table 4.1: <i>Preliminal Findings</i>	144
Table 4.2: <i>Liminal Findings</i>	145
Table 4.3: <i>Post-Liminal Findings</i>	146

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: <i>Findings Organizational Chart</i>	147
Figure 5.1: <i>Institutional Transfer Check List: Exit List</i>	148
Figure 5.2: <i>Institutional Transfer Check List: Entry List</i>	149

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND TOPIC RELEVANCE

In 2018 the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) adopted the Transfer Portal (NCAA. 2021b). The online database was designed to help the compliance process as athletes were transferring from one institution to another. The portal was created to allow compliance administrators a more organized pathway to track transfer athletes.

The transfer portal also allows athletes to have more autonomy in the transfer process (O'Brien, T. 2019). Prior to the implementation of the portal, athletes were required to receive permission from their institution. If an athlete wanted to transfer for any reason, they were required to ask for an athletic release from their original academic institution. (Stokowski, et al., 2019). Those athletic releases were not always granted.

The portal release recruiting process was also almost entirely up to the athlete. The athlete had to contact other schools and sports programs to let them know they were looking to transfer and had been released. Upon the release, the institution did not have to cover any scholarship commitments from the athlete. This made transferring very risky for the average college athlete.

Since the inception of the transfer portal, athletes have an immediate and quickly accessible way to let other institutions know they are willing and available to participate in their sport at a new school (Romano & Dasilva, 2023). The Transfer Portal created a database of available athletes that coaches all around the country could view and recruit. To accompany the database the NCAA adopted bylaws to allow athletes to maintain their scholarship status until the end of the academic year, regardless of transfer status (NCAA Publications).

This legislation empowered athletes to take more control of their own athletic future. The database also allows for athletes to have more protections and visibility during the transfer process. For example, athletes are entered into the portal they can be viewed by numerous schools around the country simultaneously. Though the portal has improved the athletic experience for some, there are still a majority of areas surrounding the portal that have yet to be explored.

Statement of the Problem

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) formed in the Spring of 1906 (NCAA, 2021a). Since its inauguration as a governing body of college sport there have been many changes to its original structures. The most notable rule, policy, or bylaw changes have been those that were implemented on the grounds of athlete improvement. Though there have been several bylaw revisions, few have had as significant an impact as the inception of the athlete transfer portal.

The transfer portal is a tangible piece of the NCAA's compliance system. The database was created as an efficiency tool to streamline the process of college athlete institutional transfers. The portal is an online database that holds the contact information and compliance office transfer credentials for college athletes who seek to participate for a new institution. To enter the portal college athletes, inform their campus athletic compliance office and then enter within 48 hours of their request (NCAA, 2018). Once athlete's information is uploaded to the database, college coaches across the United States can browse the list of athletes and contact them with potential scholarship offers and roster spots on new teams.

There is an overall lack of research on the transfer portal (Swingle & Salinas, 2020; Verburg, 2022), and what has been conducted takes a quantitative approach. Studies (Prather,

2021; Romano & Dasilva, 2023), have examined the number of athletes entering and exiting the portal, the sport, and identity demographics. Because of the postpositive theoretical nature of the current scholarship, there is a lack of personalized data about the individuals who utilize the transfer portal. Additionally, Swim et al.'s (2023) findings suggest that there is also a lack of demographic diversity. Recent studies have called for further research that examines female college athletes, particularly studies of female transfer participants with diverse ethnicities (Swingle, & Salinas, 2020). As future research recommendations suggest experiences of women of color as they move through the transfer portal have not been fully explored (Blackett et al., 2021; Couch, n.d.; DeFreese et al.; Chandran, 2021; Verburg, 2022). Thus, the current study will answer that call through an investigation into the experiences of female college athletes of color and the NCAA transfer portal.

Statement of the Purpose

Women of color occupy a unique position within the United States (U.S.) society whereby they are often disadvantaged by both the dominant ideologies of patriarchy as women and racism as Blacks (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Scholars have documented the various ways Black women have been subordinated in society in spaces such as education, politics, business, medicine, law, journalism, and sport, to name a few (Patton & Croom, 2017). Related to Black female athletes, they have experienced a range of distinct challenges as a result of their intersecting identities in society in general and in sporting spaces more specifically (Couch et al., 2023).

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women of color who have utilized the transfer portal to transfer from one institution to another. The experiences of women

of color using the transfer portal defines the population group as an athlete who was enrolled during their primary sport's women's competition season and self identifies as an ethnicity other than White. Additionally, the examined population needed to have entered the NCAA transfer portal. This study will examine the transfer process and the intersectionality of this population.

Significance of the Study

The NCAA Transfer Portal is a relatively new implementation in the collegiate athletic compliance process. There is ample research that documents the experiences of college athletes, but there is a lack of literature that examines the experiences of athletes who enter the transfer portal.

Couch et. al, (2023) explain that the intersectionality of identities that athletes hold, may have drastic implications on the data in a study. This study examines the specific intersectionality athletes have with gender and ethnicity. This area of transfer college athletes has yet to be thoroughly explored. Many studies suggest that further research is needed to advance the knowledge on women in the Transfer Portal. To increase the richness of the existing literature, researchers have called for an increase the ethnic diversity from future scholarship (Burgess, 2017; Challenger, 2017; Flowers et al., 2014; Haper, 2009).

A qualitative approach will provide and enable a deeper understanding of experiences, of women of color in the Transfer Portal. This more person-centered approach will result in a better understanding of human experience. Additionally, this framework has a higher likelihood to produce rich and detailed data based on the participants' responses.

Additional contributions of the current research includes a deeper theoretical understanding of how intersectionality may affect a student athlete's experience with the transfer

portal. There are a variety of studies that examine athletic transitions into and out of sports spaces (Harry & Weight, 2021; Navarro, 2015; Stokowski, et al., 2019), but very little that examines the athlete experience as they transition within their careers. This study will contribute significantly to the current body of research as it examines the transition *through* an athlete's college career.

There will be three primary beneficiaries from the study. The first will be coaches and sport specific staff. These individuals will be informed by the findings and can utilize the findings and discussion to inform how they engage and interact with this population during their transfer process. The second will be athletic administrator and compliance staff. The transfer portal helps administrators and compliance offices track athletes through the lens of eligibility. This study will allow transfer athletes to become more humanized to administrators and compliance officers instead of athletic release numbers on a screen. The final beneficiaries will be the future transfer athletes who identify as women of color. Female athletes who identify as women of color could examine the findings and have a more in-depth perspective and view of what they can expect through their transfer process.

Research Focus

The study aims to answer the two major research focuses to assess the experience of the target group.

1. What are the experiences of women of color who use the NCAA Transfer Portal?
2. How do women of color view their connection to the institutions while in the NCAA Transfer Portal?

These research questions will be reviewed through two major frameworks. These will include Theory of Liminality and Schlossberg's Transition Theory. The combination of the two will give a unique look into experiences of women of color and how they have utilized the transfer portal.

The theory of liminality will focus on the athlete's Liminal Phase. The Liminal Phase occurs during the athlete's transition from one status to another. This transpires when the athletes no longer occupy a space in their old programs, but they do not yet take up space in their new programs. This perfectly defines athletes that exist in the transfer portal. The goal or desired outcome of the Liminality is the reincorporation into a new group. This is similar to the goal athletes have as they enter the Transfer Portal: to be picked up by another team or institution. Thus, achieving the reincorporation process. Schlossberg's Transition Theory helps to achieve an understanding of how individuals experience and cope with change and transition.

In current literature it is applied to employees transitioning to jobs or careers, high school students transitioning into higher education, and military personal transitioning back into civilian life. This theory can also be applied in the space of collegiate athletics.

Transition theory can be used to describe the athletes and their experiences in the portal. Schlossberg's Transition Theory focus on four key factors that influence an individual's transition and experience with change. These include the external circumstances that impact transition, a person's internal strengths, coping abilities, and the individuals understanding of the transition and the impact it will have. The combination of the two frames will create a setting that allows the athletes experiences to be examined from the beginning of their decision to enter the portal, existence and experiences in the portal, and how the athlete will navigate and integrate into their new teams.

Women in Sport

Prior to Title IX

Though the NCAA was only conceived in 1906 there have been records of sport throughout history since 2150 BCE (Ackerman, 2005). Homer records sport through story form in an 800 BCE story of Princess Nausicaa playing ball with her handmaidens next to a riverbank, "...each set aside the veil she wore: the young girls now played ball..." (Homer, lines 100-101). Thousands of years later, in the 1800s, sport still remained recreational instead of competitive sport specific adventures for women. Most were games or play being informal and without rules (Gerber et al., 1974). Women were discouraged from physical exertion in competitive activities as it was perceived to be hazardous, especially during times of menstruation (Clarke, 1874). Clarke's 1874 publication continued to advocate for the exclusion of women in sport. He concluded that women did not have the mental or muscular capacity to pursue the physical activity needed to compete in sport (Clarke, 1874). Though there were interest by women to pursue sporting activity, the majority of early opportunities for women to be engaged with them were squandered by the public acceptance of Clarke's study (Park & Hult, 1993).

Though Clarke's ideals became the social standard, there were spaces that allowed women to explore sport in during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Gerber et al., (1974) cites women participating in sport through social clubs in metropolitan areas. As women gained access to higher education, the popularity of these sporting social clubs, pushed into college settings (Gerber et al., 1974). This was the start of sport clubs for women as a part of their college experience.

Sport opportunities were offered in the form of social gathering for women on college campuses. This most likely mirrored intermural sports, as the competition was between students at the same institution and not a competition between institutions (Bell, 2007). This intermural type sport was the only offering of sport to women in college until after the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920 (Leininger & Gupta, 2020). Though the rights of women continued to grow through the 20th century, college sporting opportunities were extremely limited and underfunded for decades.

Prior to the passing and inception of the 19th Amendment, the NCAA became the formal governing body of college athletic (NCAA, 2021a). However, the inclusion of women and women competitors in the NCAA just celebrated their 40th anniversary (Van Kirk, 2023). Inclusion of women in college sport can be connected largely with the inception of Title IX. This statute reads as follows, “no person in the United States shall on the basis of sex, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefit of or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal Financial assistance,” (Lopiano 2000). Though institutions formally had to have equal opportunities for men and women, the first women’s college championships did not take place until a decade later in November of 1981 (NCAA, 2021b)

Post Title IX

After the passing of 1972s Title IX, women’s sport opportunity in the collegiate setting began to grow. Before becoming a part of the championship sports in the NCAA, women’s college athletes competed in the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women or AIAW (Gerber et al., 1974). On the heels of the Title IX, the 1971-72 school year had 279 schools

competing in women's sports in the AIAW (Hult, 1994; Hulstrand, 1993). In the 10 years prior to the dissolving of AIAW into the NCAA in 1981, the governing body of women's sports would soar its membership to over 800 schools competing in competition (Hult, 1994).

However, the women's sports movement's merging into the NCAA was not a very smooth transition. The two organizations had very different philosophies on how to approach women's sport and competition. Sperber (1990) explained that the focus of the AIWA was on the education of women's college athletics and not on the results of performance. The AIWA held a great emphasis on women's participation in sport and disallowed their members to preach winning competitions as the most important aspect of sport (Hultstrand, 1993). Thus, the AIWA alum rejected the 'win or die' attitude of the NCAA. (Sperber, 1990).

Since the merger of the AIWA women's sports have been adopted into the championship structure of the NCAA. Women's participation in college sports has also continued to grow. The NCAA launched its online demographics in 2012. The NCAA database shows that from 2012 to 2023 women's sport participation has increased from 195,000 women's athletes to over 229,000 (NCAA, 2023).

Race and Ethnicity

Integration of Higher Education

Institutions of higher education in the United States have historically been nontraditional spaces for people who identify as women and ethnic minority individuals. Harvard University was the United States' first university. Opening in for the fall semester of 1636, over 100 years before the United States was a formalized country (Harvard.edu). Harvard's historical cite also

noted that it would take more than 150 years for Harvard to hire its first female professor, and over 200 years before they would admit a Black student.

Though ethnic minority students have been admitted to colleges and universities since the late 1800s, those opportunities were few and far between. In the post-Civil War era there were only a handful of schools that accepted minority applicants (Gasman & Tudico, 2008). However, even if they were admitted to college or university, they experienced disparities that the majority of their white counterparts do not (Wong, et al., 2021). Because of this, there was a direct need for colleges that served non-White scholars and students.

Creating spaces that were specifically dedicated to the education of minority students increased feelings of pride and race consciousness, which, in turn, led to greater self-esteem and self-confidence (Mbajekwe, 2006). These institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and University's or HBCUs allowed "students the opportunity to realize their potential in ways that affirmed their identity and challenged them...education acted as an instrument of liberation from a long history of legalized discrimination and oppression," (Albritton, 2012, p. 313). However, there were still obstacles preventing these positive outcomes at institutions there were designated for White students (Tienda, 2013).

Through the long process of educational integration there have been a number of federal statutes that have increased opportunities for ethnic minority students. These include *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1967, and *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* in 1971 (Onwuachi-Willig, 2019; Nagel et al., 2015; Vanderbilt Law Review, 1971).

Sport Integration

Though the NCAA has existed for almost 120 years opportunity for participation was originally designated for white men. This meant that college sport excluded athletes of color (Anwar-Chuku, 2023). The college sport landscape mimicked the societal norms of the country. Similarly to the country, schools in the southern United States were leading the charge against integration, specifically in sport. Jim Crow laws mandated social norms in a number of states (Krieger et al., 2014). These laws regarding socialization, and mixing of the races in public spaces also applied to sport settings. The emphasis on racial segregation was top priority in many southern states. Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi legislatures all passed laws forbidding universities in their states from playing integrated teams on their home fields (Berry, 1954). This created a landscape of territorialism and exclusion that shaped patterns of living (Guffey, 2012).

Continuing into the mid-sixties the implementation of sport segregation practices persisted in the south, but started to weaken in sport settings. Though ethnic minority athletes experienced many unpleasant situations, many teams did start to integrate their rosters (Hyatt, 2003; Mills & Salaga). This can be seen through important and historic milestones such as the 1966 NCAA Men's Basketball National Championship win from Texas Western College with only Black athletes in their starting line-up (NCAA, 2020).

The Jim Crow era laws not only metaphorically segregated social spaces, but also created exclusively Black and White only spaces. This resulted in an environment of territoriality and isolation that influenced ways of life (Guffey, 2012).

Because of these social patterns, there is one subgroup in college sport that is increasing participation at a much slower rate. Ethnic minority women experience a “double whammy” when combating traditional cultural norms of athletics (Hall, 2001). Hall (2001) continues to explain that ethnic minority women do not fit the Angelo mold and their existence challenges and stretches the parameters of sport norms: both on the gender and ethnic spectrums. Person et al, (2001) explains Women of color are one of the most visibly and “historically underrepresented groups in higher education. As a result, they inherit the status of minority, which can affect their perceptions of themselves and the perceptions of others,” (p. 55). Because of this ethnic minority women experience a sense of social exclusion in the world of sport (Elling, 2005). Though there have been strides for racial integration, as recently as 2021, the majority of the literature focuses on the culturalization of centering Whiteness in collegiate sports (Hextrum, 2021). There has been an increased participation of ethnic minority participants in collegiate sport (Linck, 2009). The NCAA demographics show that minority athletes still make up less than 40% of athletes participating (NCAA, 2020).

College Athlete Transfer History

The first intercollegiate competition was in 1852, showcasing the crew teams of Harvard and Yale. Just over 50 years later the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was established in 1906 (Materalexis et al., 2019). Since the inception of college sport there have been college transfers and eligibility rules to regulate and prevent free movements between collegiate institutions. Some of the original athletic transfer rules included the one-year rule. This rule dictated that athletes who had participated in varsity sport within a particular collective had to sit out a year of eligibility before participating in sport at the new institution. Outside of the

one-year rule, there were also more restrictive primitive transfer rules (May & Seifried, 2012; O'Brien, 2019). These included the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association, which beget the ACC and SEC, passing a “migratory rule” in 1921(Emerson, n.d). This statue ruled no athlete could play at all for a second school.

Since the early days of transfer regulations there have been iterations of these rules. First, through individual schools and conferences, and then directives from the NCAA executive board for all of the member institutions. In 1961, the NCAA passed legislation stating that transfer athletes had to sit out for one year of play before wearing another team’s uniform. There was very little change to the formal transfer guidelines until 2018 with the introduction and implementation of the NCAA Transfer Portal. Though the portal debuted in October 2018, the creation of the portal started years before.

The Transfer Portal

Susan Peal has managed the National Letter of Intent (NLI) Program since 2007 for 650 Division I and II member institutions and 56 conferences (Susan Peal, n.d). In 2011, Peal, from NCAA headquarters, was working on a new system for high school athletes who wished to pull their letter of intent from a previous commitment to be able to attend another university. Prior to working for the NCAA, Peal worked as a compliance administrator at Ohio State. This career path helped to inform the new rules. Her knowledge of compliance procedures helped with her NLI project and set the foundation for the transfer portal. Six years later, Peal was tasked with creating a similar system for existing NCAA athletes (Prather, 2021). Before Peal and her council built the transfer portal, transferring universities was extremely time consuming. The

original process was riddled with regulatory issues and eligibility concerns and bureaucratic red tape (Prather, 2021).

In October 2018, the portal launched. It streamlined the transfer process for NCAA athletes. During the initial transfer portal process, athletes notified their current program of their intent to transfer. After being notified, the program has 48 hours to enter the student into the portal (Gerace, 2019). Once the student has been entered in to the portal, they have a few pathways to pursue their next institution. If the athlete knows what school they want to transfer to, they can initiate contact directly. If the student is open to multiple options, or is unsure of where they want to go, they can provide contact information into the portal and prospective programs reach out directly to the student. This is very similar to the high school student recruitment process. The portal also allows coaches to create a watchlist for perspective athletes, and they are then notified when anyone on that list enters the transfer portal to be recruited.

Shaping Success

After the implementation of the transfer portal in 2018, athletes were given a one-time transfer that did not require them to sit out a year of eligibility. The constraints of the transfer process were again lessened in 2021, when athletes were given unlimited transfers as long as they have remaining eligibility and are meeting the progress towards degree requirements (NCAA Publications, n.d).

Many teams have taken advantage of the new and unlimited pool of experienced college athletes. The LSU Tigers claimed the 2022-23 NCAA Women's Basketball title. The roster consisted of 14 players; seven were transfers that utilized the transfer portal. Their championship starting five players consisted of LaDazhia Williams, Jasmine Carson, Flau'jae Johnson, Angel

Reese, and Alexis Morris. Williams, Carson, Reese, and Morris were all transfer athletes from different institutions. Johnson was the only non-transfer in the starting rotation and one of the four freshmen on the LSU roster (Women's Basketball. LSU, n.d). This example is extremely important to this study as 80% of the team's starters were transfers, 100% of the starters were women of color, and this championship occurred just one year after the unlimited transfer process were implemented.

