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A DECENTRALIZED APPROACH TO CONFRONT THE DEBASEMENT OF BLACK  
MALE STUDENT ATHLETES WHO ATTEND PWI'S

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Educational Leadership

By:

Ronald W. Whitaker, II

December 2014

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Ronald W. Whitaker, II

2014

**DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

***Dissertation***

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

***Presented by:***

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**July 11, 2014**

A Decentralized Approach to Confront the Debasement of Black Male Student Athletes Who Attend PWI's

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## ABSTRACT

# A DECENTRALIZED APPROACH TO CONFRONT THE DEBASEMENT OF BLACK MALE STUDENT ATHLETES WHO ATTEND PWI'S

By

Ronald W. Whitaker, II

December 2014

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Rick McCown

The debasement and “niggering<sup>1</sup>” of Black male student athletes who attend PWI’s is an issue that has been well documented since the mid to late sixties (Edwards, 1969, Olson, 1968). This population has been negatively stereotyped as being superior athletically, but inferior intellectually (Edwards, 1984). Both scholars and practitioners have focused on other pervasive issues including: (1) the academic achievement gap that exist between Black male student athletes and their White counterparts (Harper, 2013), (2) the commercialization of college athletics (Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005), and (3) negative stereotypes that continue to plague Black male student athletes (Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett, 2008; Oseguera, 2010). There are also current monumental lawsuits including the likeness lawsuit and athlete’s right to unionize that will certainly impact the future of revenue sports for Black male student athletes.

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<sup>1</sup> A term used by Harper (2009) in his article: *Niggers no more: a critical race counternarrative on Black male student achievement at predominantly White colleges and universities.*

Through a review of literature, research, and the author's lived experience from professional practice, this *dissertation in practice* explores the psychological effects of projected negative stereotypes and how that might impact the academic and social experiences for African American Male student athletes who attend PWI's. The author employs a race-based epistemological approach to inquiry to explore the issues raised in this dissertation. Specifically, Stereotype Threat, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and the Sociology of Sport frame this work. The main argument is, racial stereotypes are still ubiquitous and pernicious for Black male student athletes who attend PWI's, and failure to see this issue as a matter of social justice, will ensure continued dismal outcomes for this population. The author suggest culturally relevant interventions to facilitating courageous conversations with Black male student athletes, and also a decentralized diversity initiative as *designs for action* that could lead to *generative impacts*. This *dissertation in practice* hopes to offer insights into the types of programs, services, psycho-educational workshops, and interventions that athletic departments or outside groups might consider for revenue playing African American male student athletes who attend PWI's.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to “Badnews.” Your courage to tell the truth and acknowledge the “elephant in the room,” is why I am able to share this story today (*and for that, I thank you*). Thanks for your “realness,” thanks for your ability to endure, and thanks for being open to engage the journey we experienced together. Without you, this critically important work would not have manifested. Although I was the face of the initiatives, you were the real star! In many ways you are right, things probably will not change during your tenure at Seahawk University. But with all my strength and the intellectual gifts that I have been blessed to receive from God; I promise to make life better for the young men you are going to mentor at the Boys and Girls club (*I remember*). Keep striving; we need “real brothers” like you to push for “authentic” change!



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***“How can I say thanks, for the things you have done for me. Things so underserved, yet you gave to prove your love for me. To God Be the Glory for the Things He Has Done. With His blood He has saved me, With His power, He has raised me.”***

First, and foremost, I give all praise, glory, and honor to the blessed trinity-*God the father who loves me, Jesus Christ who saved me, and the Holy Spirit who empowers me.* I stand at this place today, only because of His great love and plan for my life. “Weezy” I acknowledge you also. Thank you for all of your support and love throughout the years. Thanks for also saying, “I’m too smart not to have a college degree.” You have been with me throughout this journey, thus, I am eternally thank you for all of your sacrifices and words of encouragement. Keep striving, and realize the best is yet to come for you also. To my mother, you epitomize the word sacrifice. Thank you for deferring your personal wants, so that Tosh and I could attend Catholic schools, wear decent clothes, and have money for events. Even in this season of my life, you are still pushing me to the finish line. Your resilience and sacrifice is an attribute that I inspire to have.

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lol). To my precious and beautiful daughter Rayan, you motivate me to keep pressing forward. You are such a blessing from God, and it is my job to push you into your awesome purpose. It is an honor to be your father, and your 76ers game day partner (we now have more time to play “lion”). Little “Samie,” I did not forget about you, your uncle is also going to ensure that you have everything that you need to be successful in life. To my grandmother Whitaker- rest in peace, thank you for being the biggest RWWII cheerleader, and also the president of my fan club.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### The “Outsider”

I start this dissertation by acknowledging the “elephant in the room,” which is, I was not a “blue chip” athlete who played a revenue sport at a predominately White institution (PWI). In fact, I did not participate in any organized sport during my last two years in high school. Being completely transparent, had I continued to play high school basketball, at best, I would have only been a division three prospect. During the course of this work, the aforementioned disclosure has led to my personal “DuBosian” unasked question: “unasked by some through feelings of delicacy, by other through the difficulty of rightly framing it. They eye me curiously and compassionately, and then instead of saying directly (DuBois, 1903),” What qualifies an “uppity outside negro” like you to work with revenue playing Black male student athletes? They say, is it hard to get Black male athletes to relate to you, since you did not play collegiate athletics, or, how do you plan to get the collegiate athletic community to trust you?

Normally, when faced with criticisms about my ability to lead transformational change, I possess the same philosophical approach that King (1963) communicated in his epic *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, when he declared, “Seldom, if ever, do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all of the criticisms, I would have no time for constructive work.” But since I believe the critiques, preconceived biases, and pretenses of others that have emerged during this *problem of practice* journey, actually serve as a catalyst for substantive conversation regarding my contribution to the Black male student athlete discourse, I offer the following explanation.

Warren posits (2013), “affirmation prepares a son to enter the world with the confidence and ‘emotional armor’ that he needs in order not just to survive but to thrive.” The aforementioned was critically important to me during my early adolescent years (and even now), as I yearned for the attention of my father. Watching football games and debriefing them after, filled that void. Even though I was too young to understand the unique nuances of football, what I valued most, was my father inviting me into his space, where I felt affirmed as a willing participant. More explicit, our dialogue “sessions” let me know that my voice mattered. Those sessions also gave me the confidence to try out the exploits of my football heroes with peers in my West Philadelphia neighborhood.

I grew up in a neighborhood that was situated between what I call hope and despair. Hope was found three blocks to the right of my house where *Victorian-Style* homes which start at 350 thousand dollars, were the norm. The majority of those abodes were occupied by upper middle class White professionals, many of whom were lawyers, doctors, and renowned tenured professors at the nearby University of Pennsylvania. Two blocks to the left of my house was different, it was total despair! That area was reminiscent to the images and rhetoric depicted in Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five iconic video and song, *The Message*. More specifically, one could easily feel the devastation of poverty without even looking at the plethora of abandoned houses and pavements decorated with litter, but rather, the spirit of struggle and warfare easily weakened the most optimistic person who dared to walk those streets, which was the epitome of filth and disrepair.

The aforementioned thoughts about despair in my childhood neighborhood compliment Dr. King’s reflection of life in the “urban ghetto.” King’s consciousness about the “urban ghetto” was heightened between the period of 1965 and 1966, when the Civil Rights Movement moved

north to Chicago with the hopes of dramatizing the plight of deplorable housing and segregated schools for Blacks in the city. To further this point, in his definitive book, *Martin & Malcolm & American, A Dream or A Nightmare*, Cone (1991) captures King's anguish about his time in Chicago, when he asserts:

When he (King) focused on the problems of the inner city, he saw the despair and self-hate that Malcolm had talked about. He saw the drugs and alcohol, prostitution and police brutality, and the often fruitless effort of poor black who were trying to survive in an environment unfit for human habitation. "I have never seen such hopelessness," said Hosea Williams, one of King's aides summoned from Atlanta to Chicago to "mobilize 'political power in the Negro community.'" "The Negroes in Chicago have a greater feeling of powerlessness than any I ever saw." "Chicago has been a nightmare." What could integration or the American dream possibly mean for people who saw no hope of getting out of the ghetto. (Cone, 1991, p. 226)

Although my parents stressed the importance of education, in addition to valuing culture, my childhood home was situated closer to the despair side where the "self-hate and hopelessness" captured in the above-mentioned quote was manifested by my peers in various forms of violence, and in some cases, senseless killings. In short, I was as the sociologist Elijah Anderson would term, "the decent kid" who lived in the "hood." Specifically, in his epic work, *Code of the Street*, Anderson (1999) argues, "the inescapable dilemma of the decent child is to either be a good kid like your parents and teachers tell you and get beat up by other kids or start behaving like a thug or gangster" (p. 103).

By no means did I act like a “thug or gangster” as Anderson summarized in *Code of the Street*, but trying to find my identity growing up in a tough West Philadelphia neighborhood did cause me a dilemma; in fact, it was more of an internal dissonance. That internal dissonance was; how could I find “respect” amongst the “street” kids that lived in my community? Around the age of 11, sports, specifically basketball and football became the mechanism to solve that particular quandary. Out of pure love, I was drawn to both sports, but my passion to “have game” intensified once I realized that “having game” also meant that you gained respect in the “hood.” Not blessed with height, superior strength, and overall physical prowess, I willed myself to “have game” by engaging in daily practice sessions, in addition to watching countless hours of games that I recorded in an effort to perfect the moves of my sports heroes.

By my early teen years, I began to get rewarded for my persistence to “have game.” In the “hood,” the next best thing to being respected for your “fight game,” is actually being respected for “having game.” I definitely was not respected for my “fight game,” but the street kids did admire my exploits on both the football field and hardwood. Football is the sport in which I first stood out. I was known for catching every ball thrown my way, as well as making the big play when needed. Although I was a natural at the game of football, I did not have a passion for developing my abilities. My lack of enthusiasm for seriously developing my football skills was partially due to my mother’s visceral aversion for the game. My mother’s dislike for football was attributed to her high school friend being paralyzed from the waist down after a vicious hit in a playoff game. Rather consciously or unconsciously she projected her fear of football unto me, and one thing that negates the effectiveness of a football player is fear!

My mother's hatred for football was supplanted by her love of basketball, and that is the game that I have remained actively involved in since the age of 11. "Hoops" did not come naturally to me like the game of football, but through daily hard work, I made the team of one of the best high school basketball programs in Philadelphia (West Catholic), shared the court with future division 1 college players (and also a few professional players), and most importantly was known for having the best "handle" in my neighborhood. Although I did not play basketball during my last two years of high school (due to academic eligibility issues), my "hoop dreams" were fulfilled through "schooling" more high profiled players during summer league games.

Like many Black male adolescents who compete in youth basketball, I too fantasized about a career in the National Basketball Association (N.B.A.). However, around the age of 18, I realized that no matter how hard I practiced, no matter how many pushups and calf raises I completed daily, and no matter how many miles I jogged with ankle weights on, I was not going to play in the NBA or a prominent collegiate program. And just in case I gave into illusions or wishful thinking about playing in the NBA, the mailman would periodically remind me that, "Ron there aren't too many 5'7 skinny guards in the pros, so you better think about pursuing something else." The mailman was correct, the pros were not in my future, but through basketball I learned creativity, leadership, and the ability to function at a high level both individually and collectively. The aforementioned are skillsets that have enhanced my current professional effectiveness. Basketball also helped me through the darkest period of my adolescence, which was processing the trauma of my parents' divorce. In retrospect, I needed to see a therapist to deal with my family transition, but attending basketball games and playing "hoops" daily, eased my pain a little.

For those that still question my qualifications for the revenue collegiate athletics discourse, I offer the final explanation. My life has been devoted to Black male development in educational, non-profit, and religious milieus. I coached high school basketball, and also worked at the University of Pennsylvania for three years on the nationally successful research project P.L.A.A.Y (Preventing Long-Term Anger and Aggression in Youth), in which basketball was used as a mechanism to teach youth about racial socialization, racial coping tools, and anger management. Academically, my work from undergraduate to the doctoral level explores the intersection of Black male identity, systemic inequalities, and improvement research. Even in business school while completing my MBA degree, I entertained the idea of launching a holistic sports agency for professional basketball and football players.

Just as W.E.B. Dubois was accused of being an “outsider” while constructing the sociological masterpiece- *The Philadelphia Negro*, and just as Bayard Rustin was considered an “outsider” while organizing the 1963 *March on Washington*, I too will embrace my “outsider” status if it leads to improvement within the realm of collegiate athletics. Moreover, I engage in this *Problem of Practice* because social injustices exist. I refuse to sit idle while Black male student athletes are still being negatively stereotyped and “mis-educated.” I refuse to sit idle while a pervasive academic achievement gap still exist between Black male student athletes and their counterparts. I refuse to sit idle when the commodification of the Black male body is exploited for institutional and corporate profit. In short, through my practitioner interactions with Black male student athletes at a northeastern PWI, in addition to speaking with both athletes and senior administrators at various universities during the course of my research study, I vehemently realize that my prophetic voice matters! Therefore, like King (1964), “I too am compelled to carry the



gospel of freedom beyond” the “Ivory Tower.” “Like Paul,” I too must constantly respond to the “Macedonian call for aid.”

My personal narrative that I choose to share at the beginning of this dissertation in practice, illuminates “my place” in the intercollegiate athletics discourse. The utilization of my personal narrative is also a forerunner to the student athlete’s narratives that I believe is needed to underscore the magnitude of my *problem of practice* and suggested *designs for action*. Thus, the following sections in this chapter frame important elements of this *dissertation in practice*, which will be heavily influenced by narratives.

### ***Problem of Practice***

My *problem of practice* focuses on the psychological effects of projected negative stereotypes and how that might impact the academic and social experiences for African American male student athletes at predominately White institutions (PWI's). Through my investigation of practice, I have meticulously tried to understand the aforementioned, thus, *designs for action* suggested in this *dissertation in practice* are influenced by the following inquiries:

1. Do African American male student athletes who attend a predominantly White institution (Division 1 classification) feel comfortable and/or safe on their collegiate campus and surrounding community?
2. Do African American male student athletes experience negative stereotypes in the classroom by professors, teaching assistants, and White/other minority (i.e. Asian) classmates?

3. Do African American male student athletes feel negatively stereotyped and/or experience low expectations by university personnel (i.e. support staff, counselors, and campus police)?
4. Do African American male student athletes feel comfortable talking to their coaches and White/other minority teammates?

### ***Utilizing Narrative for Designs for Action***

The decision to divulge my personal narrative as a means to justify “my place” in the revenue collegiate athletics discourse was written as a brief Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN). Nash (2004) describes SPN as an “alternative form of intellectual inquiry<sup>2</sup>” (p. 4), which is “honest, self-disclosing, and scholarly all at the same time” (p. ix). Nash (2004) also discloses that “the ultimate intellectual responsibility of the Scholarly Personal Narrative scholar is to find a way to use personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers” (p. 18). The reliance of personal insight; is a precursor for how narratives will be utilized in this *dissertation in practice*. More explicit, this is not an esoteric dissertation which offers “privileged solutions,” but rather, the goal is to yield “scholarship in practice” (ProDEL, 2012, p. 7), which leads to *generative impacts*. Thus, the narratives of the student athletes interviewed in the qualitative study, is the primary motivation for how the *designs for action* are shaped.

### ***Significance of the Dissertation in Practice***

Although I am concerned with the plight of the entire African American male student athlete population, this paper will solely focus on those individuals who participate in the top revenue producing sports, which are basketball and football. Like Melendez (2008), I too agree

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<sup>2</sup> I also argue an alternative form to scholarly inquiry.

that African American male basketball and football players have higher visibility on campus (and society), which seems to justify a more exhaustive focus on this population (p.426-427).

My problem of practice is significant for a few reasons. First, there is a common belief that Black male college students do not care about education (Benson, 2000). My interactions with Black male college student athletes dispel that myth. My experiences with Black male college athletes are also consistent with Harper and Davis (2012) conclusions that:

Black men do care about education. Despite their recognition of how schools, postsecondary institutions, and policies unfairly disadvantage them and others in their families and communities the undergraduates upon whom this article's based maintained a firm belief in the liberating potential of education. This is obviously inconsistent with Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) claims that those who forecast inequitable returns on educational investments are likely to resist schooling. (Harper and Davis, 2012, p.116)

Second, pervasive negative stereotypes about the intellectual abilities and character of Black male student athletes still exist, which is both problematic and damaging to this population. Lastly, few scholars who explore issues that impact Black male student athletes offer relevant suggestions to the problems that exist for this population within White institutions. They explore their work through the investigation of theory, and not, the investigation of practice. *This dissertation in practice* takes the latter stance. More explicitly, I hope to offer insights into the types of programs, services, psychoeducational workshops, and diversity initiatives that leaders at predominantly White institutions might consider for their revenue playing African American male student athletes. The ultimate goal for this *dissertation in practice* is not to render an esoteric account, but rather, "it is a product of learning that is meant to be read, understood, critiqued, and most importantly, used by practicing professionals in the field" (ProDEL, 2012).

## ***Definitions***

### *National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA)*

The NCAA is a non-profit organization that was established in 1906 as the governing body for intercollegiate athletics for member colleges and universities that is “dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of student-athletes and equipping them with the skills to succeed on the playing field, in the classroom and throughout life” (NCAA, 2014). This governing body makes and enforces regulations that are related to issues such as: athletic eligibility, recruitment, and financial aid.