Similarly to LSU, the University of Texas Women's Volleyball team also secured a NCAA national championship during the 2022-23 school year. Their starting six players consisted of Jenna Ewert, Bella Bergmark, Madisen Skinner, Asjia O'Neal, Zoe Fleck, and Molly Phillips. Ewert, Bergmark, Skinner, and Fleck were all transfer athletes from other institutions (University of Texas, n.d). This is additionally significant to the study showing the power of the transfer portal for Women's Sports and their successes.

It is also important to mark the contrast to their last national title which occurred 10 years earlier in 2012. The Women's Volleyball roster for the 2012 National Championship team did not have a single transfer athlete on the roster. Whereas the makeup of the 2022 roster had eight of the 17 players transferring into the university from a previous institution (University of Texas, n.d).

Though it is outside the scope of this study, it is important to note the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on college athletes. The pandemic allowed all eligible athletes to have an additional year of athletic eligibility. The additional year of play, increased the occurrence of Graduate level transfer athletes (Romano & Dasilva, 2023; Verburg, 2022). Additionally, the impact of Name Image and Likeness (NIL) and the transfer portal have yet to be fully explored.

However, both could contribute to the rise in transfers. Significant indicators of desire to transfer will be fully examined in chapter 4.

Definition of Terms

Women of color

For the purpose of this study women of color will be operationalized as an inclusive and racially /ethnically collective term referring both to Black women and multiracial women who have identified one of their races as Black.

Transfer Portal

The Transfer Portal is an online tool and database system that aids in the facilitation of institutional transfers of college athletes.

Power 4

The term Power 4 refers to the NCAA's four autonomous conferences. This includes the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, and the Southeastern Conference.

Group of 5

The Group of 5 schools are institutions that compete in the alternative five FBS conferences not included in the Power 4. These include member schools in the American Athletic Conference (AAC), Conference USA (CUSA), Mid-American Conference (MAC), Mountain West Conference, Sun Belt Conference.

HBCU

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are institutions that were established prior to 1964 as a higher education opportunity for Black Americans. These schools compete at the

Division I level in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) and the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC)

PWI

Predominately White Institution (PWI) refers to a college or university where the majority of the student population is White.

Head Count

A Head Count sport is a sport that the NCAA has allotted at specific and set number of full ride athletic scholarships. These scholarships cannot be divided between athletes. The women's Head Count sports include basketball, gymnastics, tennis and volleyball.

Equivalency Sport

These sports allow for the division of athletic scholarship, allowing athletes to receive different percentages of a full scholarship. Women's Equivalency sports include golf, soccer, softball, and track and field.

Summary

The NCAA transfer portal has significantly reshaped college athletics. By offering all athletes a greater sense of autonomy, the portal can increase player visibility and opportunities during the transfer process. While the portal can be seen as a vessel to expedite the organization and efficiency of transferring, the experience of historically marginalized groups utilizing this process remains unexplored. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by women of color as they navigate their athletic transfers. By examining the experiences of these athletes with intersecting social identities, the research

contributes to a more inclusive approach to supporting college athlete through all stages of their collegiate journey.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the inception of the transfer portal, athletes have an immediate and quickly accessible way to let other institutions know they are willing and available to participate in their sport at a new school. The Transfer Portal created a database of available athletes that coaches all around the country could view and recruit from (May & Seifried, 2012). To accompany the database the NCAA adopted bylaws to allow athletes to maintain their scholarship status until the end of the academic year, regardless of transfer status. This legislation empowered athletes to take more control of their own athletic future. The database also allows for athletes to have more protections and visibility during the transfer process.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the purpose, research questions, and significance of this study. The current literature regarding Women of color in the Transfer Portal must be examined to illuminate the lived experiences of this specific population as they move through the NCAA.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the experiences of women of color who use the NCAA Transfer Portal
2. How do women of color view their connection to the institutions while in the NCAA Transfer Portal

This literature review will provide context into this phenomenon and the current gap in the literature. It will review a deeper history of the Transfer Portal. Furthermore, it will high the literature that encapsulates the unique experiences and history of women in sport as well as sport integration. The inclusion of the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity is imperative to

understanding the current experience of this population as they transfer within athletics (Person, et. al., 2001). This will include what factors may impact an athlete's decision to transfer to a new institution (Richards et. al., 2016). Lastly, this chapter will cover the literature surrounding the theoretical frameworks used to review the study. These include Nancy Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality.

Theoretical Frameworks

The combination of Turner's Liminality (1969) and Transition Theory (1995), while examining the findings through an intersectional lens, will give a unique look into experiences of women of color and how they have utilized the transfer portal. Four previous studies have cited using the combination of at least two theoretical approaches. Utilizing these frameworks in combination for empirical studies of participants making transitions was crucial to generating a full and complete understanding of lived experiences (Broski & Dunn 2018; Willson, 2019; Willson, 2019 & Ziegenfuss, 2020).

Liminality

Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) defined Turner's Liminality, as a state of being betwixt and between two stages while on the verge of transitioning into something new. This can refer to an individual's social roles and/or identities or rites of passage. The framework is appropriate to aid in understanding the workings of increasingly precarious and fluctuating landscapes (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Liminality theory can be applied to many different areas and research disciplines where transitions are present (Polizotto, 2019). This theory has been used in areas that are adjacent to athletics. These include culture and performance, sport and religion, management,

and higher education, (Bain-Selbo & Sapp, 2016; Bigger, 2009; Gorbunova, 2017; Söderlund & Borg, 2018).

Though this theory has not yet been used to frame the limited research around the transfer portal, it does have merit for the current study. Turner's Liminality theory examined the 'betwixt and between' period of transition, or liminal state (Turner, 1969). The liminal stage of Liminality theory was used to understand and contextualize the lived experience of women of color in the Transfer Portal. By seeking to understand the experiences and perceptions these athletes have while actively in the portal, coaches and support staff can adapt their approach to providing the necessary resources to this subpopulation of college athletes. Providing college athletes with the appropriate support during their transition can influence how college athletes may process or respond while in the transfer process (Bettis, 1996).

Liminality and the liminal process can also be best described as no longer belonging to a past group, while still not belonging to a future group. Turner describes people experiencing this phase are neither one thing nor another; or maybe both; or neither here nor there; or maybe nowhere (Turner, 1967). Athletes who entered the portal are no longer a part of the original team that recruited them. However, while in the portal, they do not yet belong to a new team or athletics program.

There are three distinct phases in Turner's Liminality. The first phase is the preliminal or separation stage. This refers to the individuals symbolic of physical separation from their old self or identity. The second phase is the liminal phase. This phase occurs when the individual is in social disorder. They do not belong in one space or another and are in a sense of social purgatory. The last stage of liminality is the post-liminal state. This refers to the point when the

individual emergers from the state of social disorder and uncertainty, and has transformed into their new self. At this state the individual is attempting to incorporate into normalcy.

Utilizing the theory of liminality for this project will focus specifically on the athlete's Liminal Phase. The Liminal Phase occurs after the athlete has begun the transition and entered the transfer portal but has not yet committed to their next institution. For the purpose of this project, entering the liminal phase is both physical separation when leaving the school and social as they leave their old athletic identity in search of a new status. The liminal separation transpires when the athletes no longer take up a space in their old programs (Romano & Dasilva, 2023), but they do not yet have a roster place in their new programs. This perfectly defines athletes who exist in the transfer portal. The final step in Liminality is a person's reincorporation into a new group. This is similar to the goal athletes have as they enter the Transfer Portal: to be picked up by another team or institution. This is the final stage as the athletes achieve reincorporation into new teams.

Transition Theory

Schlossberg's Transition Theory helps to achieve an understanding of how individuals experience and cope with change and transition. In current literature it is applied to employees transitioning to jobs or careers, high school students transitioning into higher education, and military personal transitioning back into civilian life (Wilson, 2019). This theory can also be applied in the space of collegiate athletics. Transition theory can use to describe the athletes and their experiences in the portal. Schlossberg's Transition Theory focused on four key factors that influences an individual's transition and experience with change. These include the external

circumstances that impact transition, a person's internal strengths, coping abilities, and the individuals understanding of the transition and the impact it will have.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) described three different areas of focus when conceptualizing transition. These include moving in, moving through and moving out. There is over a decade of research highlighting the experiences of participants moving into collegiate athletics (Carbado et al., 2013; Gerlach, 2018; Zlotkowski, 2023), and the transition they experience. Studying this section of an athlete's career is important to understanding athletic identity development, and the athlete's sense of belonging to their immediate social circles: the team and the university student body. Transitioning out of college athletic careers has been equality studied (DeFreese et al., 2021; Harry & Weight, 2021; Mathews et al., 2021). These studies examined the change in athletic identity and conforming to and implementing new norms and routines. The transition through athletics or from one institution to another has been much less explored (Flowers et al, 2014; Richards, 2016). Additionally, because of the recent implementation of the NCAA Transfer Portal there is even less research examining the transition experience with athletes who have unutilized the portal.

Though there is related research, the majority of the research has been constructed to address issues related to student academic transitions. However, there are a few studies that have crossed this theory into the realm of athletics (Flowers 2014; Harry 2021; Swain 1991). Research on athlete transitions from college to career has grown in recent years, with much literature focusing on the value of a college education, identity development, athlete support, and transition programming (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Fuller, 2014; Navarro, 2015; Stokowski et al., 2019). Though the majority of scholarship focuses on experiences of either athletes transitioning into

college athletics or their transition out of their athletics careers. This study will focus specifically on transitions that occur within their collegiate athletic career.

Studies that have used transition theory successfully, prove this theory can be applied to different athletic transition processes (Blackett et al., 2021; Cadigan et al., 2013; Swim et al. 2023). Though every athlete's transfer experience is unique, there is some commonality in the facilitators that lead to their transitions. Three themes play a role in the transition process: (a) social and psychological characteristics of the individual, (b) characteristics of the situation, and (c) pre-transition and post-transition environmental factors (Harry & Weight 2021). These three factors were used in data analysis as well as the organization of themes (**Figure 2. 1**).

Intersectionality

Rosette et. al, (2018) defined intersectionality as the overlapping of social categories. The categories are relevant to a specified individual or group's identity and create a unique experience. Race and gender are two distinct social categories, but not two independent experiences (Hogg & Terry, 2000). This study aims to examine the unique experience of women of color as they move through college athletics.

As a construct of Black feminist theory, intersectionality is a tool that can be applied across disciplines. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term, introducing it to address the marginalization of Black women. In the 1989 her landmark essay: "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," (Crenshaw, 1989). She continued her work in intersectionality through her study *Mapping the Margins* (1991). Originally used in legal and

administrative disciplines, intersectionality has now crossed into an array of research areas (Carbado et al., 2013).

Bennett et al. (2022), stated the importance of intersectionality within sport (2022). They expressed the idea that sport has historically failed to recognize the multidimensional nature of identity, and how athletes who navigate multiple axes of oppression have learned to survive and thrive (Bennett et al., 2022). Collins and Bilge (2020) noted that intersectionality is not just limited to legal space and critical theory, but has become an accepted practice that created communal spaces: especially for women of color. Anders et al. (2024), finds that intersectionality can be used in sport while examining women of color. They conclude that sport has many intersections and while studying women of color you can find political, structural, and representational intersectionality in sport (Anders et al., 2024).

The combination of the two frames will create a setting that allows the athletes experiences to be examined from the beginning of their decision to enter the portal, existence and experiences in the portal, and how the athlete will navigate and integrate into their new teams. Including an intersectional lens will allow for a deeper understanding of the participant population.

Theories in Practice

Athletic transitions have been studied frequently by academics. Often these articles research how athletes transition in or out of athletics. They often also focus on sense of belonging and how athletes navigate their athletic identity through these transitions. The modernity of the transfer portal impacts the available scholarship examining athletes transitioning *through* athletic careers: making the research available extremely limited. However,

there are an array of studies that use the proposed theories to examine athletes throughout sport management and sport studies disciplines.

Transition and Liminality

Three peer reviewed studies were identified that used similar methodological approaches. All three studies examine some sort of transition process that occurred within the world of athletics. These studies also were qualitative in nature and used semi-structured interviews as their main source of data collection.

Blackett et. al, (2021) used semi-structured interviews and analyzed the data using thematic analysis. However, the project took a longitudinal approach by collecting data through interviews over 12 months using two different interview periods. The proposed study will not be longitudinal, but will have interactive interviews. This study also focused on athletes transition out of their playing careers, while the proposed study will focus on the transitioning within an athletic career. Similar to the proposed study, Blackett et. al, (2021) also recruited a sample from a specific population and only male athletically retired participants to their study. Though there are notable differences, the similarities showing the method section give an example of the appropriate procedures to use in the proposed study.

The second similar study that helped to shape the proposed method was Swim et al. (2023). This study utilized a qualitative research design to examine and understand the transition experience of female international student athletes within college athletics. This study is important because it not only focuses on college athletes who are women, but also has a sample size specifically targeting a marginalized population. A qualitative approach and a semi-

structured interview protocol allowed for the thoughts, perspectives, and feelings of the participants to be uncovered. This is similar to the goal of the proposed study.

Last, Cummins and O'Boyle, (2015) examined Division I Basketball players as they transitioned out of college athletics. Not only were interviews used as the data collection method, purposive sampling was used to select participants who would be relevant to the study.

Additionally, their participants were initially contacted via e-mail and provided with information about the purpose of the study and a consent form to take part in the study. The current study follows a similar model.

Transition and Intersectionality

Though there are studies that incorporate Transition Theory and Intersectionality, there are limited studies that utilized the combination of theories addressing athletic transitions. There are studies that examine the impact of ethnic identity on transfer, but all participants were male (Flowers, 2014; Fuller, 2014). The lack of overall research using Transition Theory and Intersectionality further illuminates the need for the proposed study utilizing these frameworks.

Liminality and Intersectionality

Identifying studies that used liminality in combination with intersectionality was challenging. This further exemplifies the need for this project and the need to incorporate these theoretical frames. Goode et al. (2022) identified three distinct liminal phases for college students possessing identity intersectionality: experimental, reflection and recognition phases of liminality. First, the experimentation liminal phase allowed students to engage in the performance of other identities. Next, liminal reflection provided participants the space to challenge and confront internalized dominant social narratives. Finally, the recognition phase,

pushed students to articulate a new self-narrative. This narrative acknowledged the changes experienced while in the liminal state, the acceptance and implementation of new social norms, and forging their new selves.

Using intersectional framework pushes researchers to confront how students of all backgrounds existing within the same institutional context have varying experiences (Ovink et al., 2024). Meaning, that at the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender, remains important for examining and understanding individual experiences when navigating social systems, structures and institutions (Harris & Patton, 2019). This can be applied when exploring the experiences of women of color and the transfer portal.

Black Feminist Theory and Womanism

Black Feminist and Womanists scholars have helped to shape the understanding of how Black women navigate, experience, and resist the complex systems of oppression (Brewer, 2020). Though both theories have similarities, they have two different foundational practices. There is a range of Black Feminisms including radical, queer, trans, and liberal (Garza 2016; Nash 2019). Black Feminism is rooted in the opposition of oppression including anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-heteropatriarchy and anti-imperialist praxis (Brewer, 2020). Though it has activist origins, there is more liberal Black Feminist scholarship that focuses on reform of existing structure and not dismantling oppressive systems. Despite their differences “all versions of Black feminism have recognized discrimination by race and gender and the role that both play in the lives of Black women” (Brewer, 2020, p. 92).

Womanism is rooted in the cultural expression of Black women’s lives and can be thought of as the spiritual connection to feminism experienced by Black women (Brewer, 2020;

Walker, 1983). Womanists insist in their right to be heard and their desire to be considered on matters of national import has much to teach us about what makes American democracy work (Cooper, 2018). Though womanism was forged by women of African descent, it is not limited to Africana feminism (Maparyan, 2012). This lends itself to the creating and circulation of the term Woman(men) of Color.

Women of Color

The term women of color surfaced from the National Decade for Women campaign in the 1970s and was created by non-white women. During the National Women's Conference of 1977, a group of Black women known as the Black Women's Agenda, attended the conference to present the Black Women's Plan of Action to the delegates (Matos et al., 2023; Western States Center, 2011). The plan had such a positive impact on the minority members of the conference that they now needed to include other marginalized women. From this conference the term women of color emerged as a mechanism to unify all women experiencing multiple layers of marginalization with race and ethnicity as a commonality (Castañeda, 1992; Schaefer, 2008). The political nature of the term's origin initially solidified the term as a unifying collective of solidarity and not a term referring to the women's biology and specific race.

The citations about the term's origin clearly state the phrase does not have to do with race. However, there is some debate over the terms meaning. Webster's dictionary defines women of color as:

A woman whose skin pigmentation is other than and especially darker than what is considered characteristic of people typically defined as white or Caucasian: a woman who is of a race other than white or who is of mixed race (Merriam-Webster. n.d.).

While scholars such as Matos et al. (2023) revert to the political roots of the term and cite a different definition. They concluded that women of color, WOC, is an:

identity signaled a political commitment to solidarity politics. Currently, the term “Women of color” (WOC) is used by the media and among politicians but without much explicit discussion of its history. Given WOC’s continued presence in American politics, the question remains, who identifies as a WOC today (Matos et al., 2023, p. 549).

It is also important to note that “scholars have not established if WOC identity will capture the intersectional identities of Black women *and* Latinas” (Matos et al., 2023, p. 554). Although the origins of the term WOC began in political spaces, we do not know which present-day people identify with it.

Understanding and implementing both Black Feminism and Womanism theories is of vital importance to expanding scholarship. Mowatt et al. (2013) finds:

The continued overuse of certain research approaches and the lack of a nuanced understanding of Blackness in leisure scholarship is hindering our ability to be relevant to a broader audience while preventing us from presenting healthy alternatives This also limits our contributions to social justice within the academy and beyond. (p. 646)

This not only contributes to the expansion of scholarship, but also to the scholars overall understanding of the population. Appreciating that there are "differences between women can and do lead to different levels of access and experience, including leisure and recreation" (Scraton & Watson, 1998. p. 126).

For the purpose of this study the term will be used to categorize any participant meeting the following criteria:

1. Self-identify as a woman;
2. Participate in women's collegiate sport;
3. Self-identify as a non-white person;
4. Are American born and not international college athletes;
5. Participant identifies as a woman of color and as a collegiate athlete who has utilized the transfer portal.

For this analysis, women of color is an inclusive and racially /ethnically collective term. The study will combine the dictionary definition in reference to skin pigmentation while also staying true to the more historical use for the term, by not excluding one group, but by connecting these women in solidarity. By operationalizing the term in this nature, the study is open to participants who not only identify as Black, but also those other Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) members, as well as those who identify as Asian or Latina. This study will not include international or non-American born student athletes.

Because of the way this study defines the term Women of color, it is important to note who may not identify with the term. Matos et al. (2023) found that Latinas and Afro-Latinas are less likely to identify with the term than Black women. When considering the use of the term, Lee (2008) cautioned not to assume collective politics will emerge from shared racial/ethnic labels. This could make it difficult to find the target population, if they themselves are not self-assigning the term. Matos et al. (2023) continued that although the origins of the term WOC began in leftist spaces, we do not know whether present-day Black women and Latinas are familiar with the term, if they identify with it, and the politics behind such an identification. This lack of assurance may cause difficulty in accessing the intended population.