### *Division I Institutions*

According to The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), Division I (D-I) institutions are active membership schools of the NCAA. The NCAA also states that “Division I schools generally have the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the most generous number of scholarships.” (NCAA, 2014).

### *Predominantly White Institutions*

According to Brown and Dancy (2010) Predominantly White institutions (PWIs) are institutions of higher education in which Whites account for 50% or more of the student enrollment (as cited in Lomotey, 2010). In a historical context, many PWI’s were legally able to exclude Black students and student athletes from attending their institutions through Jim Crow laws.

### *Student Athletes*

For the purpose of this *dissertation in practice*, student athletes are individuals who receive aid (i.e. scholarship, tuition waiver) from a university that is awarded on the basis of the student’s athletic ability (Watt & Moore,2001). It can also be said that student athletes are enrolled students

who participate in their respective sport(s) at the institution in which that individual is enrolled (Athlete Connection, 2012).

### *Revenue Generating Sports*

Revenue sports such as football and men's basketball generate enormous profit for Division 1 schools. For the purpose of this *dissertation in practice*, revenue generating sports specifically focus on football and men's basketball.

### ***Theoretical Framework(s)***

Three theories serve as a framework for this *dissertation in practice*, they are: (1) Stereotype Threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), (2) Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 1984, 1995), and the (3) Sociology of Sport (Edwards, 1973). Stereotype Threat will be employed to understand social psychological factors that impacts African American male student athlete's social comfortability and academic performance at PWI's. Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a lens to examine historical systemic implications of racism, in addition to hearing and valuing the narratives of Black male student athletes, while the Sociology of Sport helps one to understand the complex relationship between sport and society.

*Stereotype Threat*-Steele and Aronson (1995) define stereotype threat as the risk of conforming, as self-characteristic, to a negative characteristic about one's group (p.797). Although Steele's original work focused strictly on the standardized test performance of African American students at prestigious universities, he also asserts: "It (stereotype threat) happens whenever these students are in the domain where the stereotype is applicable. So with any kind of intellectual performance or interacting with professors or teaching assistants or other students in a classroom, this stereotype is relevant and constitutes a pressure on those behaviors" (PBS, 2006).

As mentioned, stereotype threat provides a lens to understand the social psychological factors that impacts one's identity within a particular context. The aforementioned will be highlighted in chapter four of this work, when the narratives of Black male student athletes who were interviewed for this work will be revealed. Specifically, their captured thoughts on race, racism, negative stereotypes, and code switching will be explored through the following themes: (1) individuals know when they are being stereotyped, (2) individuals know what people could think about them, (3) individuals are aware that anything they do that fits the stereotype could be taken as confirming it, and (4) individuals are aware that they could be judged and treated accordingly to those stereotypes.

*Critical Race Theory*-CRT is a critically important lens to understand the experiences of African American student athletes who attend PWI's. Critical Race Theory origins are rooted in legal studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, 1994 & Tate, 1997), and provided a reaction to the stalled advances of the civil rights era (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 4). To further the aforementioned, Delgado (1995) adds, "Critical Race Theory sprang up in the mid-1970s with the early work of Derrick Bell (an African American) and Alan Freeman (a white), both of whom were deeply distressed over the slow pace of racial reform in the United States" (p. xiii). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) define the CRT movement as, "a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 3). Tenets of CRT utilized in this *dissertation in practice* include:

1. **Racism as normality**- CRT begins with the premise that racism is normal, not unusual in American society (Delgado, 1995). More explicitly, Bell contends that racism is pernicious and a staple of American history (Bell, 1992). Legal CRT scholars (e.g., Bell, 1992;

Delgado, 1995) maintain that racism has always existed and has, one way or another, continually debased minorities who live in America.

2. **Interest Convergence-** The foundation of interest convergence thesis as understood by critical race theorists rests in understanding that “Black rights are recognized and protected when and only so long as policymakers perceive that such advances will further interests that are their primary concern” (Bell, 2004, p. 49). As it pertains to Black male student athletes who attend predominately White institutions, this *dissertation in practice* draws from Interest Convergence which is a major tenet of CRT. Delgado (1995) argues that Interest Convergence advocates for the advancement of people of color, only when the self-interest of White people is served. Given the commercialization of college athletics and the benefits that their institutions reap, this work believes Interest Convergence is a useful mechanism to explore my *problem of practice*.
3. **Valuing Voice-** A wealth of information can be drawn from the narratives of Black student athletes by utilizing CRT (Bimper, 2012). The aforementioned claim is important given the fact that even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many people still struggle to understand the unique dynamics of being a Black male student athlete who attends a PWI (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Thus, this work both celebrates and incorporates the experiences, perspectives, and viewpoints of the athletes that I had the pleasure to interview and interact with throughout the research process.

### ***Sociology of Sport***

Organically woven throughout this *dissertation in practice*, is Edwards (1973) theory of the sociology of sport, which he defines as, “a sociological analysis of sports as a social institution.” Edwards’s thesis of the sociology of sport is the belief that sports recapitulates society. Crossman (2014), defines the Sociology of Sport as, “the study of the relationship between sports and society. It examines how culture and values influence sports, how sports influences culture and values, and the relationship between sports and media. It also looks at the relationship between sports and social inequality and social mobility.”

Specifically, as it pertains to this dissertation, is the author’s declaration that the troubling plight of Black male student athletes is indicative to the historical and contemporary degradation of Black males. Therefore, this dissertation cannot fully explore the experiences of Black male student athletes who attend PWI’s with integrity, without critically exploring Black male identity within the context of American society.

### ***Organization of the Dissertation in Practice***

In adhering to the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, this dissertation’s primary purpose is: (1) the investigation of practice and, (2) the stewardship of the profession. Chapter 1 argues the author’s “place” in the intercollegiate athletics discourse, in addition to highlighting key aspects that frame this *dissertation in practice*. Chapter 2 focuses on the author’s *problem of practice* through the exploration of literature pertaining to stereotypes of: (1) Black male athletes, (2) Black male student athletes, and (3) Black males.

The etiology for the suggested *Designs for action* are divided into two chapters. Chapter 3 gives a synopsis of contemporary issues pertaining to the *problem of practice*, in addition to



describing the methodological approach that drives the author's *designs*, while Chapter 4 presents narratives of athletes, who the author had the pleasure to interview and work with, which are explored through themes that frame stereotype threat. In Chapter 5, the author presents the designs *for action*. Specifically, the author suggest culturally relevant interventions to facilitating courageous conversations with Black male student athletes, and also a decentralized diversity initiative as *designs for action* that could lead to *generative impacts*. In Chapter 6, the author conceptualizes the *generative impacts*, in addition to suggesting recommendations for practice, implications for future work, and a final claim. References and appendices will follow the concluding section.

## CHAPTER 2: PROBLEM OF PRACTICE



*Image 1. Stereotypes of Black Male Student Athletes.*

Featured in the above image, is Jadeveon “The Freak” Clowney, the former defensive standout at the University of South Carolina. Jadeveon was featured on ESPN before the start of the 2013-2014 collegiate football season, because of his ferocious play on the field, in addition to his physical stature. During the feature, Clowney was described as: (1) “a specimen,” (2) “a monster,” (3) “a player to be fearful of,” (4) “a beast,” and (5) and most often, “a freak.” For context, being labeled a “beast” or “freak” is usually a positive stereotype for Black male athletes. Those depictions symbolize that the athlete being described in that language has above-average athletic talent. But historically, Black males being described as “freaks” and “beast” invoked fear in Whites because this population was thought to be sex crazed violent beast that was after the “purity” of White women (Hutchinson, 1994). *My problem of practice* critically explores how the aforementioned descriptions and perceptions impacts Black male student athletes in their non-athletic roles. Explicitly, this work is interested in the impact of Black male athletes being perceived as “beast” and/or “freaks” in the classroom and community, opposed to the football field or basketball court.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter commences with a review of related literature to explore the historical context of the debasement and negative stereotyping of Black males. Specifically, the literature explores: (1) the historical stereotyping of Black male athletes, (2) the historical stereotyping of Black male student athletes who attend PWI's, and (3) the historical stereotyping of Black males. The remainder of this chapter focuses on relevant literature and how they inform the author's *problem of practice*.

### ***Stereotypes of Black Male Athletes***

We live in a society in which Black male athletes are worshipped like “god-like” figures. It is common to see contemporary African American male athletes such as LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, Tiger Woods, Robert Griffin III (RG3), and Floyd Mayweather, being televised not just within their respective sports, but also within commercials, in which their bodies and image are used to make money for corporate America. With the proliferation of current day young, rich, Black male athletes, one would think that this population has also been celebrated and embraced within White America, but that assertion could not be further than the truth.

In 1895, when speaking about the rise of Black boxers, Charles Dana, who was the then editor for the New York sun, asserted the following, “We are in the midst of a growing menace. The black man is rapidly forging to the front ranks in athletics especially in the field of fisticuffs. We are in the midst of a black rise against white supremacy. What America needs now is another John Sullivan” (Hoberman, 1997 Rhoden, 2006; Walter & Iida, 2010). According to Wiggins

(1988), boxers Jack Johnson and Joe Luis<sup>3</sup>, were often times featured in newspapers in “*Sambo like*” depictions. Specifically, he argues:

Physically both fighters were portrayed from 1908 to 1938 as savage, apelike figures with coconut heads, long arms, broad shoulders, narrow waists and bulging muscles. Their faces featured thick, grinning, red lips, pearly-white buck-teeth, strands of nappy-hair, and jet-black complexions. Personality traits of the Sambo stereotype also appeared in these sketches. The loud, flamboyant Papa Jack and the quiet, humble Brown, despite being different personalities each appeared in American newspaper cartoons as personifications of the Sambo stereotype. Both boxers were depicted as ignorant, uncivilized brutes who dressed up in loud, bright colored clothing, wore gaudy jewelry and spoke in ungrammatical minstrel dialect. Despite their wealth, Johnson and Louis were depicted as chicken stealers and crap shooters by American cartoons. Watermelon and fried chicken were the staple of their diets and both men, who displayed and uncommon sense of courage and self-motivation during their boxing careers, were ridiculed as being lazy, razor-toting, fearful Sambos. (Wiggins, 1988, p. 12)

The notion of Black athletes being bred to be *superior athletically* is another widely debated stereotype that has existed for years (Edwards, 1975, Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Sports Illustrated, 1971). To further this point, Wiggins (1989) asserts:

at least since the latter part of the nineteenth century people from all walks of life-coaches, athletes, trainers, cultural anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, physical

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<sup>3</sup> Jack Johnson and Joe Louis were the first two Black fighters to win the heavyweight title, and also two of the first Black athlete superstars.

educators, biologists, medical doctors, and sportscasters have put forth their own theories regarding racial differences and their possible effects on sports performance. (p.158)

In the 1936 Olympic Games, United States sprinter Jessie Owens enhanced the Black athletic superiority myth, as a result of him winning four gold medals, while simultaneously shattering Hitler's beliefs of Aryan dominance (Moore, 2009). 52 years after Owens's dramatic performance in the 1936 Olympic Games, the late Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder continued the discourse on Black athletic preeminence, when he remarked, "The Black is the better athlete and he practices to the better athlete and he's bred to be the better athlete because this goes way back to the slave period" (Uhlig, 1988, p. 47). Ironically, some people argue that Snyder's comments were intended to be positive praise towards Blacks, and not racist condescending comments (Czopp, 2006; Czopp & Monteith, 2006; Washington Post, 1988).

The "*bad Nigger*" is another negative stereotype that continues to persist for Black male athletes. The "bad Nigger" is often characterized as loud, menacing, and defiant towards White people and the racist athletic hierarchical system (Anderson, 2008; Gadsden & Smith, 1994; Jenkins, 2006). For example, after converting from Christianity to the Nation of Islam, Muhammad Ali is one example of a Black athlete that was viewed as a "bad Nigger." As Marqusee (1995) argues, Cassius Clay was the "great white hope," who was actually "thought to be good for boxing" (p. 10), but Muhammad Ali represented black dignity, black manhood, and "a symbol of black resistance to white racism" (p. 15). One example of Ali's militancy can be found in his following remarks about the war in Vietnam and his refusal to join the American military:

Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs? I have nothing to lose by standing up and following my

beliefs. So I'll go to jail, we've been I jail for four hundred years. (as cited in Marqusee, 1995)

Tommy Smith and John Carlos were also viewed as “bad Niggers,” because of their display of “black militancy” in the Olympic Games of 1968. Specifically, after winning medals in the 200 meter dash, Smith and Carlos engaged in a silent protest during the victory ceremony (Carlos & Zirin, 2013, Edwards, 1968, Henderson, 2013, Marqusee, 1995). With their heads bowed and gloved fists raised high, the two men immediately became an “enemy of the state,” or as the legendary American sportscaster Brent Musburger said, “black-skinned storm troopers” (Carlos & Zirin, 2012, p. 130) The duo was not like the boxer George Foreman, who walked around the boxing ring smiling and waving the American flag after also winning a medal in the 1968 Olympic Games, essentially the meaning of their protest, rejected the symbolism of the US flag (Carlos & Zirin, 2013, Edwards, 1968). In his autobiography, John Carlos explicitly explained the intentionality of the protest on the medal stand, when he disclosed the following:

Before the anthem started to play, I purposefully took a moment to reflect on the artifacts we had chosen. I looked at my feet in my high socks and thought about all the black poverty I'd seen from Harlem to East Texas. I fingered my beads and thought about the pictures I'd seen of the “strange fruit” swinging from the poplar trees of the South. When we were up there, I made the personal decision to keep my jacket open, which was a major breach of Olympic etiquette, to remember all the working-class people-black and white-in Harlem who had to struggle and work with their hands all day. I thought about the fact that I covered up then “USA” on my chest with a black T-shirt to reflect the shame I felt that my country was traveling at a snail's pace toward something that should be obvious to all of good will. (Carlos & Zirin, 2013, p. 120)

A contemporary Black athlete, who is branded in the “bad Nigger” tradition, is Seattle Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman. Sherman caused an immediate uproar; just seconds after his team defeated the San Francisco 49ers in the National Football Conference (NFC) championship game, when he emotionally said the following remarks to Fox Sports’ reporter, Erin Andrews, “Well, I’m the best corner in the game. When you try me with a sorry receiver like Crabtree<sup>4</sup>, that’s the result you’re going to get. Don’t you ever talk about me<sup>5</sup>” (NewsOne, 2014). With those comments, Sherman was immediately vilified, as classless, disrespectful, and threatening to White woman (Reese, 2014). Many people, who criticized Sherman, had no clue that he graduated from Manuel Dominguez High School in Compton, CA with a 4.2. Grade Point Average (GPA), and then earned his degree from Stanford University in less than four years. Those individuals saw a “bad Nigger,” or as Zirin (2014) argues, “an archetype that has been branded a threat, Whether the first African-American heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson or Richard Sherman, they tend to be painted with only one dimension, which makes it easier for them to be denigrated and demonized” (The Nation, 2014). The point is, whether we are talking about the courage of Ali, the political consciousness of Smith and Carlos, or the intellect of Sherman, current day Black male student athletes, like the aforementioned iconic Black athletes mentioned, still have to contend with being viewed superior athletically, but characterized as “Sambos” and “bad Niggers” on campus and the surrounding community.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Sherman’s comments were directed at San Francisco 49er’s wide receiver Michael Crabtree.

<sup>5</sup> A full transcript of Richard Sherman’s interview can be found at: <http://newsone.com/2842940/richard-sherman-erin-andrews-interview-michael-crabtree/>

## ***Stereotypes of Black Male Student Athletes***

This *dissertation in practice* focuses on the debasement and negative stereotyping of Black male student athletes. The account is rendered through interviews with both current and former Black male student athletes, and also the author's practitioner experience working with this population at a PWI. The aim of this work is to suggest culturally relevant *designs for action* that will lead to *generative impacts*. Therefore, this section will briefly provide stronger context to the *problem of practice*, as a means to give a historical look to a present day issue.