To combat this uncertainty, the study's specific definitions will be given in the recruitment email. Interested participants will also undergo screening questions at the start of the interview to insure they are the correct target population. The combination of the two will help to gather the appropriate and desired research demographics.

Holistic Care

The overall well-being of college athletes has been pushed to the forefront of duties for college athletic departments since returning from the COVID-19 pandemic. Athletic departments are continuing to understand that complete well-being or holism of athletes is essential to the success of the department (Egan, 2019). Current research expressed that participating in a holistic care approach can have positive impacts on the achievement of high performance. Holistic care can be defined as an approach that embraces the totality of human needs (Papathanasiou et al. 2013). It addresses the totality of the person and does not stop at an athlete's athletic achievement or contributions.

Using a holistic care approach can be beneficial for the overall success of college athletes. Using a holistic care model of student athlete support allows a collaborative, interdisciplinary effort toward providing an appropriate level of care for student-athletes (Waller et al., 2023). Recognizing that the importance of developing the entire athlete is important to athletic success. To successfully develop women athletes of color, coaching and athletic departments must train the whole athlete. This not only includes the athletes sporting skill, but also the athlete's social identities.

Positionality

In the spirit of self-reflexivity, the researcher acknowledges the ingroup status maintained with interview participants: self-identifying as Woman of Color. Though the first author did not utilize the transfer portal, they were a transfer collegiate athlete. In this self-transition process, they navigated unfamiliar territory experiences similar to the hypothesized experiences of the research sample. Because the interview will be conducted and recorded via Zoom Video Conferencing, it will be easy for the author's non-White skin to be noticed by participants. This could allow participants to easily mark the interviewer with member status. In past interviews and studies conducted by the interviewer, this has proved to be important to the perceived level of comfortability from participants and helped the research team make meaning of the transcripts.

Rationale for Current Study

Though the Transfer Portal is open to all NCAA athletes, current scholarship is very sport specific and gender focused. The majority of the literature found on the Transfer Portal focuses on men's sports. More specifically, the Transfer Portal research concentrates on Football and Men's Basketball, particularly white men (Challenger, 2017). There is a lack of literature on the experiences of women in the Transfer Portal, and an even more marginal amount of peer reviewed articles that emphasize Women of color.

There is an overall lack of research on the transfer portal, and what has been conducted takes a quantitative approach. Studies have examined the number of athletes entering and exiting the portal, the sport, and identity demographics. Because of the postpositive theoretical nature of the current scholarship, there is a lack of personalized data about the individuals who

utilize the transfer portal. Additionally, within the current research data there is also a lack of demographic diversity. Recent studies have called for further research that examines female student athletes, particularly studies of female transfer participants with diverse ethnicities (Swingle, & Salinas, 2020). As the recommendations suggest, experiences of women of color as they move through the transfer portal have not been fully explored. Thus, the current study will answer that call through an investigation into the experiences of female student athletes of color and the NCAA transfer portal.

CHAPTER 3

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design and seeks to understand the experiences of women of color who have utilized the transfer portal as an interchange from one institution to another. Qualitative research rarely has preestablished hypotheses but instead uses questions or the research purpose to guide the inquiry (Thomas et al., 2015). The purpose of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of human experience by diving into the “why” and “how” of phenomena rather than the frequencies of the occurrence.

The study aims to assess the experience of the target group. Through the interview guide, the research will shine a light on two specific areas:

1. What are the experiences of women of color who use the NCAA Transfer Portal?
2. How do women of color view their connection to the institutions while in the NCAA Transfer Portal?

These focuses will be reviewed through two major frameworks. These will include Turner’s Theory of Liminality and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Schlossberg et. al, 1995; Turner, 1969). The combination of the two will give a unique look into experiences of women of color and how they have utilized the transfer portal.

Research Approach

Research often draws the proverbial hard line in the sand regarding the most appropriate research method. This conflict can be attributed to the fields where research is conducted: either conducted in the social or natural sciences. Natural sciences have often referred to as “hard science.” Natural science research areas, such as physics or biology, have been deemed more

objective, empirical, and laborious than there investigate counter parts. Social Sciences, often referenced as “soft” and theoretical, making them more interpretive and subjective (Creswell & Creswell 2023).

Natural science research is foundationally positivist in assumption. This suggests that reality and truth is singular and objective (Lindloff & Taylor, 2011). This is supported through their quantitative research practices. Lindloff and Taylor (2011) find that the overall singular reality can be discovered, measured, and quantified. Positivist researchers value research that can be examined in artificial settings, such as through surveys or experiments.

In contrast, qualitative research is grounded in the social sciences and the attempt to uncover and understand the multiple different realities, feelings, assumptions, emotions, and behaviors of human beings (Creswell & Creswell 2023; Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described qualitative research in a thorough and descriptive definition as:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.

(p. 3)

Qualitative research often has a constructivism worldview. Constructivism concludes that multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others. Reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences. This makes a qualitative approach an appropriate method for this study.

For this research a constructivist worldview informed the approach. Creswell and Creswell (2023) find:

Those who hold a constructivist worldview believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meaning of their experiences: meanings directed towards certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal and research rely as much as possible on the participants' use of the situation. (p. 9)

This worldview allows for a qualitative approach. When using a constructivism worldview Crotty, (1998) identified three assumptions,

1. Human beings construct their own unique meanings as they experience and engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that participants can share their views without the limitations that selected response provides.
2. Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their personal, historical, and social experiences. All are born into the world and have meaning bestowed upon us by our culture. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand their participants through gathering information personally. They also interpret those

findings, and these interpretations are shaped by the researcher's own experiences and background.

3. Social constructs are the basic generation of meaning, arising in and out of interaction with a human population. Qualitative research is largely inductive meaning the researcher generates meaning from the collected data.

The best approach for collaboration with these assumptions is a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews as the methodological tool. This allows participants to generate their own responses accordingly, based on how they interpreted the questions and their own realities. Additionally, it allows for the researcher to be inductive in the data analysis process while still remaining objective. This style of research also is the most compatible with my personal world view.

A constructivist world view best fits with my own academic, athletic, ethnic and cultural experiences. As a multiracial researcher and former transfer college athlete I understand that individuals who participate in the same task or experience can have many different perspectives and identify separate truths. I have witnessed several instances where college athletes experienced the same situation; however, each individual constructed their own perceptions and therefore, their own realities.

This supports the constructivist worldview concluding there are multiple realities. These realities are created through each individuals' interactions with others and informed by historical and cultural norms (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). It can be concluded that if research participants have different experiences, they will have different accounts of their reality. This multiple reality assumption allows the data to become more robust and richer. Though a qualitative approach for

the study expands the potential findings, there are challenges to conducting qualitative research. Cho and Trent (2006) cite concerns with the of validity in qualitative research.

Narrative Inquiry

The qualitative design of this study follows a narrative inquiry. Narrative research allows for the study of one or a group of individuals to provide their personal stories and lived experience to increase the depth of research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The purpose of the study was to explore the experience of the target population and the transfer portal. This study takes the narratives of women of color who have utilized the transfer portal, and analyze those lived experiences to produces the study's findings. In response to the current gap in qualitative data surrounding the transfer portal, conducting a qualitative study with a narrative design is appropriate.

Research Design and Methods

Interview Guide

Two methods were used for the initial development of the interview guide. The first was method a review and evaluation of reflective journals written by the researcher and former athletes who had transfer experience. These were not peer reviewed journals but journals in the researcher's possession and personal collection from the researcher's time as a college coach and an athlete. A review of journals consisted of the researcher's personal journals, which they were required to keep as a college athlete, and also the journals of their former athletes. From this review the researcher was able to find the journals of former athletes in storage boxes which were dedicated to the researcher's time as a collegiate volleyball coach. Additionally, journals from former athletes that transferred into the program were also reread and reviewed. Lastly, the

researcher reviewed some of the last entries from players who transferred out to other institutions.

Alongside journals from previous athletes, were the researcher's personal journals from their time as a collegiate athlete. In the storage boxes were journals from the researcher's original institution, where they committed to play as a senior in high school, and one from the school they transferred to after playing collegiately for two seasons.

As the journals were reviewed, notes were made regarding some of the expressed feelings, emotions, and questions written throughout the passages. After revisiting the journals, an initial list of themes was created. Also compiled was a list of questions that the researcher wished someone would have asked or even cared to ask them as a player. Additionally, a list of questions was compiled that the researcher had for their former student athletes who transferred both into and out of the programs where they were on staff. This information was then used to supplement the peer reviewed methods for the creation of the initial interview guide.

The three studies below used similar research methods and approaches to the current study. Interview guides from the three listed studies were examined and adapted to help shape the initial interview guide. Combining the notes taken from the review of athlete journals and the published interview guides allowed from the interview guide to be drafted.

Blackett et al. (2021) used semi-structured interviews and a longitudinal approach by collecting data through interviews over 12 months using two different interview periods. This study also focused on athletes transition out of their playing careers. Similar to the proposed study, Blackett et al. (2021) also recruited a sample from a specific population and only male athletically retired participants to their study. Though there are notable differences, the

similarities population and athlete transition made it a suitable resource for constructing the interview guide.

The second study that helped to shape the interview guide was Swim et al. (2023). This study utilized a qualitative research design to examine and understand the transition experience of female international student athletes within college athletics. This study was a significant source in the creation of the interview guide because it not only focuses on college athletes who are women, but also has a sample specifically targeting a marginalized population.

Last, Cummins and O'Boyle, (2015) examined Division I Basketball players as they transitioned out of college athletics. In this study purposive sampling was used to select participants who would be relevant to the study. The sampling method, focus on athlete transition, and the sample of Division I athletes were similar to the focuses of this study. The interview guide from Cummins and O'Boyle (2015) provided meaningful insights to the creation of this study.

The combination of the two above processes generated the creation of this studies semi-structured interview guide (Appendix E).

Pre-Testing

Pre-testing for the interview guide was be done in two steps. First, the drafted interview guide was compiled into a google document and shared with the dissertation chair and appropriate committee members for the approval and revision. Lastly the interview guide was distributed to three academic experts: specifically, those whose research focuses are in sports sociology, athlete holistic care, and intercollegiate athletics. Feedback will be recorded and appropriate revisions will be made.

Pilot Testing

After receiving feedback from the sources above, the researcher started the pilot testing phase. For pilot testing, interviewees were sourced using convenience sampling. Two transfer athletes in my immediate sport circle were used to conduct pilot interviews. The interviewees received both the recruitment email and informed consent. Next, the researcher met with the pilot testing group individually to conduct the interviews over zoom. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Analysis was performed on these interviews to test and combat researcher analytical biases. Transcripts and hypothetical themes and codes were extracted and reviewed with the pilot testers. Bases on this review, no significant biases were detected.

After the initial pilot testers completed the interview, they were asked to provide feedback via a shared google doc. The google doc asked short questions about their experience and participation in the interview and gave a space for them to provide any suggestions they have to improve the questions and their experience. After making the initial round of pilot testing adjustments, a second conference was had with a member of the research team. Once members felt confident the interview guide and researcher were ready for data collection, pilot testing was deemed successful and thus concluded.

Validity

Validity refers to the awareness that the instrument measures what it intends to measure: capturing the research question. The biggest threat to internal validity is selection bias and constructivist interpretation (Creswell & Crewell 2023). The goal is to measure differences of demographic groups, however if the respondents sample size is skewed toward one particular ethnicity it may affect the validity. To combat this recruitment emails were sent to different

schools in different states within the United States. Threats to external validity will be contributed to confidentiality. If a participant chooses to participate in an interview, the researcher will have access to their name, image and contact information. Additionally, the interviewer could potentially also have access to any PII the participants chose to disclose during the interview, such as current intuition, names of teammates, or coaches. To overcome this, participants were given pseudonyms when using direct quotations. Additionally, they were not identified by specific conference or by primary sport as not to disclose the specific school attended or the participants identity.

Participant Selection

The initial sample of collegiate institutions will consist of Division I campuses whose football teams will compete in the Fall 2024 Southeastern Conference (SEC). These schools include the University of Alabama, University of Arkansas, Auburn University, University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, Mississippi State University, University of Missouri, Oklahoma University, University of Mississippi, University of South Carolina, University of Tennessee, Texas A&M University, and Vanderbilt University. Rosters from the listed schools were then reviewed to identify potential research participants.

Purposive roster sampling was used to identify the initial potential respondents for the study. This sampling method aims to create a sample within a specific population. It provides the researcher discretionary authority to determine who will be interviewed based upon the criteria for the study (Rai & Thapa, 2015). Purposive sampling is traditionally used for quantitative research but has been adapted and combined with thematic analysis and observational research to

perform qualitative studies (Rai & Thapa, 2015). This method was the bases for the initial roster review. The specific target group identified by the roster review had to meet following four criteria:

- Athlete must be listed on a roster of a women's sports team. Examples: Women's Volleyball, Women's Tennis, or Softball.
- Athlete must have transferred between collegiate institutions. Example: Athlete was enrolled at the University A and then transferred into the University B.
- Athlete must have participated in a competition season for at least two different collegiate institutions. Example: Volleyball athlete competed at the University A in Fall 2022. They participated as a player and then transferred to the University B in Spring 2023. They then completed in the Fall 2023 Volleyball season with University B. At the time of data collection (Fall 2024) she would be eligible to participate in the research.
- Researcher identified the athlete as someone who was perceived to be a Woman of Color using purposive roster sampling.

From the roster reviews potential respondents were identified and their school email addresses were collected. Participants were then sent the initial recruitment email (Appendix C) and asked to participate in a semi-structured interview via zoom. The recruitment email introduced the interviewer and research purpose. Additional information about the study such as length of participation, data collection method, and informed consent were also included in follow up correspondence.

After a participant responds with interest in participating in the study. They were then asked a list of screening questions to ensure they meet the overall participant criteria. The final participant criteria will include:

- Participant identifies as a Women
- Participant is a current collegiate athlete
- Participant is a transfer and has participated in competition seasons for at least two different collegiate programs.
- Participant entered the transfer portal.
- Participant identifies as a woman of color.

These screening questions were verbally repeated once more to every participant at the start of every interview.

Snowball sampling was used as the secondary sampling method and increased the number of conducted interviews by over 50%. At the conclusion of interviews, participants were encouraged to share the study information with anyone on their teams or social circles who also met the above criteria.

Data Collection and Analysis

The initial purposive sample was identified by looking at roster photos of NCAA division I athletes in the southern region of the United States. Original recruitment emails were sent to 137 athletes who were presumed to fit the study criteria. From the original emails, eight responses were received. From there, four interviews were scheduled, three respondents could not schedule interviews that met the timeline of the project, and one did not meet all of the study inclusion criteria. At the time of response, scheduling communication began between the

researchers and the potential participants. At that time, the written informed consent document was provided to the participants (Appendix D). The informed consent document was adapted from the provided template located on the University of Tennessee IRB website and was adjusted to reflect the needs of the current study. Once consent to participate was received, interviews were scheduled via Zoom.

At the end of each of the four interviews, participants were encouraged to freely share the study recruitment information if they choose to. Due to that circulation of information, six additional interviews were scheduled. All interviews occurred over a 10-week period: October 7th to December 9th 2024.

Interviews

Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews examining participant experiences. These interviews were framed using the IRB approved interview guide (Appendix E) informed by existing literature on liminality and transition theory. These interviews were conducted and recorded through video conferencing, via Zoom. Interviews were then digitally transcribed verbatim, using the zoom transcription feature. All interviewees were given the same initial set of questions with responses determining if any additional follow up questions were required. The average interview time was 37 minutes and 42 seconds. The shortest interview was 26 minutes and 51 seconds, and the longest taking 54 minutes and 13 seconds.

Thematic analysis was the main frame used to manage the data and the analysis. Data analysis will follow Clarke and Braun's (2013) six step approach to thematic analysis.

Transcriptions from each of the interviews were analyzed separately and then compared. After a detailed comparison of the transcripts, common themes between participants were analyzed.

These commonalities were then defined and reported. The step-by-step thematic analysis process that was used to code data is listed chronologically below:

Original audio recordings were transcribed, read and reread while listening to the audio recording to insure transcript validity. This process aided in search of emerging themes. The initial step involved an in-depth reading of the raw data to achieve strong familiarization with the transcribed responses.

After thoroughly reading through the transcriptions, a collection of repetitive, and important words and sentences were recorded. These words and phrases with significant relevance to addressing the research focus. A color-coding highlighting system was used to help organize the list as they emerged in each interview. The highlighted selection was then used to form the codes for the data analysis.

Once the transcriptions were color-coded, the data was organized by relating the codes to the research purpose. This created the initial sorting system for the original 70 codes. These coded then derived 15 themes that allowed for the participant's lived experiences to be fully captured (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After the original list of themes was collected, they were then reviewed once more to insure relevance to the research purpose. Directly following the review, some themes were consolidated. After several rounds of review the 21 initial themes, they were condensed into 10 major themes: Intrapersonal Dynamics, Interpersonal Dynamics, Campus Culture, Lack of portal knowledge, Negative Feelings, Juxtaposition of Recruitment, External Supports, Academic Disruption, Barriers to Incorporation, and Facilitators to Incorporation

The themes were then finalized and reorganized to ensure they were an appropriate fit to the theoretical frameworks of the study. The themes were then ordered to correspond with Turner's theory of liminality (**Figure. 2 1**).

The final step of the process was to contextualize the data. In this phase, the data was categorized and connected back to the corresponding research purpose and the applicable framework. The goal was "to tell the complicated story of the data in a way which convince(d) the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

Introduction of Participants

This study included 10 participants. The demographics of participants are included in Table 3.1, which includes participants' assigned pseudonyms, gender identity, race/ethnic identity, sport scholarship type, total number of collegiate transfers, total years played, and their current Division I level of competition. The introductions below provide more detail regarding the participants and their athletic transfer. Additional participant demographics can be found in Appendix F.

Ruby

Ruby is a Black woman in her last year of eligibility at a Group of 5 school. She has competed at three different institutions. She started her career off as a headcount sport athlete at a Power 4 institution. After leaving her initial institution, she transferred to a junior college for her second year of eligibility. She then transferred again after exhausting her junior college eligibility to her current school, where she competed last year and is competing again this school year.

Jade

Jade is Ruby's sister. She is currently competing at a Division I HBCU. She has transferred twice. As a headcount athlete, she has competed at three different schools. These include two schools in different Power 4 conferences and now her current HBCU. She is in her third year of eligibility and does not yet know if she will be transferring again or staying at her current HBCU for her final year.

Hazel

Hazel is a biracial woman with one of her ethnic identities being Black. She has transferred one time. She is a headcount athlete that is currently competing at a Division I HBCU. She competed for one season in a Power 4 conference before transferring to her current enrollment. She competed last school year and is expending her third year of athletic eligibility at the same HBCU during the 2024-2025 academic school year. She currently has no intention to transfer again. She is on track to graduate in May 2026.