Black males began participating in collegiate athletics at predominately White institutions in the 1940s (Govan, 1971). Often times, these athletes were welcomed on the field and court, but scorned within their campus milieu (Edwards, 1969; McPherson, 1971; Olson, 1968). The dual relationship with Black male student athletes can be attributed to the fact that few people viewed them as scholars, but rather, they were perceived as "dumb jocks" with superior athletic talent (Adler & Adler, 1985; Harrison, 2001; Miller, 1998; Wiggins, 1989). The aforementioned is an issue that Edwards (1969) raised when he asserted:

For the black athlete in the predominately white school was and is first foremost, and sometimes only, an athletic commodity. He is constantly reminded of this one fact, sometimes subtly and informally, at other times harshly and overtly, but at all times unequivocally. The black athlete is expected to "sleep, eat, and drink" athletics. His basketball, football, or baseball (depending upon the season) is to be his closest companion, his best friend, and in a very real sense, the symbol and object of his religious concern. (p. 9)



The vicious legacy of racism and Jim Crow laws played a major role in the stereotyping of Black male student athletes and the debasement of this population at PWIs (Brooks & Althouse, 2000; Sailes, 1991; Singer, 2005). Specifically, racism for Blacks in employment, housing, and voting rights was also recapitulated in the realm of collegiate athletics. To further this point, Green et al (1972) concluded:

The most glaring fallacy about intercollegiate athletic competition in the United States is the assumption that fairness is inherent. Indeed...college sports is not the haven of fair play and equal opportunity that we have been led to believe. To black athletes, coaches and officials, fairness and equal opportunity are myths. The patterns of racial discrimination, both overt and covert, institutional and individual, found in the larger society are reflected in and perpetuated by athletics in the United States. (p. 12)

The recapitulation of racism in collegiate athletics had profound effects on early Black male student athletes who attended PWI's, given the fact that they were devoid of a "safe place" on campus to be recharged. This is an problem that Olson (1968) raised when he asserted: "Recruited into a society for which he (or she) has no cultural or educational preparation, and isolated by its unwritten codes, the typical Negro athlete discovers an immense gap between himself (herself) and the college community" (pp. 18-31). The point is, from the initial migration, to the present, Black male student athletes have been plagued with racial stereotypes (Edwards, 1984; Hughes, Satterfield & Giles, 2007, Oseguera, 2010), and failure to have substantive conversations about the aforementioned will negate "improvement" efforts as it relates to Black male student athletes who attend PWIs (Harper et al., 2013, p. 19).

### *Stereotypes of Black males*

Whether we are talking about stereotypes of Black male professional athletes, stereotypes of Black male student athletes, or stereotypes of Black male high school athletes, the common denominator is Black males. Therefore, a critical and honest examination of the perception of Black males needs to be explored. In his book, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*, Kennedy (2002) gives historical and contemporary examples of the term, which he argues is usually derogatory to African Americans, especially African American men. The act of “niggering” is prevalent, regardless of a Black male’s status in life. Specifically, the connection for Black males in the “hood,” and also for those that attend highly selective universities is that their skin tone causes them to be viewed through a deficit perspective (Decoy, 1967; Harper, 2009; Steele, 2010).

In her book, *We Real Cool: Black Men And Masculinity*, scholar bell hooks (2004) compliments the aforementioned claim by writing:

Seen as animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers, black men have had no real dramatic say when it comes to the way they are represented. They have made few interventions on the stereotype. As a consequence they are victimized by stereotypes that were first articulated in the nineteenth century but hold sway over the minds and imaginations of citizens of this nation in the present day. Black males who refuse categorization are rare, for the price of visibility in the contemporary world of white supremacy is that black male identity be defined in relation to the stereotype whether by embodying it or seeking to be other than it. At the center of the way black male selfhood is constructed in white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy is the image of the brute-untamed, uncivilized, unthinking, and unfeeling. Negative stereotypes about the nature of

black masculinity continue to overdetermine the identities black males are allowed to fashion for themselves. (p. xii)

Through his research, Brown (2011) explores normalized discourses about Black males from the 1930s to the present. His findings suggest that the narratives for Black male throughout the decades were:

- **1930s-1950s-Absent and Wandering**-“This narrative explains why African American males are underachieving in schools and society” (p. 2069).
- **1960s-Impotent and Powerless**- “In this context, father absence was an uncontested finding and the African American mother was positioned as the culprit for bringing up African American males who would become “powerless,” “ineffective,” and “effeminate” (p. 2069).
- **Late 1960s to 1970s-Soulful and Adaptive**-“The African American male style of talk, walk, and social interaction was at the center of this research, this work often reproduced essentialized portraits of Black male performance” (p. 2069).
- **1980s to Present- Endangered and In Crisis**-“What stood out about this period of research was the tone of the narrative in this body of work that often depicted African American male life as entrenched, solemnly fatal, and incurable” (p. 2070).

In summary, within an American context, Black males have had to historically contend with being viewed as a “the wretched of the earth,” and also a threat to the earth (Ginsberg, 1989; Hutchinson, 1994). For example, when documenting the prevalence of gun violence and senseless murders that have been occurring in the city Chicago, IL, ABC Nightline choose to overlook systemic inequalities within that city, but rather, the face of terror who influences minority males to senseless acts of violence was given to Keith Cozart, better known by his rap stage name Chief

Keef, who is a teenaged Black male from that city (ABC Nightline, 2012). Therefore, in addition to the “dumb jock” stereotype, Black male student athletes also have to compete with notions of being a “menace to society.”

### ***The Psychological Condition for Black Males who Attend PWIs***

For reiteration, my problem of practice explores the psychosocial experiences of Black male student athletes that attended PWIs in the northeastern, southeastern, and Midwest province. I had to clarify that point because much of the discourse around Black male student athletes focuses on the commercialization of college athletics, scandals (SI-Ok state), and also the academic achievement gap between their White counterparts (Harper & Harris, 2008). Edwards (1984) shifts the conversation closer to my problem of practice when he argues: “they must contend, of course, with the connotations and social reverberations of the traditional ‘dumb jock’ caricature. But Black student athletes are burdened also with the insidiously racist implications of the myth of ‘innate Black athletic superiority,’ and the more blatantly racist stereotype of the ‘dumb Negro’ condemned by racial heritage to intellectual inferiority” (p. 8).

The aforementioned observation by Edwards is something that has been well documented by other scholars (particularly African American psychologist). What is not so well documented is how these biases impact the psyche of Black students who attend predominately white institutions (PWI’s). Steele (2010) does acknowledge the damage of negative stereotypes on the entire Black population when he writes:

The psyche of individual blacks get damaged, the idea goes, by bad images of the group projected in society-images of blacks as aggressive, as less intelligent, and so on. Repeated exposure to these images causes these images to be “internalized,” implicitly

accepted as true of the group and, tragically, also perhaps of one's self. This internalization damages "character" by causing low self-esteem, low expectations, low motivation, self-doubt, and the like. And in turn, this damage contributes to a host of bad things, such as high unemployment, poor marriage success, low educational achievement, and criminality. (p. 46)

My problem of practice seeks to engage Steele's supposition specifically within the context of Black male athletes who attend PWI's. Both my scholarly examination and also my practitioner experience convince me that there is ample evidence to move forward with this work. For example, many schools have external remedies in place to confront the academic achievement gap that exist with Black male athletes (i.e. study hall, tutoring), but few are prepared (or responsive) to support the cultural needs of Black male student athletes who attend PWIs. Thus, I am arguing that my problem of practice can yield educational improvement, if interventions center on the psychological effects of Black male athletes who attend PWI's.

### *Actor or Observer Perspective*

Before my practitioner experience at Seahawk University, I strictly explored disparities that exist with Black male student athletes through the lens of institutional and corporate exploitation. Foolishly, I failed to explore the psychological anguish that this group might experience because of projected negative stereotypes. I took what Jones and Nisbett (1972) would describe as an "observer's perspective," which is the perspective of a person observing the behavior. Conversely, I should have taken an "actor's perspective," which is the outlook of a person doing the behavior we are trying to explain.

Spending intimate time with Black male student athletes at Seahawk University forced me to take an “actor’s perspective.” Consequently, I now have a different philosophical stance towards the educational difficulties of Black male student athletes. I believe that it is critical to move beyond surface level explanations of the so called “achievement gap” (not abandon), and start dealing with root psychological issues that factor into the disturbing educational outcomes for this population. In his seminal book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson (1933) supports my position by arguing: “The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies” (p. 2).

My experience working with Black male student athletes has caused me to assert that Woodson’s teaching are as relevant today, as it were almost 80 years ago when he wrote the book, given the fact that this population is still perceived (and they also perceive themselves) to be educationally inferior (in my opinion). Even more damaging, is the fact that many Black male student athletes whom I worked with, simply reduce themselves to negative stereotypes often attributed to their group (i.e. “The jokester,” “The thug,” “Mr. Inferior,” “Angry Black Man”). For this dominant narrative to change, it is imperative that professionals who work with Black male athletes find creative ways to explore the psychological dissonance that this population might be experiencing at predominately White institutions.

### ***The Debasement of Black male high school and youth athletes***

According to some experts, the 2013-2014 Men’s collegiate college freshman class is one of the best cohort’s to come along in years. In fact, at least eight of the incoming freshman “studs” are expected to be lottery picks in the 2014 National Basketball Association (NBA) draft<sup>6</sup>. As

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<sup>6</sup> 2013-2014 talent overload, story at: [http://espn.go.com/mens-college-basketball/story/\\_/id/9226839/way-too-early-all-americans-2013-14-college-basketball](http://espn.go.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/9226839/way-too-early-all-americans-2013-14-college-basketball)

Rhoden (2006) contends in his influential book, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, many of these young men have been wooed since middle school with sneakers, athletic apparel, and in some cases money, by so called coaches, youth league advisors, and trainers. Masquerading as concerned adults, sadly, too many of these individuals are simply “black market agents,” who are looking to profit from the athletic genius of young gifted Black male adolescents.

Rhoden (2006) defines the “conveyor belt” as the extraction of “black muscle” from their communities to support the sports industry (p. 174). He also argues that the system “introduces young people to the worst ills of the contemporary sports-industrial complex while they’re still young and impressionable” (p. 177). While the “conveyor belt” is problematic for all youth (regardless of gender and race), who participate in sports (i.e. hockey, tennis), it poses a particular quandary for Black boys who encounter pervasive negative stereotypes, in addition to being systemically targeted. More poignantly, Rhoden (2006) asserts:

But race and the poverty that often goes hand-in-hand with black skin in this country-adds a complicating factor to the Belt. And of all the major team sports, basketball offers the most poignant insights into the mechanics of the feeder system. Because of the growth of basketball during the past fifteen years, it has been a vehicle for both hustlers and positive forces to exert their influence. (p. 180)

Because of the aforementioned claim from Rhoden, this section will specifically explore the exploitative nature of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball leagues and high school programs, and how that directly impacts the educational and social opportunities for Black male adolescents. This section will first explore this topic through Critical Race Theory, specifically through the Interest Convergence tenet to reveal that too many AAU officials and coaches are

involved in the lives of vulnerable Black males strictly out of the economic value that their labor helps to produce. Interest Convergence will also be utilized both analytically and conceptually to frame the “racialized” problem of the “conveyor belt” throughout the research. Part II highlights problematic and ethical issues through a case study vignette of OJ “the juiceman” Walker. Part III will debrief the case study and offer recommendations for educational leaders. While this work is a conceptual account, it has serious implications for educational leaders and individuals concerned about the plight of Black male adolescents in general, and Black male student athletes in particular.

### ***The Bait and Switch***

*“This is supposed to be fun; People take AAU ball too seriously”* (Wetzel & Yaeger, 2000, p. 205).

The aforementioned statement was made by Curtis Malone<sup>7</sup>, the former coach and co-founder of D.C. assault. D.C. assault has been one of the premier AAU traveling teams in the country over the past twenty years, which has produced current N.B.A. players such as: Michael Beasley, Jeff Green, Nolan Smith, and Daunte Cunningham to name a few<sup>8</sup>. Notions that sports promote healthy behaviors (i.e. not doing drugs), accomplishment, competitiveness, and respect and fair play, (Pate et al., 2000; Waller, 1961; Evans & Davies, 1986; Fejgin, 1994), are often times disregarded in the case of athletically gifted young Black males who display “potential.” To further this point, Edwards (1984) adds:

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<sup>7</sup> Curtis Malone is now serving at least 15 years in prison for drug conspiracy:  
[http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-09-13/sports/42032121\\_1\\_community-support-curtis-malone-youth-basketball](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-09-13/sports/42032121_1_community-support-curtis-malone-youth-basketball)

<sup>8</sup> Information about D.C. Assault can be found at: <http://www.dc-assault.org/alumni>



As soon as someone finds that a particular Black youngster can run a little faster, throw a little harder, or jump a little higher than all of his grammar school peers, that kid becomes-something ‘really special.’ What this usually means is that, beyond sports excellence, from that point on little else is expected of him. (p. 9)

According to Farrey (2008) the “wooing” of these “really special” athletes begins around the age of eight, before most of the boys start puberty and middle school. More poignantly he shares, “Now it (the AAU) sanctions more than 250 such events in which a total of 1,900 age group champions are crowned, starting around age 6. More often, these tournaments begin at age 8” (p. 159). Exploitation is the main motivation for the proliferation of basketball tournaments that features thousands of early to late male adolescent participants. Although many gullible (and vulnerable) parents are sold on rhetoric that the AAU is committed to the “physical, mental, and moral development of amateur athletes<sup>9</sup>,” the entity is really involved in transactional selling<sup>10</sup>. Younger participants are valued because they bring in augmented merchandising revenue (Farrey, 2008, p. 165), and gifted Black male teenagers are “goldmines” because of athletic apparel sponsorships, money, and “other perks” that they generate for schools, coaches, and in some cases parents (Wetzel & Yaeger, 2000; Dohrmann, 2012).

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<sup>9</sup> Lifted from the AAU mission statement found at: <http://www.aausports.org/Resources/AboutAAU.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> Transactional selling is a business concept which centers on making quick sales without an attempt to form a long standing customer relationship. Complete definition can be found at: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/>

## ***The Business of Bouncing a Ball***

*“Once upon a time, the cancer in professional sports was the posse. Hangers on who almost always got a player in trouble whether directly or indirectly. Those problems seem to be a thing of the past now but as is typical with most “diseases,” a new strain has come **prep basketball’s cancer** is the handler, **shady individuals** who claim to have the athlete’s best interest in mind but really only look to **benefit themselves**” (Slam, 2009).*

“Youth sports is a business. Across America, it’s a business,” were statements made not by a dissident of grassroots basketball, but rather, by Bobby Dodd<sup>11</sup> the former president of the AAU and the man largely responsible for revitalizing the organization (Farrey, 2008 pp. 170-182). Under Dodd’s “leadership,” the AAU, which was established in 1888, went from an organization that lost their niche<sup>12</sup>, to a thriving establishment, where basketball is supreme (Callies, 2013). While many educational leaders and scholars would not disagree with Dodd’s claim of youth sports being a business, few can explain why this condition exists. Thus, the author will concisely highlight three precarious reasons for the “plantation like” operations of grassroots basketball.

First, the AAU system has successfully been able to control the revenue at sponsored events by employing psychographics. Kotler and Keller (2012) define psychographics as the science of using psychology and demographics to better understand consumers. AAU promoters have meticulously studied the spending habits at boys’ basketball tournaments, thus by selling merchandise at events (i.e. headbands), youth games yield increased revenue for organizers. Additionally, the AAU is able to enhance their brand by marketing these events as so called “national championships” (Farrey, 2008). Sadly, many parents and players believe that participation in the “national championship” is a prerequisite to a guaranteed college athletic

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<sup>11</sup> Bobby Dodd was fired in 2011 after allegations of child molestation.

<sup>12</sup> The Amateur Sports Act of 1978 gave the U.S. Olympic committee control of athlete selection for competition. Prior to that act, the AAU and NCAA battled for control of amateur sports. Info about the act can be found at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=30133#axzz2hWiKdDFF>

scholarship, when in essence AAU tournaments is simply a mechanism for primarily European Americans to benefit, and for racist stereotypes regarding the physical superiority yet intellectually deficiencies to persist for African American males (Edwards, 2000; Coakley, 2009; Harrison, 2000).

The second and most pernicious reason for corruption in AAU basketball is because of the organizations relationship with athletic apparel and shoe companies (i.e. Nike). This is an issue that the Sonny Vaccaro, “The Godfather” of grassroots basketball did not deny when he proclaimed, “I’m not hiding, we want to put our materials on the bodies of your athletes, and the best way to do that is buy your school, or buy your coach” (as cited in Branch, 2011). Put another way, the commercialism that exist today in amateur basketball, commenced when Sonny Vaccaro and others convinced companies like Nike to pay both high school and college coaches to outfit their players with the “swoosh,” which essentially made the young men walking billboards for the sneaker companies. In the pursuit to find the next Michael Jordan, the goal of black market agents masquerading as coaches and concerned adults, is to “identify them early and talk to all the necessary people” (Wetzel & Yaeger, 2000). This practice now includes sneaker companies sponsoring AAU teams with promising players with marketing value, even if that player happens to be under ten years old (Farrey, 2008, p. 163).

Prevalent business transactions that are brokered by “trusted advisors” (i.e. coaches) which essentially treats the “boys” like chattel, is another issue that will be briefly discussed regarding the “plantation like” operations of grassroots basketball. In the world of AAU basketball it is common for grown men to flock around young players who display talent. Wooing a gifted player to a summer camp, school or collegiate institution could be the difference in attracting other players to a particular program and also acquiring wins (Rhoden, 2006 & Farrey, 2008). In some cases,

these “trusted advisors” become legal guardians to vulnerable young players (who are disproportionately Black) who are having “home troubles,” but interesting enough, also predicted to be future millionaires (Dohrmann, 2012 & Farrey, 2008, p. 167). Grassroots basketball is indeed a business in which dominate groups and institutions continue to prosper, while simultaneously oppressing primarily young Black males.

### ***The Problems of the “conveyer belt” through storytelling***

The previous section named the problems of the “conveyer belt,” and also attempted to argue why interest convergence is applicable to grassroots basketball. This section will demonstrate complex challenges that may occur for educational leaders who want to tackle the “conveyer belt” within their milieu through a case study. In being true to the term “voice” in CRT (Delgado, 1990, p. 98), the case study highlights the stories of individuals who are “players” in the business of youth athletics, whether consciously or unconsciously. While the majority of current AAU and high school players will not experience the success of the main protagonist in the following narrative, they are certainly not immune to the ethical and problematic issues raised in the vignette. Given the vast inequalities that impact this population, educational leaders may feel frustrated by the “system,” yet motivated to address injustices through the lens of social justice.