Ebony

Ebony, a Black woman currently competing at a HBCU. Before transferring to her current school, she was enrolled for two seasons at a Power 4 institution. During her first season she utilized her Red Shirt year. She competed in her second season as a Red Shirt Freshman before entering the transfer portal. This is her first year as a headcount athlete at an HBCU. During the interview, she expressed that she is considering transferring again and reenrolling at a different institution for the 2025-2026 school year.

Violet

Violet is a biracial equivalency sport athlete. One of her racial identities is Black. She is the only equivalency sport athlete in the sample. She has transferred one time from a Group of 5 school to her current HBCU. She competed for one season at her Group of 5 school and is currently utilizing her second year of eligibility at her HBCU. She did not express any intentions to transfer again.

Coral

Coral is a headcount sport athlete who self identifies as a Black woman. She is currently competing at her fourth institution. She currently competes at a Power 4 institution. Though she has been on the roster at four different institutions they have all been at the Power 4 level. After this academic year, she has one more year of eligibility. She does not want to transfer again, so she can finally finish her degree. She is the only athlete in the sample with three different transfers.

Sienna

Sienna is the only graduate transfer in the sample. She identifies as a Black woman and is competing as a headcount sport athlete. In her first three seasons she competed at a Power 4 institution where she graduated with her bachelor's degree. After graduation she still had two years of eligibility remaining. She is currently rostered at her second institution, and enrolled at her second Power 4 school. She plans to finish her athletic eligibility at this school and earn her master's degree.

Amber

Amber is currently enrolled as a headcount sport athlete competing at the Division I HBCU level. She identifies as a Black woman. Amber has utilized the transfer portal one time, transferring from a Group of 5 school to an HBCU. She competed for one season at her Group of 5 school before transitioning to her current institution where she has played the last two seasons. She plans to graduate in May and will be seeking a master's degree from her current institution and wants to continue competing as a graduate student.

Olive

Olive is a biracial headcount sport athlete at a Power 4 institution. One of her racial identities is Black. She has utilized the transfer portal one time in her collegiate athletic career. She is the only interconference transfer in the sample: transferring from one Power 4 school to another institution which competes within the same athletic conference. She is currently in her first year at her new institution. She is enjoying her time, and has no current plans to transfer again.

Scarlett

Scarlett is a Black woman who participates in a headcount sport. She is currently at the Division I HBCU level after spending her first season at the Group of 5 level. Due to unforeseen medical issues during her first season, she was granted a medical Red Shirt after the season started. She retained her freshman year of eligibility and transferred to her current HBCU. She expressed that she does plan to transfer again, though she is not sure when she will enter the portal or where she would like to transfer next.

After the interviewing the eight participants, the researcher noticed common and repeated themes. Two confirmatory interviews were then conducted to insure the research reliability (Skinner et al., 2015). Interviews with participant 9 and 10 confirmed the approach of data saturation. The complete and extracted findings can be found in Chapter 4. Following the detailed findings, this dissertation includes discussion, implications and conclusion in Chapter 5.

Delimitations

This study focuses on the lived experience of women of color and their journey in, through, and out of the NCAA transfer portal. The athletes in this sample have met the study's criteria. They all identify as a woman of color, are current college athletes, have utilized the transfer portal, and have played their primary sport at more than one institution. The study excluded athletes who did not identify as women of color, participate on men's or co-ed teams, did not enter the transfer portal, and had not yet participated in their primary sport's competition season. Though it was not a criterion of the study, all athletes are currently attending institutions in the south and southeastern regions of the United States.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This qualitative inquiry sought to understand the lived experiences of women of color who move through the NCAA transfer portal. The first two chapters provided an overview of the study and a breakdown of current and past literature used to shape this dissertation. Chapter three provided a summary of the qualitative approach to the study and insights of the research design. This included the method, materials, creation of the interview guide and positionality statement. The current chapter will provide an in-depth report of the findings that coincide with the thematic analysis of the interview transcriptions.

Themes

Due to its lack of tenure, the NCAA transfer portal has limited peer-reviewed research examining the nuances of the system and its participants. As the literature review demonstrates there is an overall lack of research on the transfer portal. However, within the existing research, there is additional neglect for exploring the experiences of women of color. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women of color who have utilized the NCAA transfer portal. The study examined the transfer process of the specified population utilizing a liminal framework while incorporating an intersectional lens.

After conducting the 10 interviews it was clear that the experiences of this population can be separated into three distinct phases that coincide with the theory of liminality framework. The major findings fit into three categories: preliminal, liminal, and post-liminal. The preliminal findings express the experiences of women of color before they choose to transfer, directly following the point of separation from their initial institutions. The liminal findings illustrate

their experiences while waiting to find their next institution: not being connected to their initial school, and still not having integrated into their second institution. The third and final set of findings fall under the post-liminal phase. Post-liminal findings suggest that there are specific barriers and facilitators involved in the incorporation process for athletes as they enter new institutions.

In the first set of findings in the preliminal stage, three main themes emerged these included: intrapersonal dynamics, interpersonal dynamics, and campus culture as leading contributors to thoughts of transfer. The liminal stage findings generated six themes that directly influenced the experience of women of color while they were in the portal. These six themes include lack of transfer portal knowledge, negative internal feelings, loss of connection, uncertainty, juxtaposition of recruitment, and external supports. In the final set of findings, post-liminal, five themes emerged that contributed directly to the athlete's incorporation into their new team. These included academic disruption, barriers to incorporation, navigating stereotypes, facilitators to incorporation, and the athlete's reflection on their process.

Preliminal

The first major set of findings fall under the preliminal or separation phase of Turner's theory of liminality. This phase refers to the time in a relationship where participants began the transition from one status or role to another. This stage is often marked by a specific separation. Traditionally this can be seen through social structures or cultural norms. For example, in the Hispanic community, Latinx girls separate from childhood in the form of a traditional quinceanera. During this time, 15-year-old girls separate from adolescence and have a rite of

passage into becoming a woman. In relation to the transfer process in sports, this phase is marked by declaring yourself into the portal.

During this phase individuals are removed from their previous positions or statuses and leave behind that identity. Though traditionally the separation process can be more symbolic than physical, in relation to the transfer portal this is a physical separation from their initial institution. The preliminary stage sets the foundation for the transformation that will occur in the next phase. Traditionally it is the stage where individuals are preparing for the challenges and changes that lie ahead.

All 10 participants marked three distinct areas that contributed to the preparation of their separation from their initial institutions in the preliminal phase (**Table 4.1**). These included interpersonal dynamics, interpersonal dynamics, and the overall campus culture of the institution. Intrapersonal dynamics refers to the internalization of feelings and experiences of these athletes and how they perceive their self in their initial environment. Interpersonal dynamics are referring to the relationships between two or more people (Evans & Benson, 2025), that they built while at their initial institution. This can include teammates, coaches, administration, support staff, or with students and faculty in a non-athletic space. Campus culture refers to the overall environment of the campus and program. While the athletes were enrolled and participating during their initial institution, specific factors that compose the campus culture include campus traditions, campus size, and demographic makeup of the campus.

Intrapersonal Perceptions

All 10 interviewed athletes expressed that their sense of belonging and inclusion on campus was directly impacted by their self-perception of how they integrated into the

environment. One of the key factors contributing to this sense of belonging came from their perception of their racial and ethnic identities. When athletes felt that their identity conflicted with the identities of those around them, a lower sense of belonging and inclusion was experienced. Olive expressed that though on paper her team seemed diverse she still felt like an outsider,

There were players from all over the world, Bosnians and some Serbians, and some girls from Greece, and stuff like that, but it was still weird. I was still the only person of color for the first two years at my institution. So, when I say diverse, it's not necessarily in race, but in culture. I still kinda felt lonely, I guess.

Scarlett echoed, “when you're on a team, majority of them are Caucasian. I feel like you always feel different.”

Additionally, other aspects of identity also played a role in the intrapersonal perceptions of belonging with these athletes. These perceptions increased the desire for separation from the institution. Four of the participants identified their religious faiths or lack of perceived spiritual choices being made by those around them as being a contributor to their interpersonal interpretations. The spiritual development and acceptance of athletes has been identified as a significant factor in improving performance, growth, and overall well-being (Roychowdhury 2019). They began feeling as if they could not belong with their teams because they did not want to make the same choices. Amber stated: “It was a party school and you were expected to join in for “team bonding”. I was falling out of my faith. I needed some spiritual grounding and I knew I needed to leave to get that back.” In order to achieve optimal performance, an athlete’s spiritual well-being must be addressed. Waller et al. (2016) found the physical performance of athletes

and their spiritual well-being are intertwined. Therefore, without being spiritually whole and healthy, the athletes cannot achieve peak performance. Unfortunately, the most overlooked and underdeveloped dimension of holistic care of student-athletes is spiritual development (Waller et al., 2023).

Personal identity is a complex structure. Proios (2017) concluded that religious beliefs may have an impact on the athletic identity of religious people within the frame of sport. The study informs that athletes may experience negative emotions when their religious identity may conflict with their athletic identity. Additional studies have found that there were conflicting ideas between religion and Division I athletics (Nite, et. al). When these conflicts arise for athletes, it can cause a negative experience for those athletes who are strong in their religious or spiritual faiths.

Lastly, these negative intrapersonal perceptions caused physical outburst for half of the participants. Though all 10 expressed having negative intrapersonal perceptions that impacted their sense of belonging and inclusion into their campuses and teams, five of the participants specifically stated having negative physical outcomes related to those perceptions. Hazel explained “I thought I would never play again in my life. I was having really bad panic attacks and stuff when I was playing there.” Hazel and Olive both expressed having to be treated for mental and emotional ailments that grew from their experiences at their initial institutions. Ruby and Amber also shared their negative emotions surrounding their sport caused them to experience bouts of intense nausea or vomiting on several occasions leading up to practices and team interactions. Amber recalled sitting in her dorm, looking at the time tick closer to the report time and immediately starting to feel sick and nauseous. “I felt sick all the time, and like I had no

control. Everything was changed for me, and if I didn't like it then I would have to suck it up or leave.”

Negative emotions and increased stress from their athletic experience caused some of the participants to seek transfer. Participants expressed that it wasn't specifically the emotions that made them want to transfer but the emotions coupled with the impact it had on their athletic performances and overall physical health. Research finds that negative forms of emotions and stress can lead to mental disturbances which can also lead to physical ailments (Kazanjian, 2022). Scarlett reported that these emotions directly impacted her experience while attending her first school, “I was sad. Every single day I was crying...I felt crazy. It kept me from doing what I love...I couldn't function right.” The negative emotions felt by participants expressed itself as a physical response and ultimately kept them from performing to their best abilities in their respective sport. This led to an increased desire to transfer and added to the athletes craving to leave their programs.

The second area contributing to the preliminal or separation process was interpersonal dynamics. These included relationships between the interviewees, their teammates, their coaches, athletic administration and support staff, and general interactions with faculty and non-athlete students. The intersubjective nature of their experiences played a major role in the athletes' desire, or perceived need to transfer. All 10 participants discussed how these group dynamics played a part in their overall decision to leave their institution.

All 10 participants discussed how the perceived mattering in relation to their coaches impacted their decision to leave their initial institutions. They all expressed that if they felt a deeper connection, or perceived they mattered more to the coach as a person they would have

considered staying. However, nine of the 10 participants explicitly detailed experiences in which they felt that their coach did not care about them. Jade described her experience with her first coach,

The coach wasn't very welcoming. She didn't greet us when we first got there. I didn't do any visits, so I didn't even know what the coach looked like until practices started. The first time I saw her was at pictures and then that's when I actually met her, but that was like 3 days after I got to campus.

A lack of holistic care from the coaches also played a role in the athletes' interpersonal experiences. Sienna suffered from an injury after being a three-year starter at her school. In the final portion of her junior season, she suffered an injury during team training. The reaction from the coach made her want to leave the school, "As soon as I tore my ACL. They were like you're done here. We're not going to keep you. We're graduating you out, regardless of your recovery." This was a shared experience that she had with Ebony,

I tore my ACL, but I had 2 years left... After I got hurt, the relationship that I had with my coaches just did not exist. They automatically wrote me off. As in okay you can't play, well bye then.

This theme was hammered home by sisters Ruby and Jade. Ruby described her relationship with her coach as, "It was terrible. She liked me as a [sport] player but not as a person." Her sister, Jade had a similar experience at a different institution "they train you athletically, but they need to train you on what to do next. I didn't feel like they cared about me growing as a person."

Experiencing holistic care and having a cultivated relationship with their coaches was a desire expressed by all participants. Athletes often rely on coaches for support, instruction, and

guidance. This extends to their sport of choice and to their lives outside the sporting context. Previous research also supports the importance of care in the coach-athlete relationship (Murray et. al, 2010). Alexander (2014) found student-athletes who expressed lower levels of satisfaction with their coaching relationship were more likely to consider transferring. Not only does this relationship impact their playing experience while at their initial institution, but it also has a direct impact on an athlete's intent to transfer. Thus, the relationship built between a coach and their players has a larger impact than just the scoreboard.

Interactions and relationships with teammates also contributed to the athlete's desire to transfer. Seven of the 10 athletes interviewed described specific negative experiences with their teammates that ultimately impacted their decision to transfer. In Ebony's experience, "There was a lot of hostility with everyone on the team. A lot of people didn't get along, and a lot of drama. It was not an environment I wanted to be in."

In this theme, the idea of disconnection through race was also reported. "Everybody of color, you know, stuck in one group, and everybody that was not stuck in one group. You could tell it was a big split and a big division within the team." Ruby continued remembering this experience stating "At my first school they saw me as an outsider because of the way that I looked."

Peer interactions and interpersonal relationships have significant impacts on sense of belonging and are often seen as the most critical factor for overall sense of belonging (Johnson, 2012). Strayhorn (2012) attributed these interpersonal relationships to "experience mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important" (p. 3). Previous research on college athletes of color found they spend a significant amount of their social time with college

athlete peers (Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Cooper et al., 2015). Women of color, in particular, seek the presence of positive peer relationships and peer support overall (Rainey et al., 2018). The lack of positive interpersonal relationships with teammates negatively impacted athletes' connection to the team and institution. These poor interpersonal connections were specifically cited by 80% of the study participants. Interviewees specifically identified these relationships as having a direct correlation to their decision to transfer. During Coral's interview, she stated her teammates "...didn't like me. I was fine with that. They didn't want me to play, so I didn't want to be there... I didn't feel bad about leaving them."

Feeling like an outsider was not only limited to the team experience. It also extended to the campus cultural experiences. It contributed to the athletes' need for separation. Violet recalls the lack of integration into her initial institution as she

Did not want to be at that school, but it was paying for my degree, so I couldn't say no. I just decided to suck it up. So that was terrible. It just felt like I was stuck in a place I didn't belong and I didn't have a way out.

Not living up to the stereotypical personal characteristics of students at the initial institution was contributing to athletes wanting to transfer. Ebony stated "do I look like an SEC Girly?" Answering her own question, she exclaimed, "NO! I do not." Violet also had a similar experience, "I am not blonde, I am not a sorority girl, or some kind of cleat chaser. So, I didn't really have a group." The experience of not feeling as though they fit into the campus was shared by multiple participants. Violet seemed to experience the most extreme case of a person-environment fit mismatch.

I really hated it. It just felt like I couldn't be myself. They wanted me to change everything about me, and if I didn't like it. I missed the person I was before I got there...I couldn't be the new (Violet). They were trying to make me someone I wasn't. They weren't even calling me by my name... I couldn't be the person they wanted. I didn't want to be that person just to fit in with them.

Beattie and Turner (2021) examined the impact of person-environment fit in regards to athletics. The study found that the mismatch of individual personalities to campus culture and environment had a negative impact to the athlete's overall satisfaction. Specifically, the study suggested that college students who perceive that they are a misfit at their institution are more likely to transfer to another institution (Beattie & Turner, 2021). This phenomenon is not a recent finding. A lack of person-environment fit has long been documented as a factor contributing to college athletes separating from their sports teams. Athletes who failed to reach significant engagement with their college environment (outside of athletics) struggled with integration into campus culture and often transferred (Astin, 1993). As echoed by the participants in the current study, the lack of person-environment fit experienced by the women of color was a strong contributing factor in the athletes' decision to separate from their initial teams and institutions.

After the athlete commits to separation, they experience physical and symbolic disconnect from their former teams. At that moment, they leave their team they are now entering the second phase of liminality.

Liminal

Turner's theory of liminality describes a transitional phase in which individuals are in-between two stages. This phase is personified as athletes enter the transfer portal. The findings

that correlate to the liminal phase can be directly linked to the time spent inside the transfer portal. Moreover, it is connected to the time after separation from their initial institution, but when they are not yet incorporated into the new athletic program. Turner emphasized that the liminal stage is not just a time of waiting in ambiguity, but a kinetic space for transformations to occur. During this time, participants often undergo symbolic or tangible rituals to signify the metaphysical death of their past self in order to make way for their new identity. This is marked by the athlete's declaration into the transfer portal.

The liminal phase is marked by a sense of being betwixt and between, and those in the phase do not fully belong to any particular order or structure. They are often considered out of place. According to Turner, the liminal space allows its participants to disassociate from traditional hierarchy. This gives athletes in the liminal space the opportunity to transcend old boundaries or norms set by their initial institutions. This is a time of fluidity where athletes can be unbound from previous expectations and allowed to experiment with new possibilities. In this, liminality offers freedom as individuals have fewer constraints.

Because of its traditional rigidity, athletes in the liminal space sometimes have difficulty adjusting to the lack of structure in their life. It is marked by feelings of uncertainty, loss of social and athletic connections, and also a sense of negativity about oneself or the process. One significant factor contributing to the ceilings is the lack of knowledge athletes have about the transfer portal process. It is an area of athletics most have not experienced. Additionally, with the nuance of the transfer portal and its ever-changing rules, it is difficult for athletes to know everything there is to know about the portal and the transfer process. An additional factor contributing to athletes' feelings of uncertainty is the juxtaposition of transfer portal recruitment

to high school recruitment. However, those feelings could be combated by having additional and supportive external supports in place that helped the athletes adjust to their new phase.

Lack of Transfer Knowledge

Findings from this study show the women of color who enter the transfer portal have the stage of liminality marked by a lack of knowledge about transfer portal processes, negative feelings of self, questions about recruitment and external support experience. Though the initial decision to transfer was marked by extreme confidence and feelings of certainty, once the ink was dry on the paper and the release was given by the initial athletic programs, these athletes had a mix of feelings and experiences while in the portal.

The first factor that shaped the liminal process for women of color in the transfer portal was the overall lack of knowledge the participants had about the transfer portal process. This was illustrated by the experience of the research population. Sienna stated,

I actually didn't know anything really about transferring. I had no knowledge. I thought I was gonna go on a website or something. I thought I was going to get to see everyone that's looking at me. Kind of like a social media thing. Something like, oh, this school looked at my portal profile, okay, let me look at their page, but it wasn't that.