### ***The Case of “The Juiceman”<sup>13</sup>***

OJ “the juiceman” Walker is a 18 year old African American male “blue-chip” basketball player, who attends Chester Heights high school. Standing 6 ft. 5, OJ has a chiseled athletic body, “slick moves,” impressive jump shoot, and court “swagger,” that has every major collegiate basketball program in the country vying for his “service.” Once labeled the top prospect to come

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<sup>13</sup> Pseudonyms are used for the individuals, schools, and school districts referenced in the case study.

along in years and future professional superstar, OJ's stock slightly dropped after he had a minor knee procedure during his junior year in high school. Nevertheless, OJ is still considered one of the best three players in the nation, and his cult like following accentuates his position as a "blue chip" player. Grown men stand in line for two hours (following his game) just to get an autograph and picture. Tickets for OJ's games are scalped on the street for \$100 dollars, and "juiceman" t-shirts are sold for \$15 dollars. The aforementioned is a present day reality for players like OJ who grace the cover of sports magazines, and garner the attention of corporate athletics sponsors who would love to have OJ and his team sporting their brand.

"OJ's upbringing was one of great pain and disappointment. He grew up in a single parent home with his mother Ms. Kia. Ms. Kia or "Kiki" as she is known to friends and relatives, was only 16 year's old when she gave birth to OJ. OJ's father was absent for the majority of his childhood, and is now serving 45 years in prison for manslaughter. Ms. Kia struggled to provide for OJ, and the two of them moved at least eight times before the time he reached middle school. Given his home instability, it was hard for OJ to form meaningful friendships. The stress of providing for his family is something OJ also took on at an early age. OJ would try little "hustles" such as pumping gas to earn some pocket money, and stashing extra school lunches so that he and his mother could have something to eat for dinner. Devoid of a father figure, OJ's barber "OG," was the closet person he had as a male influence during his adolescent years. Things have slightly improved for OJ's mother. Ms. Kia is currently enrolled in job training program, and she's also a "born again" believer who attends Mt. Messiah Pentecostal Church on a regular basis.

Given OJ's difficult upbringing, the basketball court became his sanctuary, a place where he felt secure and validated. It was also the place where his basketball genius was discovered by "black market" street agents masquerading as coaches, athletic trainers, mentors and youth leaders.

In many ways, OJ is the poster child of the “system.” By the age of ten, he was ranked the best young prospect in the country by various “recruiting gurus.” At 13, the “juiceman” was playing on a team comprised of juniors and seniors in high school, and receiving clothes, sneakers, and physical training sessions that would rival services offered to professional athletes. A vicious bidding war ensued concerning what high school OJ would attend, but because of his relationship with Mr. Williams, who is a “consultant” for an athletic apparel company and self-proclaimed “youth league advisor,” OJ decided to attend Chester Heights. Mr. Williams told OJ, “Chester Heights is the best place for you. The coaches will allow you to “shine,” and the teachers understand the rigorous demands of student athletes. Besides, all of my boys did great at Chester Heights in the past; you follow that “breed.” Chester Heights has a strong athletic tradition, but academically, the school failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) the year before OJ enrolled. Chester Heights is also situated within a financially strapped school district that lacks strong leadership. Even more troubling, is the fact that Chester Heights graduated only 37% of Black male students over a four year period. Ironically, even though Chester Heights had to lay off several teachers and support staff, the athletic apparel company that Mr. Williams is a “consultant” for, decided to sponsor the men’s basketball program with new uniforms, sneakers, and workout equipment.

In addition to his athletic brilliance, OJ is also well liked and respected at Chester Heights. Both peers and teachers are memorized by OJ’s charisma and communication skills. Unfortunately, OJ is a below average student. His current GPA is a 1.8, and he always seems to be in danger of failing several classes. Miraculously, OJ manages to remain eligible during the basketball season, but once his season culminates, the pattern has been for OJ grades to dip. This is an issue that Mr. Shepard raised with the athletic director at Chester Heights, Mr. Planters. Mr.

Shepard is a 32 year-old African American history teacher that has been at Chester Heights for two years, and he was OJ's homeroom teacher during his junior year. In his discourse with Mr. Planters, Mr. Shepard raised the following, "You know for the past two years, I've been expressing my concerns to you about the mediocre academic outcomes for Black male student athletes at the school. I believe their grades would improve if we invested in their holistic development. Take OJ for example, here's a kid that is a critical thinker, he has strong communication skills, and he takes an interest in African American businessmen. I signed him up for the young entrepreneur's conference last year, but the day of the event, OJ told me he couldn't attend because he had to participate in a mandatory training session. If younger players saw OJ being active in other extracurricular activities, he would inspire them to do the same." Mr. Planters interrupted Mr. Shepard at that moment and said, "Look I hear your concerns, but I also hear the concerns of other teachers, coaches, and my players. The problem is, teachers don't understand the demands of student athletes at a rigorous athletic program like ours, and they place unrealistic expectations on the "boys." As for OJ, he already has several things to worry about, such as committing to a college, giving interviews, and leading his team to a state championship. He shouldn't have to worry about participating in anything else. I appreciate your concerns, but we'll continue this conversation at another time." The continuation of that conversation did not occur, since Mr. Shepard was transferred to another school following his second year at Chester Heights.

For years, "the juiceman" has been widely considered to be the best prospect in his class, a pure "stud" who could change the fortunes of any marquee program in the country. The aforesaid explains why numerous top collegiate coaches and professional scouts personally attended OJ's games. Most aggressive in the courting process of OJ, was the coaching staff from "Big Capital State University" (BCSU). In fact, the coaching staff from "BCSU" sent OJ 120 handwritten

letters during his senior season alone, and the “BCSU” dance team sent “the juiceman” daily tweets and Instagram photos. “BCSU” has a winning tradition in basketball, and their coach, Jim Whipabro (or “coach Whip”) is one of the highest paid coaches in the country. While “BMSU” has a winning tradition in “hoops,” the graduation rate for black male student athletes has been dismal (only 31%) during “Coach Whip’s” eight year tenure. Further, the campus climate at “BCSU” for Black male students is also problematic. Nevertheless, because of the success of the BCSU program with sending former players to the pros, OJ decided to sign a letter of intent to play for “BCSU” and “coach Whip.” Although the BCSU coaching staff has not missed one of OJ’s games since his sophomore season, “Big Capital State University” has never sent admissions representatives to participate in Chester Heights annual college fair.

Ms. Kia threw OJ a send-off party the day before he was set to leave for “Big Capital State University.” It was a festive event attended by several friends, family members, and former Chester Height teammates and coaching staff. You could hear people talking and laughing from several blocks away. During the party, a few people recalled their favorite “juiceman” memories. Mr. Planters shared, “If it wasn’t for OJ, our games wouldn’t have been packed by famous people, and also broadcast on television. He’s also the reason I was able to increase the cost of our games, yeah things will be different now (ha-ha).” Ms. “Kiki” said, “the only thing that’s going to be different is that my son is going to playing on a bigger stage with more people watching him,” and “OG” chimed in, “it’s just like “Biggie” said, ‘either you slinging crack rock or you got a wicked jump shot<sup>14</sup>,’ and we all know my man got a wicked “J,” he about to “turn up” for “BCSU.” Mr. Shepard, who was also invited to the party articulated, “OJ can ‘turn up’ in whatever path he chooses, don’t limit him just to basketball.” Before he departed the party, Mr. Shepard gave OJ a

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<sup>14</sup> Reference to lyrics from the slain rapper, Notorious B.I.G. song, *Things Done Changed*.



copy of the Autobiography of Malcolm X, in which he wrote the following, “mental liberation and critical consciousness is priceless, don’t conform to the system.” Reverend Comfort, who serves as the senior pastor at Mt. Messiah Pentecostal Church, closed the party out in prayer, in which he declared, “Father we thank you that “BCSU” and “Coach Whip” offered “OJ” a scholarship, and we also thank you for their love and concern for “juice.” Help him to appreciate his “opportunity” and also to remain loyal to everyone who helped him. Thank you in advance for making all of his dreams come true at “BCSU,” amen.”