Four participants stated they thought they would “have to sit for a year” once they decided to transfer. They were given that information from older siblings, parents, or other family members who participated in college athletics prior to the implementation of the transfer portal. The lack of understanding about the transfer process was summarized very bluntly by Ruby, “I had no idea what I was walking into.” This lack of knowledge surrounding the transfer process impacted the liminal experience of the participants. Jade said,

I didn't know a *thing* about the portal. I didn't know it at all. I thought, I thought my coach was supposed to handle all of it for being honest, so I was just waiting for her to say, hey! there's this school that's looking at you and they want to bring you down. That's pretty much what happened at my high school.

Juxtaposition of Recruitment

The lack of formalized education around the transfer portal is illuminated by the participants confusion about the recruitment process while in the portal. Juxtaposition of high school and portal recruitment exacerbated some of the negative feelings experienced by women of color in the transfer portal. Sienna recalled, "It was terrible. Getting recruited was so exciting in high school. Portal recruitment made me want to throw up."

All participants expressed a less than hands-on approach in their high school recruitment process. They allowed their high school or club coaches to initiate recruitment conversations and reciprocate emails to college coaches interested in recruiting them. They had little interaction with the recruiting coaching staff until they arrived on campus for their official visits. This is a very different experience from their portal recruitment process. Hazel explained that most, "didn't go on a visit. Everything was mainly just typed on emails between me and the coach."

The types of school or qualifications for commitment also changed for the athletes. Coral had a completely different experience in her second round of recruitment

Out of high school I wanted to go anywhere. Everywhere that wanted me I looked into...

In the portal I was specifically targeting a lot of A and M schools. I needed it for my major... This last time, it wasn't just about playing anymore.

The differences in recruitment were not limited to just the communications between the athletes but also what they looked for and questions they were asking potential coaches. They became more selective than their high school selves. Olive cautions to everyone “don't just pick a school just because they're offering the scholarship. Actually, look into the school. Do your homework.” This quote reiterates that these athletes needed to educate themselves on the portal process and their new schools. Having to traverse a landscape they were unfamiliar with adds to the increased level of uncertainty surrounding the portal.

Negative Feelings

The precariousness of their athletic futures caused this athletic population to experience heightened senses of negative emotion while in the liminal phase. The loss of their athletic identity, though temporary, caused all of the participants to experience an array of negative emotions while waiting to be picked up by their secondary institution. This illuminated the betwixt and between phase of the liminal theory. The athletes did not belong to their original institutions anymore, but had not yet found their secondary location.

All 10 participants expressed negative emotions and feelings while enduring this process of uncertainty. The lack of athletic certainty both increased and created negative emotions experienced by these women. Ruby explained,

I think, going into the portal, I think it genuinely brings in those bad thoughts. They just kind of start to come in. I was thinking, what if I don't get picked up? What if nobody wants you? What if this terrible thing? Or what if that bad thing happened? The bad stuff was all I could think about.

Negative feelings were riddled with general feelings of overall uncertainty about the future.

This feeling of uncertainty started immediately after entering the portal, “From the start, it started off a little nerve wracking because I really didn’t know what was going to happen,” Scarlett remembered.

Amber also experienced uncertainty about her athletic future “I was a little freaked out that I wasn't going to be accepted, or picked up... I didn't know where I was going, or if I was even going to be playing the next year.”

The overall sense of unknowing was a staple for others as well. Ebony said. “It was pretty rocky. I didn't know where I wanted to go at the time. I just knew that I wanted to play, but I just didn't know where I wanted to go.” The liminal phase disrupts the normal order of life. During this phase, the participants lacked a clear sense of direction. This disorganization can be anxiety-inducing. As they move through the liminal phases, they question their self-identity and may experience heightened negative feelings (Turner, 1969). Participants also reported a significant increase in their stress levels while residing in the liminal space. All participants used a form of the word ‘stress’ during their interviews. This included the words stress, stressed, stressful and stressing.

Three key factors contributed to the increase in stress levels. These included the athletes need for athletic aid, time spent in the transfer portal, and the lack of backup plans if the participant could not continue their athletic or college career because they were not picked up by another school. Each factor was reported by at least half (50%) of the participants.

Scarlett was one of the eight participants who expressed they could not continue their academic careers without athletic aid. She described her level of stress while in the portal as “kind of nerve wracking honestly.” She continued, “I was really questioning my skill and choices

when I didn't have a new scholarship after a week." She stated bluntly, "I was going to be a drop out if no one wanted to add me."

Coral also had an increase in stress when managing the liminal process. The need for athletic aid to continue her education also increased the urgency she had when looking for a secondary program. She recalled, "it was stressful to try and find a school that I could go to, and that would pay for me to be there." Paired with the need for athletic aid, the lack of a formidable back up plan if they did not receive a scholarship, also increased participant stress levels.

The combination of the two factors significantly increased the stress for Amber. She expressed that she did not have any other options if she didn't get another scholarship. If she wasn't going to play on scholarship, she was not going to be able to continue her degree, "I was starting to lose hope... So, it's kind of getting to the point to where I was kind of thinking I was never going to play anymore, and no play means, no money, no money meant no school." When asked what she would have done if she did not get picked up by another school, she stated, "I didn't have no plan B at all. That's why I was freaking out."

All participants experienced an increase in stress the longer they sat in the portal uncommitted. As the days without commitment increased, so did their stress levels. Olive described her experience with a metaphor, "it's like eating a cookie. The first one is good, but the more you eat, you start to feel sick." She explained that she was originally really excited to enter the portal, but after the first day, the excitement wore off and a sense of panic started to set in.

Though increasing stress was reported by all participants who experienced at least one of the contributing factors, Hazel reported experiencing all these factors. She was the participant who spent the most time in the portal, had no back up plan, and had to have athletic aid to

continue her academic career in higher education. This is also significant as she was the only equivalency sport athlete in the sample. Unlike the other nine, an offer of a scholarship was not a guaranteed full ride at the division one level. Therefore, even if a secondary school wanted to give her athletic aid, there was a possibility that it would not cover her financial need. As the days in the portal turned into weeks Hazel's stress levels significantly increased,

I was really scared because I was kind of late in the process. I thought about it for a long time before I decided to make it official and I didn't enter the portal until a few weeks before school was over, maybe two weeks before I left... My mom yelled at me when I told her, but I know she was really worried because she couldn't help me financially... I had to find another scholarship because otherwise I was not going back to school and I wouldn't finish my degree.

The increased stress and negative emotions experienced by the participants were exacerbated by the loss of relationship and connection to their former teammates. People that they had built strong bonds with now were seeking to distance themselves. The sense of isolation from teammates was acknowledged by 9 of the 10 participants. Jade thought that she had built a long lasting and strong connection with the team. However, once she started the transfer process there was a palpable change, "Our captain thought I was very rash in my decisions, and that I wasn't living out the school to its full potential. I thought she was my best friend on the team, but she kinda dumped me after that." Her sister Ruby had a similar experience while starting her transfer process,

Once you started the process to leave the team, they start to not really talk to you that much, and they started bringing in new and other players, so they're trying to focus on other people they're trying to bring in for next year. So, they was kind of distant.

Though 90% of the sample experienced strained or loss of relationships with teammates, four of the participants reported direct and implicit negative comments from former teammates. Violet detailed her interactions with her former “friends” as she described them, “They said it was never gonna work. And she still thought it's stupid for me to leave, I couldn't be friends with them after that.” This was not an isolated experience. Ebony also had negative experiences with teammates after entering the portal, “They tried to make me feel bad. They told me I was making a mistake.” However, it didn't stop there, “one girl sent me a long text about me being stuck up and how I was ruining the team... I blocked all of them.”

For the study participants, the liminal phase is earmarked with milestones of uncertainty, negative emotions, increased stress and a loss or severing of previously strong and cultivated relationships. Additionally, the low level of knowledge participants had about the NCAA transfer process increased the overall uncertainty for this population. Though this liminal phase of the transfer process was littered with negative experiences, there was one factor that had an overwhelming positive impact on their liminal experience: external supports.

External Supports

The emotional experience of uncertainty is fundamental to the liminal stage. It induces a sense of stress or loss, but also presents participants with a unique opportunity for change. The potential for positive change was impacted directly by the amount of positive external supports each participant had.

For the purpose of this study external supports were specifically defined as a person who did not have direct daily responsibilities with the athlete's teams. This excluded coaches, teammates, athletic trainers and athletic administration. All 10 participants conveyed negative experiences while in the transfer portal. These experiences can be contributed to both intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics. However, all 10 participants reported the significant impact of having a positive external support system. The majority of the support came from siblings, parents, friends made outside of athletics and former coaches.

Having positive external supports was the biggest contributing factor to combating the negative liminal experience. However, not everyone's support system started off in a positive manner. Olive's family was initially unsupportive,

My mom was pissed at first. She said you're not leaving a program that is paying for your college. You're on a full ride that's absolutely insane. And then I came home for Thanksgiving, and I had lost like 15 pounds, and my hair was falling out, and they realized that I was struggling so much there. So, then everyone hopped on board and was like, okay, yeah, you can transfer.

A change of heart from family members was not an isolated incident. Coral also experienced apprehension from her parents at first. However, they eventually came around. She shared: "My mom and dad were not too happy the first time, but after that they were all excited and they had a running joke to see if I was going to transfer every year since I was three for three." Some parents needed less convincing. Ebony's experience was slightly different "Lord, my mom was excited. She was just happy that I was moving on, and excited for my next journey."

The positive impact of external supports was not limited to parents. Ruby felt the support from her sisters,

My sisters were pretty supportive of it all, throughout the entire thing. They were always down for me. They supported me through it all like they were there. They listened in on calls. They saw all the emails. They prayed with me about it, everything that you can possibly imagine, and they were there for me.

Her sister Jade shared a similar experience, “It’s my sisters. I think they are what helped me get through it.” Ruby and Jade shared a unique experience being siblings and both experiencing the transfer process at the same time. They were able to lean on each other in a positive manner to work through the liminal phase of transferring.

The impact of having positive external supports could be felt across all participants. Sienna remembered “My family and friends, everybody was very supportive. Wanted to stay in the loop of what was going on and who I was talking to.” She continued that the support extended into helping her prepare to have a successful transition, “They were even helping in preparing me for my visits and suggesting questions I needed to be asking. They wanted to make sure I crossed every line I needed to.”

Navigating the liminal phase can be challenging and emotionally intense. Having positive external supports plays a crucial role in helping individuals wade through the uncertainties and emotional upheavals that accompany transitions. These social support systems are important to counteract the negativity one may feel. These external relationships can buffer the psychological distress of liminality by helping individuals process their experiences and regain confidence in their transition (Luhmann et al., 2012).

Positive external supports were critical to this sample in navigating the emotional and physical challenges of the liminal stage of the transfer portal. They provide a sense of normalcy and stability by helping to reduce feelings of uncertainty as individuals move through life transitions. These social connections serve as a resource for these athletes experiencing a loss of connection with former teammates and ambiguity about their athletic futures. Having these supports in place are imperative to facilitating a positive athletic transition. They provide vital support allowing athletes the opportunity to move more smoothly into the third phase of liminality once they are picked up by their new team. Thus, the post-liminal or incorporation process begins.

Post Liminal

After exiting the transfer portal, the participant entered the final stage of liminality. Entering their new teams sparks the post-liminal phase. In this phase the athletes emerge from ambiguity and uncertainty of the previous liminal phase and start the incorporation process of their new teams and athletic roles.

During the liminal phase the athletes have undergone significant transformation. They have shed their initial athletic identity formed while attending their original institutions. This phase marks the concluding of their transition stage and introduces the athlete into reaggregation by their new team and athletic roles.

The women of color in this study marked four major subthemes in the post-liminal phase. These included academic disruption, barriers that impeded their incorporation into new teams, facilitators that aided them towards a smoother transition, and the importance of reflection when they finally felt settled into their new identities. These identified themes helped them restore

personal stability and foundation for those who have experienced the transformation of liminality.

Academic Disruption

For the purpose of this study, academic disruption refers to the retaking of a course or course work that an athlete completed at a previous institution and is now having to repeat after their transfer. It also refers to the necessary changing of an academic major or the delayed implementation of academic services. For example, when Violet completed her transfer, she switched from sport management to general management when her original academic path was not offered at her new institution. Seven of the 10 participants experienced issues when trying to transfer credits into their new institutions. Scarlett thought if she supplied her old transcripts, all her credits would transfer and count towards her degree at her secondary institution. However, that was not the case for her, “I could get copies of my transcripts, that part was easy. But the credit part was hard. It was difficult getting them to transfer over to this new university. I had to redo three classes that they wouldn’t accept.” Others also had to retake courses to improve their GPA before becoming officially enrolled as a student at their new institution. Coral had to take classes at her local community college during summer break to improve her GPA, “I didn't know what grades I needed to get into my university, so that kind of sent me back a little bit because I had to retake some classes in summer school at home.”

Along with retaking credits, three athletes had to reinstate their academic accommodations from Student Disability Services (SDS). Though two participants experienced a relatively smooth transition of academic accommodation, Amber was not so lucky. She

explained that her second institution did not have the same expansive resources as her original campus,

I had to have a lot of academic help and help during the transfer process. I'm extremely Dyslexic. I had to get all my disability paperwork and stuff like that transferred over to my next school. The first few weeks I didn't have any accommodations and my grades were terrible. When I finally got approval for my accommodations it was very different. I didn't have a note taker, or anything like I did at [first institution]. I basically had a whole team around me to help there. Here, I get extra time on assignments and that is about it. It is a lot harder.

Though not all participants experienced academic disruption directly, they were all explicitly aware of how much of a challenge it could be in the transfer process. Sienna is the only graduate transfer in the sample. After graduating with her bachelor's in three years from her first school, Sienna would be pursuing her master's degree at her second school. The academic disruption for her was minimal and she was grateful, "I am so glad I was a graduate transfer. It was a nightmare for my teammates getting their credits to count from their first schools."

The possibility of having to retake credits, change academic majors, or having incomparable academic disability assistance could be a deterrent for some to consider transferring. Academic disruption comes in many different forms, but it is an almost certain reality for all who decide to transfer from one higher education institution to another. However, this is not the only obstacle these participants faced.

Barriers to Incorporation

All 10 participants experienced a variety of barriers that made their incorporations into new teams challenging. These included accusations from their new program of being whitewashed (n=3), adjusting to a new style of play (n=5), and navigating transfer athlete stereotypes (n=10). Three participants experienced all three of the listed barriers.

Whitewashed. Three participants experienced accusations of being Whitewashed from their coaches and teammates. All three started their career at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and transferred to a HBCU. It is important to note that these experiences were expressed by three Black women in the sample. The two biracial women who transferred to a HBCU did not explicitly mention Whitewash accusations as a barrier.

For the purpose of this finding, the term Whitewashed was defined by one of the study participants. Ebony “My coach told me that I was Whitewashed and she meant it as an insult...Like I wasn’t Black enough. She told me I was too assimilated to White people.” In her experience, it wasn’t just the coach that made her feel this way. She explained that the coach also implored the team to make sure she was “...SWAC enough. She had the girls try and be meaner to me, to help bring out the mean side of me.”

Jade was also told by her teammates that she was Whitewashed. She explained, “they said that I was Whitewashed from my last school.” Before the season started her teammates gave her a warning, “They would always say SWAC ball is a different ball, and playing HBCU ball is different than playing for a White school.” She reflected on her first conference competition at an away game where she experienced a completely different atmosphere than her previous school,

The amount of trash talking is insane. Playing in the SWAC compared to playing at my old school. It pushes you mentally, because they are coming for you, and it's all of them. It's not just like one or 2 players it would be *everybody*: the bench, their coach, their fans, like everyone, is talking trash to you. It's so much. After the first away game I was talking with my teammate about it and they said get used to it. They know you came from a White school. They probably think you're Whitewashed and won't be able to handle it. So, I had to get a thick skin, quickly!

Ebony also expressed that though the term was meant to be an insult to her, she felt that it was more insulting to the Black community.

Scarlett echoed the idea that Whitewashed was more of an insult to the rest of the team than it was to her, "When they were saying I was Whitewashed what they really meant that I didn't act Black enough; meaning I talked to proper, I was too nice and that I didn't have the right attitude." She then explained, "Black does not mean I am uneducated, inconsiderate of others, or have to have a bad attitude, so for them to say I was Whitewashed was saying negative things about them and had nothing to do with me."

Navigating a new campus culture was initially difficult for these three participants. At the time of the interviews, they felt they were handling the change effectively. However, others were having additional challenges navigating a new style of play at their secondary institutions. The lack of swiftness in their change of sporting style proved to be a significant barrier for 50% of the sample.

New Playing Style. Five of the participants expressed having to adjust quickly to a new playing style as a significant challenge to incorporation. Because they had previous collegiate

playing experience, the participants felt they were given a very short leash in regard to coaching retention. Olive stated “they expect us to come in as transfers with experience to just kind of come in and adjust right away.” Violet shared a similar experience “I don't think they give us the grace that they give incoming freshmen.” Four of the five participants who experienced difficulties adjusting to the new style of play felt this barrier was exacerbated by unrealistic timeline for adjustments given by their new coaches.

Sienna recalled having to request a meeting with her head coach after only three days of practice because she felt as though she was not given any time to adjust. She said,

I just went into the office and told her I was struggling with how fast she wanted me to make these changes. I told her, yes, I'm a transfer. Yes, I've already played in college, but I do not know you, nor do I know this program, nor do I know how this program runs. I can be good. I can learn your system, but I need time to pick it up. Teach it to me and I know I can get it, because right now you're just expecting me to know everything y'all do and I obviously don't. I just got here. So, you have to teach me or we're both going to continue being frustrated and not getting any better.

After this conversation she expressed that everything changed. Her coaches helped her to get acclimated to the new style of play and she was able to improve her skill and work on becoming an integral part of the team.

Navigating Stereotypes. The most significant barrier that the sample faced to incorporation into their new teams was navigating the stereotypes associated with being a transfer college athlete. All ten participants experienced some sort of obstacle associated with negative stereotypes surrounding NCAA transfer athletes. One of the biggest hurdles they had to

overcome was others thinking they only left their first institutions for playing time reasons. Coral explained,

we're not just leaving just because we're not getting playing time. A lot of us were playing at the schools we left. We're actually leaving because we're going to a better school, or getting a better fit or better opportunity for ourselves.

Additional negative stereotypes included lack of skill, no sense of loyalty, or they lack the mental toughness needed to compete at an elite level. Though Scarlett had emotional struggles at her first school, it did not impact mental toughness as an athlete. She was receiving significant playing time but found that others did not understand her reason for transferring. She recalled “they think that we leave just because it's hard work and you're not getting any playing time... no one believes you whenever you're actually struggling.” Once she transferred, she was able to find a more suitable situation where her athletic and emotional needs were met, but until she provided teammates with stats, they all thought she left because of a lack of playing time. Sienna expressed that she would have stayed at her first school but ended up transferring after an injury. She explained “a lot of people just assume the worst. That I didn't play. She hated everyone, or she didn't get along with the coach, so she left. They aren't loyal and they'll just leave. That's not always the case.” She thought it was important to say, “I didn't have some sob story at least not to me. I'm a transfer that's it. Stop trying to make me into some sort of victim.”

It is important to treat all transfers on a case-by-case basis. They are not all the same, nor do they have the same transfer reasons or experiences. Hazel stated “the main stereotype that we face is that we're not good, we don't play and that our coach hated us. It could always be true or none of it could be true. So don't make assumptions.”

Though there were barriers to incorporation in the post-liminal phase there were also significant facilitators that aided athletes in making a smoother athletic transition. These included finding the right person-environment fit, creating a positive interpersonal relationship, and finding the appropriate coaching and communication style sought by the athlete. Experiencing one or multiple of the listed facilitator aided in the post-liminal phase of athlete transition.

Facilitators to Incorporation

Three significant facilitators were identified by the research sample. The first facilitator, securing the needed communication and coaching style of the new coaching staff, was a major indicator of positive transitions. The second facilitator indicated by the sample was the significant positive impact of creating healthy interpersonal relationships had on their incorporation into a new team. This included the relationships built with teammates and members of the campus outside of athletics. Lastly, achieving a positive person-environment fit. This fit occurs when the athlete's needs, abilities, and personality align with the demands, opportunities, and culture of the athletic program, leading to positive outcomes.

Coaching Style and Communication. Finding the coaching style and communication practices that best fit each of the athletes was a critical part of achieving a positive outcome. Jade who was on campus for days before meeting her coach at her initial institution was relieved that this was no longer the case for her, “the relationship with my new coaches was amazing! I could go to them when I needed things. It was an open-door policy... I can talk to them about whatever I needed to.”

Having open lines of communication was also important to Ebony. She felt comfort and support by the attentiveness of her new coaching staff,

We are together all the time. My coaches are in constant communication with us. If anything goes wrong, they're going to help you. If you need them, just ask. It felt good to be supported, so it was very welcoming.

Feeling support from coaches did not just start and end on the sideline. It was important to all ten participants that they felt their coaches supported them not only as athletes, but also using a more holistic approach. This also reiterates the importance of a positive coach-athlete relationship.

Interpersonal Relationships. After transferring, finding and cultivating significant interpersonal relationships was an important part of successful post-liminal integration. All 10 participants cited the importance of creating new interpersonal relationships. Though all 10 expressed their importance, they did not all find them in the same places. These relationships can cultivate from a variety of sources. This includes, new teammates, campus community groups, and athletes from other sports teams at their new institutions. Hazel found companionship with a teammate that was in a similar situation to hers “I met my best friend here. We became closer just because everyone else already had their friend group from their freshman year and both came in as midyear transfers.” Coming into a preestablished team can be difficult for transfer athletes. Finding an ally can be vital for successfully navigating these group dynamics. Sienna also had a similar experience,

Being teammates doesn't really describe it. It's sisterhood. They are absolutely my best friends. I bet they will probably be in my wedding whenever I get married one of these days. They're my people and I'm really close with them...We are like family here. You know dysfunctional sometimes, but I still love them.

Relationships between teammates were not the only interpersonal connections that helped to create a smoother athlete transition. Campus clubs and community group are also sources of these impactful interpersonal relationships.

Amber found significant interpersonal connections within campus ministry, “When I left my first school, I felt like I needed spiritual grounding. I got that through FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes).” She felt she “was able to find my church community, and find my people...my heart felt so full. They even came to my games.” Ebony found her new campus family through joining a sorority. She explained that they did not have any Black sororities at her original institution and because of that she never had an interest in participating in recruitment. However, after transferring to an HBCU she wanted to pledge, “I was here so I needed to get the full experience, right? How can you come here and not be a Soror. When I committed to come, I knew I was going to pledge.” Later in the interview she called her sorority sisters her family and said “they make it feel like home here.”

Interpersonal bonds were also found with members of other athletic teams. Scarlett who did not necessarily find strong connections with her own teammates, did find camaraderie in members of another team,

my roommate was on the soccer team. Her teammates became my friends because they were always at our apartment. It was really cool because everyone on the team had a different background, so no one expected me to be a certain way or act a certain way.

They were all internationals and they were all different, so it was okay that I was.

Finding these bonds with other athletes on campus was an important part to helping her find community and improve post-liminal success.

Person-environment Fit. Finding the right fit was crucial for this population's positive post-liminal outcomes. For the women of color in this sample, five are currently competing at HBCUs. Prior to competing at their current schools, they were all attending PWI's. Enrolling in a school at a HBCU was a very new experience for Violet,

I was a little freaked out when I got on campus. I had never even been to an HBCU and my first school was really White. But once I got on campus everyone looked like me. I really liked it.”

Of the five women that are currently competing at a HBCU only one is considering transferring. Jade expressed, “it was good to find a school that's built for me.” Ebony also experienced a similar new found fit at her HBCU, “I went to a White high school, and at my last college, I was the only person of color on my team. It's different here there is so much more of a community feel. I love it.”

Person-environment fit extended past having a Black athlete attend an HBCU. Regardless of the racial demographics of the campus, feeling a general sense of welcomeness from their new environment was also impactful. Coral who has competed at four different institutions has finally found the right fit on the fourth try, “The environment was different from my other schools. Everybody, like *everybody* here is just so loving and welcoming. I loved it. I always tell them; I wish I would have been there all 4 years.”

Olive also experienced positive outcomes in a different environment. After transferring she felt almost like a new person. She explained,

I would say the main difference and why I can be more successful here is the atmosphere.

How you are welcomed and treated at different schools makes a difference. I feel like my

first school, the environment sucks. If I stayed there, I know I wouldn't have continued playing. I felt very defeated and at a very low spot. I knew I couldn't keep continuing to put myself through that. The environment here is so much better and that matters.

All 10 participants expressed the importance of finding the right person-environment fit. It is also important to recognize that not every environment is a fit for every person. All athletes' needs are different and they require different environments to thrive. Because of the uniqueness of everyone's needs, being self-aware of one's needs is important to successful post-liminal incorporation. This self-awareness can be aided by a reflexive process.

Reflection

Eight of the 10 participants reported reflecting on their past school and playing experience as a factor to having a successful integration into their new programs. Because of the reflective process, Violet reorganized her priorities, "school became my number one focus, and I just keep my head down and do what I need to do to keep this scholarship because I didn't want to be back in the predicament of the transfer portal." Amber also had an impactful reflective experience after transferring,

Coaches always say be on top: Be on top of your grades, be on top of your nutrition, be on top of your character. But the main thing I have learned is to just be on top of you, personally... actually sit down and understand what all is going on when you want to transfer because it's your life. Take notes. Do things needed to prepare yourself for the transfer. Make sure to ask lots of questions and really think about what is best for you and your future as a person, not just as a player. Your life goes on after this, so you need to make sure you are setting your life up to be winning at that too.

Reflection also provided clarity for what higher education options are available to college athletes of color. When reflecting on her transfer options she found peace of mind after talking with her mother, “Honestly, I thought my transfer options were limited. Then my mom made me realize it actually gave me more options, because I could go to any PWI that wanted me and HBCUs would give me a chance too.”

Sienna also found that reflecting on yourself can give you a great sense of empowerment, especially as a woman of color,

Try to find the right institution step one, but you can’t do that until you know what you need. I, and women of color specifically, need to understand what they're looking for, and what they really want when it comes to a school and a program. In life sometimes we are looked at as the bottom of the totem pole and we are sometimes just told what we can expect or just given something and told we be grateful. We’re not used to telling people or even telling me what’s best for me.

Coral, the athlete with the most transfers in the interview sample, wished that she would have been more self-aware before committing to any school, “I wish I would have done a little more soul searching... Do a little more research on these schools before I just sign up and sign my eligibility away because you can’t get it back.”

Reflection on their transfer process played a key role in post-liminal successes. There are eight athletes that engaged in a reflective process. Seven of those athletes do not have current plans to transfer again. This shows that engaging in reflection can aid in athlete retention and successful post-liminal outcomes for women of color who decide to utilize the NCAA transfer portal.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The study examines the experiences of 10 athletes who transitioned out of their initial institutions by utilizing the NCAA transfer portal. The research findings explain these experiences through the lens of intersectionality and are organized using Turner's Theory of Liminality (Turner, 1969). The findings above are ordered to mirror the framework and its three distinct phases. The first phase, preliminal, involves the separation from one status to another. For the context of this study, the preliminal state refers to the period directly before declaring the transfer portal. The second stage of the findings assesses the experiences of the study population through their liminal state. Turner refers to this as a period of disorder. The liminal findings give a glimpse into the participants' lives during their time within the portal: while they are waiting to get selected by another team and are experiencing the betwixt and between phase of their athletic careers. Lastly, the findings shine a light on the post-liminal state of the athletic transition and describe the experiences of the athlete trying to reaggregate into a new team and athletic department. The findings illuminate the process of incorporation into their new identity status and the barriers and facilitators that can impede or improve their chances for post-liminal success.

Preliminal

In the examination of the findings three preliminal subthemes emerged. The preliminal subthemes expressed through the interviews include intrapersonal perceptions, interpersonal dynamics, and the impact of campus culture (**Table 4.1**).

Intrapersonal

Interviews with the athletes revealed that their internal perceptions of belonging and inclusion deeply impacted their connections at their initial institutions. All 10 participants discussed how their self-perception and the environment around them affected their sense of belonging. These perceptions predominantly revolved around the athletes' social identities. When the identities of the interviewed athlete conflicted with those in their immediate circle there was a lower sense of belonging reported. Examples in this study include athletes being the only women of color on their teams and being on a team where they felt their religious beliefs alienated them from their teammates. When either conflicted with the social norms of the team or campus, the athlete's sense of belonging was impacted. This intensified feelings of disconnect and fueled the athletes' desire to want to leave their original campuses. When conflict existed in their intrapersonal perceptions, it created emotional distress for all athletes. Five athletes reported physical symptoms connected to emotional suffering, including panic attacks, intense nausea, and even stress-induced vomiting.

The mental and even physical tolls personified by these negative intrapersonal perceptions were significant. They affected both athletic performance and overall well-being. Previous research shows that emotional and mental strain can lead to physical ailments (Kazanjian, 2022). This was echoed by the research participants reporting that their poor mental health created poor athletic performance and further increased their desire to enter the transfer portal.

Interpersonal Dynamics

Another crucial contributing factor to the athletes' desire to transfer and their preliminal experiences was their interpersonal relationships. The most impactful interpersonal relationships were those with coaches and teammates. All participants discussed how the relationship with their coaches directly influenced their decision to transfer. The athletes expressed feeling as though their coaches did not genuinely care for them as people and only view them as a transactional obligation. Jade described her coach as being unwelcoming after not meeting with her until three days after being on campus. The lack of holistic care exhibited by the original coaching staff widened the disconnect. An absence of support both emotionally and physically was a significant deciding factor in the athletes' decision to seek separation from the athletic program.

Negative dynamics between teammates were also significant when deciding to transfer. Findings indicated that seven of the 10 women of color interviewed conveyed having negative relationships with teammates. These interactions ranged from implicit hostility, to racial divisions, and fractioning on teams. Ebony recalled experiences of intense drama between teammates, while Ruby explained implicit racial division among the players on her initial campus roster. These instances contributed to feelings of alienation for the study participants. Experiencing negative team dynamics led to a diminished sense of belonging and were cited as reasons athletes ultimately made decisions to leave their athletic situations. Research supports that peer relationships between athlete and lack of positive connection with teammates led to feeling of unwelcomeness, particularly for athletes of color who may already feel minoritized.

Campus Culture

The overall campus culture and environment also contributed to the preliminal need for separation. The athlete's alignment with the campus environment, or lack thereof, was crucial in understanding the population's experience. Members of the sample felt that their original campus culture did not align with their personal identities. Violet described feeling a low sense of belonging at her school and emphasized how she felt the institution tried to mold her into a version of herself that she did not wish to become. Similarly, Ebony shared her frustrations when she couldn't align with the campus stereotype. She gave specific examples addressing how the stereotypical "SEC Girly" identity did not align with her own individuality.

This mismatch between the athletes' identity and the major campus culture was a contributing factor when considering transfer. Previous research has found that students who perceive a poor person-environment fit are more likely to seek separation. This finding was illustrated by the athletes' experiences. Research states that athletes who struggle to engage with their campus outside of athletics often feel a sense of disconnect (Beattie & Turner, 2021). The women of color in this study expressed a strong desire to find a campus where they could be their most authentic selves, as well as a space where their identities could integrate into the campus and would be respected by others.

The preliminal phase of athletes' transition from their initial institution was marked by emotional, interpersonal, and cultural challenges that contributed to their desire to separate from their original campus and enter the transfer portal. Intrapersonal perceptions of exclusion, paired with strained and conflicted interpersonal dynamics with coaches and teammates were pivotal in establishing the athletes' sense of belonging. When those factors contributed and confirmed a

poor sense of connection, it added to the athletes need to leave their initial school. This coupled with a mismatch in person-environment fit were significant indicators of their decision to transfer.

Liminal

Turner's theory of liminality describes the liminal phase as the existence between two distinct stages. For the purpose of this study, the liminal phase is identified by the athlete's time in the transfer portal where they have separated from their original teams and have declared the portal but have not yet been signed to a secondary institution. During this time the athlete is not just in a passive waiting period but is undergoing significant change. The liminal space is a time where athletes can transform from their past self into a new athletic identity.

Athletes waiting in the transfer portal are the personification of Turner's concept of being betwixt and between: a state where they are neither fully a part of their original institution but not yet integrated into their new one. This experience is often characterized by feelings of uncertainty, a lack of structure in their daily lives, and a sense of feeling out of place (**Table 4.2**). Turner suggested that the transitional state of liminality provides opportunities for transformation. For these athletes in the study, being in the portal allows them to detach from the old expectations and explore new possibilities at new institutions. However, despite the potential freedoms of the liminal phase allows, it is not without its challenges. The increased amount of uncertainty about the future can lead to feelings of isolation and distress for athletes who sit in the portal. This is especially true since athletes are unfamiliar with the nuances of the transfer process and the transfer portal. The rapidly changing rules surrounding the portal and the lack of clarity about the recruitment process for athletes increase uneasiness in an already uncertain

time. Many athletes entered the transfer portal with little to no knowledge or understanding about how the process works.

Lack of Transfer Portal Knowledge

A significant finding from the study was the impact that a lack of transfer knowledge had on an athlete's liminal state. Many participants admitted to having no or little prior knowledge to the understanding of how the portal process worked leading up to them declaring the portal. The lack in understanding of transfer navigation had a negative impact on the transformational process of liminality. For example, some athletes expected the transfer portal to operate similarly to a social media platform where they could see which schools were interested in them and reach out via an instant messaging system. Others had misconceptions about the consequences of transferring, such as having to sit out for a year or losing a year of eligibility, which once was how transferring operated, but this has since become outdated information. The overall lack of knowledge or education surrounding the transfer portal process added to the stress and confusion experienced by athletes and the liminal process. As they navigated through this liminal space the levels of uncertainty about next steps and feeling vulnerable and anxious increased. Without a clear understanding of how the recruitment process works, athletes were unsure of how to navigate the complexity of the landscape of college athletics.

Juxtaposition of Recruitment

The juxtaposition of high school and transfer portal recruitment also added to the uncertainty athletes felt about their future. The women of color in the study had positive memories of high school recruitment which were generally more straightforward and guided by their coaches. They recalled called feelings of excitement and anticipation as they worked to find

their original institutions. However, recruitment through the transfer portal felt more impersonal often consisting of just email exchanges with coaches and lack of direct interaction with schools' campuses and teammates. The athletes had to take a more active role in their own recruitment process, which was a significant shift from their earlier experiences as high school athletes. Moreover, the transfer portal recruitment process highlighted changes in the priorities for athletes as they became more selective in choosing their new school. Unlike their high school selves who were eager to accept offers from anywhere, the athletes and the portal were more focused on finding schools that aligned with their academic and athletic goals as well as their personal values. This shift in priorities added to the complexity of their decision making and further contributed to the negative emotions and stress associated with their stent in the liminal phase.

The liminal state itself is one of uncertainty. This uncertainty for the athletes and the sample also heightened feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. The negative feelings and fear associated with not being picked up by another school caused significant stress. The athletes in the study voiced specific concerns about their athletic future while waiting in the transfer portal. The stress was heightened by the lack of backup plans other than athletics. Only one of the athletes had a clear path in mind if they didn't continue in college athletics. However, nine of the 10 athletes had no alternative plans, if they were not going to be picked up by another school.

During this time athletes felt a sense of isolation and loss of athletic identity. The athletes were no longer part of their previous team but had not yet been incorporated into a new one. This disconnection with their former teammates and anxiety about what was next created a sense of emotional instability. Participants described how the strain of the transfer process led to negative

interactions with former teammates, as well as increased self-doubt and disappointment, which they did not feel as high school students when recruited for the first time.

External Supports

Despite the significant negative emotions and stress that guided the liminal experience, this study found that positive external support systems were crucial in helping athletes and navigate these feelings and were significant to the overall transfer portal process. External supports were defined as individuals who are not directly involved with the athletes' athletic lives, such as family members friends or former coaches. The athletes in this study reported these external supports played a key role in helping them manage their emotions and the uncertainty of the liminal phase. All participants in the study describe the positive influence of family members who provided encouragement, advice, and practical assistance during the transfer process. For example, some athletes initially faced resistance from families when wanting to transfer. However, once they understood the emotional and physical toll that the initial programs were taking on their loved ones, they became more supportive. These supportive relationships helped the athletes feel more confident and grounded as the feelings of negativity in the liminal space grew. An addition to familial supports, friends and social circles also provided crucial emotional support for these athletes. These individuals offer guidance and empathy to assist with the logistical challenges of the transfer process. The presence of supportive networks provided the athletes with a sense of stability in normalcy during this time of significant uncertainty.

The liminal phase associated with the athletic transfer process was riddled with uncertainty, emotional upheaval, and a sense of disconnection both from their previous and from their potential athletic futures. This transitional phase offered athletes the opportunity for growth

and transformation but also presented significant emotional challenges. The lack of knowledge about the transfer process combined with the emotional stress and isolation from former teammates creates a challenging environment for athletes navigating the transfer portal. However, the presence of positive external supports played a crucial role in alleviating some of those negative stressors associated with the liminal experience. Family members, friends and social circles provide essential guidance, encouragement, and helped create a more positive emotional state for the athletes as they navigated the portal process. In such an uncertain time, adequate support for the athletes allowed them to be better positioned to successfully transition into the third phase of liminality.

The post-liminal phase, where the women of color were being integrated into new athletic programs was essential to completing the liminal experience. Overall, the liminal phase of the transfer portal process, while challenging, offered athletes a chance to redefine their identities, set new goals, and ultimately find a better fit athletically and academically at their new home. The external support systems these athletes relied on are instrumental to helping them navigate the ambiguity and uncertainty of this transitional period. As athletes moved through the transfer portal, they not only confronted these challenges, but also embraced the opportunities for growth and change through the liminality process.

Post liminal

The process of transferring colleges as an athlete can be a transformative and complex process particularly for women of color. After exiting the transfer portal, these athletes entered the final stage of their liminal transition. The post-liminal phase guided the athlete through emerging from the uncertainty of the liminal stage. The liminal stage was the period of

ambiguity in which the athletes shed their previous athletic identities but were not yet reaggregated into new teams. As they transitioned into their new athletic roles in schools, athletes enter a phase of incorporation, where they integrated into new teams, relationships, and campus cultures. The athletes in this study shared a diverse experience during the post-liminal phase revealing challenges and facilitators to successful transitions. Four major themes emerged from the interviews (**Table 4.3**). These include athletes experiencing academic disruption, barriers to incorporation, facilitators to incorporation, and the importance of reflection as the athletes integrated into their new environments.

Academic Disruption

One significant challenge faced by the participants of the study was disruption to their academic progress. This disruption refers to the need to repeat courses, change academic majors or the delay of academic services and accommodation when transitioning into new institutions. One common scenario between the participants was the need to switch academic majors as they arrived at their new institutions. Seven of the 10 participants also experienced complications when transferring credits, with many having to retake courses that they had taken at previous institutions. Athletes made assumptions that their credits would transfer swiftly into their new academic institutions. However, that was far from the reality. Athletes had to retake several courses because previous courses were not accepted by their new institution or did not meet the qualifications that they needed for their degree, which posed a significant obstacle.

Additionally, achieving the needed academic accommodations for athletes with educational disabilities also caused disruption in their academic process. Amber, who has dyslexia, struggled significantly during the initial weeks of enrollment at her new institution. The

support she received at her previous school was incomparable to the assistance offered at her new institution. The lack of accommodation led to poor grades initially. Other athletes had similar experiences. The accommodations they required were not seamlessly transferred, which caused challenges in adjusting to their new academic setting.

Sienna was the only graduate transfer in the sample. She experienced minimal academic disruption, but recognized the difficulties faced by her teammates. The variation in academic experiences highlights the reality of academic challenges faced by the athletes who decide to transfer. Though academic disruption caused some difficulties in incorporation into the new academic environment, it was far from the only barrier.

Barriers to Incorporation

Incorporating into their new athletic teams posed a range of challenges for these participants. One significant barrier was dealing with accusations of being whitewashed, particularly among those who transferred from Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) to HBCUs. Three participants faced these accusations from their coaches and teammates, with their environments labeling them as too assimilated or not black enough for the team. This term whitewash was used as an insult implying that the athletes had adopted the culture and distanced themselves from their racial identity. These experiences were particularly prevalent among Black women in the sample. Ebony is one of the athletes who described how her coach used this term to try and change personal characteristics about her. She felt pressure to act in a certain way that was perceived more in line with the team's cultural expectations. Similarly, Jade faced comparable accusations which intensified as she adjusted to a new style of play at her new school. The style of play she experienced in the SWAC was not comparable to previous

experiences in other leagues. This new dynamic of play led her to develop a thick skin in order to handle the harsh environment and the perceptions of her teammates, who believed she might not be able to handle the pressures due to her background playing at a predominantly white institution.

Additionally, five of the participants struggled with adapting quickly to different demands with their new teams, particularly given the lack of time to adjust as transfer athletes. They were expected to perform immediately and at the highest level. The transition was particularly tough for those who were not granted the grace and time needed to adjust to new styles of play, new offensive programs, or just a new coaching style. All expressed that she felt she was expected to adopt too quickly without the needed support to do so. Sienna also shared the struggle with a fast-paced transition and ultimately requested a one-on-one conversation with her coach to express her concerns. After addressing these concerns, she found the support needed to adjust to the new system and improve her performance.

All 10 participants encountered having to navigate some sort of negative stereotypes surrounding NCAA transfer athletes. These stereotypes often suggested that transfers were less skilled, lacked loyalty, or merely seeking better playing time. They did not account for athletes pursuing personal or academic growth. These negative stereotypes and assumptions often overshadowed the true reason for the athlete transferring. The assumption that transfers athletes were failures and not tough enough to handle the challenges at their initial institution could significantly hinder the athlete's ability to be fully accepted into their new teams. Though there were impactful barriers that hindered the incorporation of the athletes into their new teams, there were equally impactful facilitators that aided athletes and successful transitions.

Facilitators to Incorporation

Despite the negativity of the barriers, several factors played a key role in helping athletes navigate the challenges and the post-liminal phase. The most significant facilitators were finding the right communication style from coaches, developing positive interpersonal relationships, and achieving a favorable person-environment fit. One of the most critical factors for a smooth transition for the population was the relationship with the new coaching staff. Having an open-door policy gave the athlete a sense of relief and support that was absent from their previous institution. Continuing a sense of constant communication and attentiveness from the new coaching staff helped create a sense of belonging and support with the new athletes as they incorporated into the new setting. The level of care extended beyond just athletic performance and contributed to the holistic sense of well-being that was a crucial part of the successful post-liminal transition.

Forming strong interpersonal relationships both within the team and within the larger campus community was another significant factor to easing the athletic transition. For some athletes these relationships were built with teammates who had also transferred. Others found support through campus community groups including fellowship of student athletes and on campus sororities. These relationships outside of the athletics department allowed athletes to develop a more comprehensive sense of community and sense of belonging aiding into their integration within the new campuses.

Finding the right environment was an integral part of successful integration. Athletes in the study who transferred to HBCUs found a new sense of community and connection, particularly because those schools allowed them to feel more at home and understood by the

overall campus community. Violet who had previously attended a PWI, felt a sense of relief and belonging upon arriving at her new HBCU. Similarly, Coral who transitioned multiple times finally found an environment that felt loving and welcoming. The fit between the athletes' personal needs and culture of the school can significantly impact the overall experience and aid in a successful post-liminal transition.

Reflecting on the liminal phase played an important role in post-liminal successes. It allowed athletes to understand their experiences and the needs that their identity craved. Eight of the 10 participants engaged in some sort of reflection during their post-liminal transition. This reflection enabled athletes like Violet and Amber to recognize their priorities, with Violet focusing more on academics and Amber realizing the importance of managing her academic and athletic life. Reflection also helped athletes like Siena to gain clarity about the needs of women of color and the collegiate athletic space. This reflection caused a sense of empowerment and aided them in making future decisions that aligned with their personal goals. Reflection also helped them to realize the importance of self-awareness before making future transfer decisions, ensuring that athletes are more thoughtful about their next steps. This reflective process, as evidenced by the athlete's experience, appeared to lead to a greater self-awareness and better outcomes and post-liminality. The athletes who reflected on their experiences were more likely to feel settled and satisfied in their new environments, suggesting that the reflection is a powerful tool to successful integration.

The experiences of these women of color transferring within NCAA Athletics highlight the complex and transformative nature of the post-liminal phase. Academic disruption and barriers created challenges while navigating new environments. These were significant obstacles,

but the post-liminal phase also illuminated strong facilitators to incorporation. These included creating new relationships with coaches, teams, and campus, and finding the right person environment fit. Furthermore, the reflective practices of these athletes empowered them to take ownership of their own experiences. This facilitated a smoother transition and more successful post-liminal outcomes at their new institution. Reflecting on their journey allowed these athletes to adapt and learn from their challenges, build new identities, and reintegrate into their new athletic roles.

Implications

This dissertation explored the experiences of women of color who utilized the NCAA Transfer Portal. The findings focused on the challenges and barriers they encounter during the transition process. This research shined a light on several critical themes defining these athletes' experiences. The preliminal phases illuminated the importance of intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics. After separation, the athletes' liminal phase was rooted in self-doubt, uncertainty, and the need for a positive external support system. Once the athletes have emerged from the uncertainty of liminality, the post-liminal transition highlighted both barriers and facilitators to a successful integration into new teams. The implication section will translate these major findings into theoretical and practical recommendations that can be used by coaches and administrators to enhance the transfer process of women of color in college sports.

Theoretical Contributions and Expansions

The major theoretical framework that shaped this study was Turner's theory of liminality (Turner, 1969). A subsequent theory also helped to summarize the findings including Transition Theory (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The research was also assessed through an intersectional lens

as appropriate for the study population (Crenshaw, 1991). The theory of liminality allows for the theoretical to be personified in the practical by examining the NCAA transfer portal. The portal is a tangible piece of the athletic experience that highlights the betwixt and between phase of a college athlete's career.

As the literature review demonstrates, athletic transitions are frequently explored (Henriksen et al., 2023; Park et al., 2012; Swim et al., 2023). However, like these studies, the majority of the articles examine how athletes transition into or out of their athletics careers. There is little current research exploring the transitions that occur between and during an athlete's career. Equally as researched is athlete sense of belonging and how they navigate their athletic identity through these beginning and ending career transitions. The freshness of the transfer portal impacts the available scholarship examining athletes transitioning *through* athletic careers. Because of its modernity, the relevant research available is extremely limited. The current study contributes to the existing gap.

Though it may seem in retrograde, the first stage of liminality, the preliminal stage, does mirror existing research on athletes exiting their careers. The same could be said for the final stage, post liminal, and the current research on athlete transition into athletics. The most impactful contributions of this study to the existing empirical research will be the findings from the betwixt and between stage of athlete transition; their lived experiences as they enter, live in, and exited the transfer portal. Lastly, because of the intentional selection of the population, this study will also contribute to the gender gap, and lack of diversity in previous research samples.

The current study shows that the preliminal phase is marked by intrapersonal perceptions, interpersonal dynamics, and campus culture play a significant role in the athlete's desire for

athletics separation. If the athlete is experiencing negative feelings in any of these areas their sense of belonging is poorly impacted. Having a positive sense of belonging is imperative to athlete success and retention. Cooper and Newton (2021), also concur that this is particularly important for athletes who are women of color. Creating a more positive sense of self, cultivating positive social relationships and having constructive engagement within the campus culture is critical to the success of women athletes of color.

The liminal phase is manifested in uncertainty, negative feelings, and confusion about the transfer and recruitment process. This is very similar to the loss of athlete identity in times of transition. This study finds the athletes felt an extreme sense of disconnection to self and community. This disconnect could be combatted by the athletes surrounding themselves with positive external supports. These findings mimic similar significant findings in previous studies conducted on similar athletic populations (Couch et al., 2023). Though there were similar findings, the lack of portal knowledge impacting athletes' feelings was not found in any previous research. This could be due to the overall lack of research surrounding the transfer portal.

The last set of significant findings occurred within the post-liminal phase of institutional transition, Impactful findings include: academic disruption, barriers and facilitators to incorporation, and the need to implement athlete reflection. Findings in this section are similar to research related to athletes transitioning into college athletics from high school sport (Gerlach, 2018). However, the power of reflection applied after athletic transitions seems to be a new finding. The athletes in the study who used a reflexive process expressed higher successes in integrating into their new teams and lower desires to transfer again.

Practical Recommendations

This study is qualitative in nature and gives rich and consistent insights into the lived experiences of women of color. In the future, comparing and contrasting the results of this study with previous works can help to derive important practical implications for athletic departments and coaches. This will allow for appropriate considerations to improve athlete experience and the overall successes of the women of color in their programs.

As Crenshaw (1991) suggested it is important to view women of color through an intersectional lens: understanding the uniqueness to both their gender and racial identities. Intersectionality is the way to understand how an individual's different social identities overlap and can impact their experiences in the world. Similar to life experiences, overlapping identities do impact the experiences of athletes (Cooper et al., 2015; Couch et al., 2023). It is important for coaches to understand the identity of their athletes. They are not just athletes, just women, or just people of color; they are all of those identities and more simultaneously.

The findings of this study provide several actionable recommendations for college coaches and administrators. These recommendations are especially pertinent to those who are responsible for supporting women athletes of color. These recommendations aim to aid these athletes as they navigate the NCAA transfer portal.

Academic Support

Transfer athletes face a unique set of academic challenges when they transfer institutions. Not only do they have to navigate the needs of their academic major, but they also have to navigate the requirements of the NCAA progress towards degree requirements, and the academic requirements of their respective team. Trying to transfer course credits from one institution to

another is another hurdle they have to jump. In order to streamline the process, coaches and administrators can connect athletes with the appropriate members of the academic support staff and registrar's office. Also providing clarity about team and NCAA academic requirements can minimize transfer academic disruption. Providing clear and direct information about on campus academic resources outside of the athletic sector is also recommended to minimize transfer academic disruptions.

Adding additional touch points for athletes transitioning out of institutions will help to alleviate academic disruption as they enter new institutions. One example of this is an exit check list for athletes who have declared the transfer portal. This would vary by institution but would be a list of the appropriate paperwork that athletes would collect before they completely separate from their initial institution (**Figure 5.1**).

Similarly to the exit check list, adding an entrance check list for institutions accepting transfer athletes will also help to avoid extensive academic disruptions (**Figure 5.2**). Both should be easily accessible through athletic websites. Having this additional touch point will aid limiting the impact of academic disruption for the transfer athletes. Additionally, it gives the athletes more knowledge and academic transparency through the transfer process.

Coach Training

One of the most direct and impactful recommendations derived from this study's findings is for coaches to undergo two distinct sets of training:

1. Training program to teach and improve interpersonal communication skills.
2. Training to increase cultural competencies.

Most of the most significant indicators of an athlete's desire to transfer was the relationship or lack thereof with their coaching staff. Having a better interpersonal and cultural understanding of their athletes will ultimately lead to better athletic and holistic outcomes for women athletes of color. Training coaches to be knowledgeable and intentional about creating an inclusive environment that embraces athlete diversity is recommended. This will help to mitigate feelings of exclusion and disconnection. Decreasing these feelings can help not only retain these athletes and keep them from transferring but can also aid in the post-liminal integration process after transfer. Training coaches to improve interpersonal skills and cultural competency can have a positive impact on individual athletes and overall team dynamics.

Integration

The successful integration of transfer athletes into new teams is critical for their success. From the interviews and compiled findings, this study recommends teams and coaches implore a mentorship program to pair transfer athletes with established athletes in the program. These intentional pairings can be beneficial in providing the needed social and emotional support for post-liminal success. Coaches can also implement processes of self-reflection into their practices and team plans. Journaling and informal check-ins can be easy and less time intrusive ways to implement reflection. This will allow coaches to have a more personal relationship with their athletes and can improve reaggregation.

Limitations

This study was limited to women of color. Specifically, women of color who have participated in Division 1 Athletics and have utilized the NCAA transfer portal. Furthermore, the study was limited to those who had transferred using the transfer portal and have competed in

their respective sports' major competition season at more than one Division I institution.

Because of the specificity of the targeted study population, the participant sample is particularly fixed.

Along with the studies specified recruitment criteria, after review of the participant demographics, additional study boundaries emerged. Though it was not a specified requirement, all interviewed participants are currently enrolled and competing at schools in the southern and southeastern regions of the United States. Additionally, all participants were members of team sports. The specificity of the sample shines a much-needed light on an under researched athletic population. However, because of this selectivity of the sample it may not represent the broader demographics of college athletics. Though the study focuses on a diverse sample within college athletics, the sample itself is semi homogenous, and all findings may not be generalizable to all athletes. Furthermore, the original recruitment sample was not a random sample, and purposive sampling was used for initial recruitment. Because of its subjective nature, purposive sampling is subject to the researcher's selection bias. Outside of the original sample recruitment, additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling. The personal nature of snowball sampling also reduces the randomness of the sample. Additionally, the researcher does not have control of communication between participants who are acquainted with one another.

An additional limitation to this study is that all the participants are at least one academic semester removed from their transfer. No participant was more than five academic semesters removed from their most recent time in the transfer portal. The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of women of color who utilized the transfer portal. The interview guide questions asked specific questions about each participant's experience in the portal. However,

some of the participants were at least two years removed from the portal. Their recollection of emotions, time in the portal, information regarding their experiences may be less detailed than if they were interviewed as soon as they transitioned to a new team.

Study Design

Despite providing rich and in-depth insights about a study's population, because of its subjectivity qualitative research can also have limitations. The qualitative study design involves human analysis and interpretation of participant interviews. The researcher's personal perspectives and biases can influence the analysis of the data collected. This study used semi-structured interviews, and at times additional follow up questions that were not a part of the original interview guide were asked to participants in order to gain deeper insights of their experiences. Additionally, the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews are categorized and coded by the researcher and are also susceptible to the researchers' interpretations. These interviews provide detailed descriptions of each participants' experiences, which can be very specific, and may not be overly generalizable. Due to the specified descriptions of their experiences, some details were withheld in order to maintain participant confidentiality, however the researcher does not anticipate this affecting the richness of the data. The qualitative nature of the study does not allow for a statistical analysis or quantifiable data to measure the strength of the relationship between the variables and the participants experiences. In summary, while qualitative research provides deep insights into human behavior and experiences it does have challenges with generalizability researcher bias and subjectivity. These limitations have been addressed through careful methodological practices researcher positionality and transparency and discussing coding and findings with the research chair.

To combat the express limitations of this qualitative study several strategies were employed to enhance the validity and applicability of the findings. First, triangulation was used by collecting data from participants involved in different sports and at different institutions: by achieving the correct method of study and by cross checking the results and findings to reduce biases. Member checking was also used to review and confirm the findings and interpretations. This analytical step help ensure the accuracy of the data and findings. Lastly, reflexivity was used by the researcher to minimize researcher bias and reflect on their own assumptions and values. These strategies helped to strengthen the study's conclusions and offer a balance of in-depth findings to the specified research purpose.

Future Research

This study primarily examined the experiences of women of color as they navigate the NCAA transfer portal. Though unintentional the study sample included only team sport athletes and athletes who either identified as Black, or Black comprised one of their racial identities. Future research should explore a boarder range of athletes. This could include further exploration into the transfer portal focusing on any of the following areas: individual sport athletes, further exploration involving equivalency sport athletes (the current sample only included one equivalency sport athlete), athletes who identify as men, or other historically marginalized or minoritized athletes. Additionally, all athletes in the current study are enrolled at institutions in the southern and southeastern regions of the United States. Expanding the samples geography could enhance future research. Similarly, the study was limited to NCAA Division I. Future research could be conducted utilizing a sample, but from a NCAA Division II or III, NJCAA athletes, or athletes who compete at the NAIA levels.

Future research could also explore the long-term impact of transferring on athletes academic and athletic careers. This could provide valuable insights into the successes of transfer athletes, post transfer. Additionally, a longitudinal study could examine how transfer impacts athletes beyond their college athletic careers. Another study could also be conducted using a similar population but taking a qualitative approach. Paring the findings from this study with statistical data from future qualitative findings could help give a richer understanding of the experiences of women of color who utilize the transfer portal.

This dissertation contributes to the growing body of research on the challenges faced by women of color in collegiate sports, specifically as they navigate the transfer process. By transcribing the experiences of the study population and compiling the significant findings the study can make the appropriate and actionable recommendations for coaches and administrators. The implications outlined above aim to foster a more supportive, inclusive, and successful environment for transfer athletes. This will ultimately aid women of color as they navigate the complexities of collegiate sport and the NCAA transfer process. Therefore, future research is needed to fully understand the experiences of women of color as they navigate the NCAA transfer portal.

Conclusion

This dissertation sought to explore the experiences of women of color and how they navigate the NCAA transfer portal. By conducting 10 interviews with athletes meeting the inclusion criteria the study found specific themes that coincide with the distinct stages of Turner's theory of liminality. These athletes face a range of obstacles that discourage retention and decrease positive emotional state, and drive the athletes desire to enter the transfer portal.

However, separation from their original teams creates a new set of challenges seen during the liminal phase. Difficulties can continue as they try to integrate into new teams. The recommendations and creation of targeted transfer athlete programs including academic support, peer mentorship, and increased intention around cultivating interpersonal relationships could facilitate smoother athletic transitions.

The findings suggest that coaches play a particularly important role in creating supportive and inclusive environments that acknowledge the unique challenges faced by women of color in sport. Practical recommendations include clarity, transparency, and support surrounding the needs and requirements specific to academic transfers. Additionally, fostering a team culture and environment that values diversity and promote individual integration into the team setting is crucial to the success of transfer athletes at new institutions. The study also highlights the need for cultural competency of coaches and social structure which is critical for women of color who face both the emotional tolls of being an athlete and the additional systematic stressors related to race and gender.

From a theoretical view, this study contributes to the current collection of research by examining an underrepresented population across the larger body of sport related studies. It also aids in filling the current gap in research related to the NCAA transfer portal. Additionally, the current study expands the current understanding of how intersectionality, specifically combined impacts of race and gender, shape the academic and athletic experiences of women of color in collegiate sports.

However, the study does have boundaries. The specified focus, women of color (identifying Black as at the or least one of their racial identities) in team sports, limits the overall

generalizability to all college athletes. Future research should expand the scope to include athletes from a wider variety of sports, competition levels, and identities to better understand the transfer portal and process. Additional methods or study designs including longitudinal and qualitative approaches could be used to investigate the impact of transferring on women of color in their athletic careers and beyond.

In conclusion, the experiences of women of color in the NCAA transfer portal reveal both the challenges faced and the resilience and adaptability they exhibit during transition. By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommendations outlined in Chapter 5 of the dissertation, college sports programs can foster a more inclusive and diverse environments for all athletes. The research underscores the importance of providing equitable environments for women of color in college athletics. Furthermore, it lays the groundwork for future efforts aimed at improving the transfer process and experience for all college athletes.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

September 11, 2024

Robin L. Hardin
UTK - Coll of Education, Hlth, & Human - Kinesiology, Recreation & Sports Studies

Re: UTK IRB-24-08437-XM

Study Title: Intersectionality and the College Athlete Transfer Process: The Experiences of Women of Color in the NCAA Transfer Portal

Dear Robin L. Hardin:

The Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) reviewed your application for the above referenced project and determined that your application is eligible for **exempt** review under 45 CFR 46.101, Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your application has been determined to comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval of your application (version 1.1) as submitted, including:

Documents Stamped:

- Revised Informed Consent (English) - (Version 2.0)
- Recruitment email-Revised - (Version 2.0)
- Interview Guide - (Version 1.0)

that have been dated and stamped IRB approved. You are approved to enroll a maximum of 25 participants. Approval of this study will be valid from 09/11/2024 - 09/10/2027.

Any revisions in the approved application, consent forms, instruments, recruitment materials, etc., must be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Approval of this study is valid for three years. If a Study Update Form is not submitted in iMedRIS and approved by the IRB prior to 09/10/2027, the study will be automatically closed by the IRB and no further study activity will be permitted until a Study Update Form is received. Please be sure to also submit a Study Closure Request (Form 7) when all research activity, including data analysis, has been completed.

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement

1534 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1529

865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb.utk.edu

BIG ORANGE. BIG IDEAS.

Flagship Campus of the University of Tennessee System

Sincerely,



Lora Beebe, Ph.D., PMHNP-BC, FAAN
Chair

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1534 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb.utk.edu

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APPENDIX B

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title:

Intersectionality and the College Athlete Transfer Process: The Experiences of Women of Color in the NCAA Transfer Portal

Researchers: Dr. Robin Hardin, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Hunter Porter, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be a part of this research study because you have been identified as a transfer athlete on a women's collegiate team who may have utilized the transfer portal. We believe you can offer valuable perspectives of your experiences with the transfer process.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of the research study is to examine Women of Color and their experiences with the NCAA transfer portal and transfer process.

Who is conducting this research study?

This study is being conducted by researchers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your interview will last approximately 1 hour.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that should take approximately 1 hour to complete. You will be asked questions pertaining to your transfer experiences. This will include questions about your sport participation, recruitment, and your transfer experiences. Additional screening criteria questions demographic information will also be asked.

What will happen if I say "No, I want to be in this research study"?

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. Your decision to participate/not participate in this research study will not affect your relationship with the University of Tennessee.

What happens if I say “Yes” but change my mind later?

If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is your interview may be excluded from analysis.

Are there any possible risks to me?

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. For example, you may be asked questions involving personal opinions or perspectives on your transfer experience. If at any point you are uncomfortable with participating in this study, you can exit the study without penalty or consequence. You may also skip a question if you do not wish to share your answer or if the question is not applicable to your experience.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

We do not expect you to benefit directly from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about athlete experiences in the transfer portal. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future including, coaches, athletes, and athletic administration.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

The data collected from your interview (audio recordings/transcripts and consent forms) will be securely stored on a password protected hard drive. Only research personnel will have access to this information. The information collected from your responses will be used in the final research project.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will keep your information to use for future research or publication. Your interview responses and any other identifiable data will be securely stored on a password protected hard drive in a locked office, and only accessible to qualified research personnel.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem, contact the researchers, Hunter Porter (hporter8@vols.utk.edu) or Robin Hardin (robh@utk.edu).

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form, and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance prior to the start of the interview to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I understand I can stop the interview to ask them. I am agreeing to provide consent to have my experiences transcribed and referred to under a pseudonym for the research study, and in publication. I have received a copy of the consent document, and I am ready to begin the interview.

Participant Signature: _____

Date _____

(Researcher use only)

Recorded Verbal Consent: _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello!

My name is Hunter Porter, and I am writing to request your participation in a study regarding your experience with the transfer portal. Participation is voluntary and confidential and should take approximately 60 minutes to complete. Participation is limited to the following criteria:

- Participant identifies as a Women
- Participant is a has participated in collegiate athletics.
- Participant is a transfer and has participated in competition seasons for at least two different collegiate programs.
- Participant entered and exited the transfer portal
- Participant identifies as a Women of color.

This study has been approved by the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the approval number is UTK IRB- (Insert Number). The IRB oversees all research conducted through the University of Tennessee to ensure that it is conducted properly.

If you choose to participate in the study, more specific information and details can be founded in the attached informed consent form. The interview will be conducted via zoom. Please contact me directly if you wish to participate in the stud or if you have any questions regarding the study. You can send questions and inquiries to (hporter8@vols.utk.edu) or to my faculty advisor, Dr. Robin Hardin (robh@utk.edu). If you choose to respond to this email with

questions regarding the study or interest in participating, I encourage you to respond from a personal email address in order to protect your confidentiality. Your university email address may be deemed public information and subject to a public records request depending on the state laws that your institution is subject to.

Best,

Hunter Porter

APPENDIX D
SCHEDULING CONFIRMATION

Hello,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. As a reminder the interview will be used to inform the research findings and hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the transfer process for women of color.

Attached you will find the informed consent form. Though there are two attachments, they are the same document just in different formats. The form will give you more information regarding the study and its purpose. Please review, sign, and return the document prior to the start of the interview. I was able to secure the time you requested for the interview.

Here is the link to our meeting: (Zoom Link)

See you at (specified interview time)

I look forward to hearing your perspectives,

Hunter Porter

Doctoral Candidate

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Screening question

1. Please answer with a “yes” or “no” response to the following screening questions.
2. Do you self-identify as a Woman?
3. Have you participated in college athletics between Fall 2019 and the current semester?
4. Are you a transfer athlete who has utilized the transfer portal?
5. Have you competed in your primary sport competition season at more than one institution?
6. Do you self-identify as a Woman of Color?

Pre-Interview Script

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences with me. Before we start the interview, have you read the informed consent? If not, please do so now. If you have, do you have any questions regarding the consent form or the research study itself?

Do you agree with the following statement of consent from the consent document provided?

“I have read this form, and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance prior to the start of the interview to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I understand I can stop the interview to ask them. I am agreeing to provide consent to have my experiences transcribed and referred to under a pseudonym for the

research study, and in publication. I have received a copy of the consent document, and I am ready to begin the interview.”

Interview Questions

Background

1. What is your primary sport and competition season?
2. How many total years have you participated in this sport?
3. What is primary position?
4. What made you pursue this spot as your primary activity?
5. Did you play any other sports at the Varsity high school or college levels?

Recruitment

1. Approximately how many college visits or combines did you attend before committing to the school where you played your first college competition season?
2. Describe your recruitment process for your initial institution?
3. Why did you commit to play at your initial institution?

Initial Institution experiences

1. How would you describe your preseason experience once you arrived on campus?
2. Can you describe your experience as an athlete during the competition season?
3. How would you describe your relationship with others in your program (coaches, staff, player and/admin)?
4. When did you make the decision to transfer and why?
5. How and when did you inform your coaches and teammates about your decision to enter the portal?

6. Did your relationships with program members change after the notification? If so, how?

Portal Process

1. Before entering the portal what was your knowledge of the transfer process?
2. What was the process or procedure you followed to enter the portal?
3. When you entered did you have any a particular school in mind you wanted to transfer to?
4. How would you describe the recruitment process while in the portal?
5. Were their specific characteristics you were looking for in your new program?
6. What were some of the emotions you experienced while in the portal waiting to commit?
7. How long where you in the Portal?
8. How long from your commitment to your second school did it take for you to arrive on your new campus?
9. Did you have a plan B if you did not get picked up by another program?

External Factors

1. Were your teammates supportive of your decision?
2. How did your family respond to your decision to transfer?
3. What external supports did you have when you entered the portal (family, friends, partner)?
4. Did your academic support staff assist in aiding your transfer?
5. Did NIL have any influence on leaving your first school or your commitment to next?
6. Do you feel that you had the appropriate amount of support you needed to transfer?
7. Were there any factors that made you consider not to transfer? If so, what were they?

8. Do you feel there are stereotypes or assumptions made about transfer athletes? If so, what are they and where do they come from?

Transfer institution

1. Why did you choose your transfer institution?
2. How would you describe the atmosphere of the program when you arrived as a transfer?
3. How would you describe your preseason experience once you arrived on campus?
4. Can you describe your experience as an athlete during the competition season?
5. How would you describe your relationship with others in your program (coaches, staff, player and/admin)?
6. What were some similarities and differences between your experiences at both schools?

Final thoughts

1. How would you summarize your overall transfer experience?
2. Is there anything you wish would have happened differently?
3. Do you feel like being a woman of color had an influence on your transfer process?
4. If you could go back and have a conversation with yourself before you entered the portal, what would you say?
5. Before we conclude the interview, is there anything about your experience that you wish to share that was not covered?

Conclusion

I would like to thank you again for taking the time to speak with me and share your story. As a reminder this interview will be transcribed and may be paraphrased or quoted using a pseudonym

in the final research project. If there is nothing else you wish to add, we will conclude the interview at this time.

APPENDIX F

Table 3.1
Participant Demographics

Assigned Pseudonym	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Sport Scholarship Type	Total Years Playing	Total College Transfers	Current Division I Level of Play
Ruby	Black	Head Count	10	2	Group of
Jade	Black	Head Count	11	2	HBCU
Hazel	Biracial	Head Count	10	1	HBCU
Ebony	Black	Head Count	7	1	HBCU
Violet	Biracial	Equivalency	10	1	HBCU
Coral	Black	Head Count	16	3	Power 4
Sienna	Black	Head Count	10	1	Power 4
Amber	Black	Head Count	14	1	HBCU
Olive	Biracial	Head Count	11	1	Power 4
Scarlett	Black	Head Count	10	1	HBCU

APPENDIX G
FINDINGS TABLES

Table 4.1
Preliminal Findings

Theme	Definition
Intrapersonal Dynamics	The internalization of feelings and experiences of these athletes and how they perceive their self in their initial environment.
Interpersonal Relationships	The relationships built while at their initial institution: involving the athlete and one or more people. This can include teammates, coaches, administration, support staff, or with students and faculty in a non-athletic space.
Campus Culture	The Collective identity that's created by both the students and the institution to represent the campus' norms, values and traditions.

Table 4.2: *Liminal Findings*

Theme	Definition
Lack of Transfer Knowledge	Little or no understanding about the college or athletic transfer process or regulations.
Negative Feelings	The negative feelings in the liminal phase include: loss of athletic identity, uncertainty, and anxiety about the future.
Juxtaposition to Recruitment	The noticeable differences between the athletes' high school recruitment process to their initial school and their transfer athlete recruitment process.
External Supports	An athlete's social support network outside of the sport space. A person who did not have direct daily responsibilities with the athlete's teams.

Table 4.3
Post-liminal Findings

Theme	Definition
Academic Disruption	The retaking of a course or course work that an athlete completed at a previous institution, the necessary changing of an academic major, or the delayed implementation of academic services.
Barriers to Incorporation	Three additional barriers were found these included, accusations of Whitewashing, adapting to a new playing style, and navigating negative stereotypes
Facilitators to Incorporation	Three facilitators were identified: securing the needed communication and coaching style, creating healthy interpersonal relationships, and achieving a positive person-environment fit.

APPENDIX H

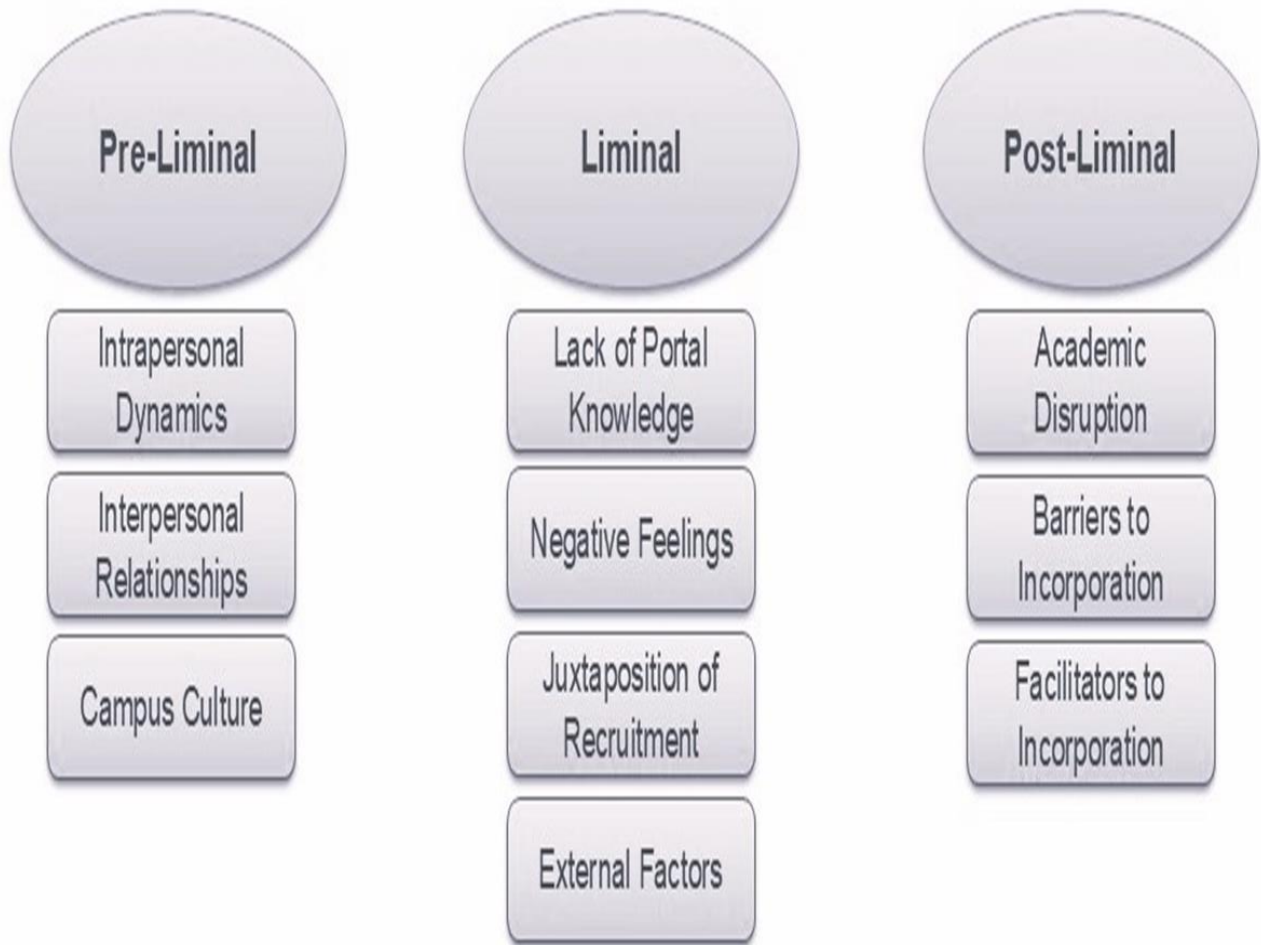


Figure 2.1
Findings Organizational Chart

APPENDIX I

Institutional Transfer Check List: Exit List

- Notify appropriate athletic personnel of your intent to transfer
- Drop all courses for the upcoming semester
- Notify your major college and college partners of your intent to transfer
 - College academic advisor, Financial aid, and room and board officials
- Obtain necessary paperwork head of transfer
 - Gather Syllabi from previous courses, locate and request transcripts, get copies of academic accommodation or student disability paperwork.
- Once you have your paperwork connect with your student services coordinator to check your paperwork and advise on any additional needs
- Connect with your Athletic Trainer to collect medical history documentation

Figure 5.1
Institutional Transfer Check List: Exit List

APPENDIX J

Institutional Transfer Check List: Entry List

- Contact the Office of the Registrar and Transfer Student Coordinator
- Identify your intended major and contact your advisor to start planning for upcoming course schedules
- Schedule a meeting with your advisor to compare syllabi and transcripts to identify additional transfer credits
- Meet with athletic compliance office to insure athletic eligibility.
- If appropriate, contact student disability service to transfer and request academic accommodations.
- Connect with your Athletic Trainer to share medical history and documentation

Figure 5.2

Institutional Transfer Check List: Entry List

VITA

Hunter Porter earned a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication from Midwestern State University where she was also a member of the Volleyball Team. She then completed a Master of Science in Sport Administration from the Arkansas State University. Following graduation, Hunter worked as a collegiate volleyball coach at the Iowa Lakes Community College, and Florida International University. Additionally, she served as the Director for two non-profit sports clubs: Texas Advantage and Drive Nation in their satellite locations. Upon graduation in May, Hunter will earn a Doctor of Philosophy in Kinesiology and Sport Studies. Her research primarily focuses on athlete experience and underrepresented populations in sport.