***Recommendations for Educational Leaders to confront the “conveyer belt”***

*“The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the foreigner, denying them justice. “I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one.” (Ezekiel 22:29-30, New International Version)*

In the aforementioned text, the Deity told the prophet Ezekiel to declare judgment against Jerusalem. Judgment was needed because the leaders did not care about the people, they had their own agenda, they wanted to be rich, and they oppressed marginalized groups and strayed from the teachings of the sacred scriptures. The Deity could not find a person of righteousness to protect the people, and ultimately the country was destroyed. Similarly, major sneaker companies, corporate entities, and too many grown men involved with grassroots basketball are exploiting the athletic gifting’s of talented young players for their own benefit. It is now time for concerned educational leaders to “stand in the gap” for Black male student athletes and Black male students as a whole. Therefore, based off of problematic issues raised in the preceding case study explored

through questions that frame Langley's (2009) *model for improvement*<sup>15</sup>, the author recommends the following:

1. ***Accountability for coaches and youth basketball leaders-*** Educational leaders must demand accountability from school officials involved with youth basketball. As in the case of "OJ," it was clear that Mr. Planters did not care about the holistic development of the school's star player, he was only concerned about the bottom line (wins, sponsorship, and increased revenue). Leaders like "Mr. Planters" should be exposed. Data should be made available pertaining to grade point averages (GPA's), graduation rates, classroom experience, and enriching educational experiences beyond athletics (i.e. Trio program, entrepreneur clubs, volunteer service). Further, educational leaders, school athletic directors, and coaches should investigate the AAU teams that their players participate on, and the personnel that run these clubs. If that club has a history of shady and unethical practices, players and their families should be made aware of that, and strongly advised to disassociate themselves from that team.
2. ***Courageous conversations regarding stereotypical views about Black males-*** A huge reason for the pervasive biases against Black males, is because there is great confusion about what it means to be a Black man (for the purpose of this paper Black male youth student athletes). This confusion may cause some to believe that Black males are a homogenous group. Thus, as University of Pennsylvania professor Eric Grimes suggest, "Often we jump right to "solutions" without any consideration of the essential step of a clear definition (purpose) and a clear understanding that this Ideal Black Man is

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<sup>15</sup> Langley et al. (2009) challenges readers that "any effort to improve something should result" in answering the following questions: (1) what are we trying to accomplish? (2) How will we know that a change is an improvement? And (3) what changes can we make that will result in improvement?

contextually and culturally specific” (E.A. Grimes, personal communication, September 17, 2011). As it pertains to Black male youth, personal and cultural development is often times neglected, as they are socialized to believe sports are their only viable option (Edwards, 2000; Harris, 1994). The previous point was illustrated several times is the case of “OJ” consequently; educational leaders must lead courageous conversations within their milieu pertaining to low expectations, stereotypes, and the practice of “niggering” (Harper, 2009, p. 697) that Black male student athletes have to endure.

3. ***Culturally Relevant Leadership***-As Beachum (2011) declares culturally relevant leadership has implications for practice related to raising consciousness, affirmation and inclusion, and rejecting stereotypical barriers (pp. 33-34). In the case study, “Mr. Shepard” endeavored to fulfill that role with “OJ.” “Mr. Shepard” approach compliments Molefi Asante who has devoted his career to challenging the way in which African American students are being educated. In his book, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, Asante (2007) argues, “Afrocentricity seeks to respond to the dislocation of the African student in such an educational system by providing philosophical and theoretical guidelines and criteria which are centered in the African perception of reality” (p. 79). While I will not suggest total Afrocentric education, I do believe that every Black male student should be familiar with current and historical African American images of success in other industries besides sports. Furthermore, exposing Black boys to historical text such as, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Like “Mr. Shepard” did) will go a long way towards instilling pride and self-confidence within this group (which is also needed to reject negative stereotypes).
4. ***Give Accurate Information about the “System”***-Educational leaders who are concerned about the plight of Black male student athletes must become cognizant about the ills of

grassroots basketball. In his seminal work, *the Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson (1933) asserted, “If you can control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do” (p. 32). Woodson’s affirmation is relevant to the “system,” given the fact that too many African American males and their families are duped into believing that AAU basketball is a prerequisite to a college scholarship, and also that spending the entire summer playing basketball both locally and nationally is more important than participating in an academically enrichment program (Wetzel & Yaeger, 2000, pp. 259-267). Success on the court should not override success in the classroom and career development, therefore it is time to “blow the trumpet” about the grave lies that the “system” and “system advocates” promise.

The aforementioned strategies are just a few suggestions to combat the exploitation of the “conveyor belt.” Failure to act will ensure an educational genocide for this population. Although this research took a critical stance against the AAU and high school programs associated with the “system,” it is the author’s belief that most individuals working in grassroots basketball have a genuine interest in developing young people, and also that they are trying to do their best within a corrupt system. Unfortunately, exploitation is a reality, and as Van Rheen (2012) argues, a reality that should be expanded through a moral lens. Therefore, I am convicted to employ my usable intellect, leadership abilities, compassion, and charge from the Deity to “stand in the gap” for Black male student athletes, and declare like Dr. King, “If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show somebody he’s traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain” (As cited in Carson & Holloran, 1998).

### **Summary of the chapter**

This chapter provided context to the author's *problem of practice*, through relevant literature, in addition to a case study. Although the literature was not exhaustive, it does underscore the historical and contemporary issues at hand. The next chapter argues that to know about the "problem" is not enough, thus, chapter three provides rationale to the author's *designs for action*.

## CHAPTER THREE: RATIONALE FOR DESIGNS

### **Non Statis Scire: To Know is Not Enough**

This *dissertation in practice* seeks to enhance the common discourse pertaining to Black male student athletes who attend PWIs. For decades, numerous scholars, educators, and activist, have written and lectured on the debasement of Black male student athletes, but little “improvement” has taken place. To that end, we are living in one of the most explosive times there has ever been, as it pertains to intercollegiate athletics. Today, many current and former revenue playing athletes have become frustrated, disenchanted, disillusioned, and probably set for action now than ever before. Thus, the focus of this chapter is twofold. First, I will briefly review contemporary issues as it pertains to my *problem of practice*, as a means to give context to the complex issues at play,<sup>16</sup> and second, share aspects of my research study design, which enhances my understanding of the plight of revenue playing Black male student athletes, while simultaneously confirming the author’s suggested designs. The main point of this chapter is, “to know is not enough,” thus, the information rendered in chapter three provides a framework for the designs for action suggested in this *dissertation in practice*.

### **Contemporary Issues Pertaining to my Problem of Practice**

This *dissertation in practice* seeks to begin the process of recruiting followers to my work. I suppose harmful stereotypes projected on Black male student athletes negatively impacts the educational outcomes for this population. I also believe that stereotype threat is a valuable and respected frame to explore my problem of practice. But what does my scholarly conceptualization

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<sup>16</sup> Since the writing of this dissertation in practice, new issues have emerged in the revenue sports discourse. I will give a brief synopsis of these issues in Appendix A.

signify, if my audience is still ignorant to the systemic evils that impact the integrity of college athletics? Further, why would someone want to lend their support to a cause that appears more intellectual than social justice oriented?

It is the aforementioned inquires that compels me to take a psycho-educational approach to informing potential followers, about institutional inequities that harm African American male student athletes. Thus, this section of the paper will focus on the following themes related to my *problem of practice*: (1) Profit and “Pimpin:” are African American male student athlete’s indentured servants? (2) Condemnation and Conformity: the “miseducation” of Black male student athletes. And (3) Young, Dumb, and Vulnerable: the exploitation of Black male student athletes that begins in their early years. In addition, I will also share intervention strategies and next steps in this section of the dissertation.

***Profit and “Pimpin:” are African American male student athlete’s indentured servants?***

An exploratory critique of higher educational institutional inequities, inevitably leads us to the topic of White supremacy and privilege. Like it or not, it is a connection that we cannot ignore. The term predominantly White institutions symbolizes that within these milieus, they are and have always been composed of and controlled by White people. Parham (2009) highlights the abuse being done to Black athletes who attend predominately White Institutions when he asserts:

Student-athletes of African descent struggle with a set of challenges that often go beyond the experiences of both their Anglo student-athletes peers and their non-athlete student peers. Whether covert or overt, racism represents the most significant challenge facing today’s athletes of African descent. Irrespective of sport, division, or student demographic profile of the institution they attend, overt daily “micro aggressions are common.

As it pertains to White colleges and universities, the controversial issue is, do these institutions also exploit male athletes who compete in revenue producing sports? In his book, *Understanding & Dismantling Racism*, Barndt (2007) suggest institutional exploitation is inevitable, because those who are oppressed serve the purposes of those who dominate (p. 79). He further argues:

It is the misuse of power by systems and institutions in order to perpetuate white power and privilege. And the only way to deal with it is by changing the systems and institutions of the United States that are structured to benefit the white society and to dominate, control, and exploit people of color. Simply changing attitudes are not enough. Helping the victims of racism is not enough. Only by changing and transforming white power and privilege will it be possible to make significant progress in dismantling white racism. (p. 81)

There are opposing views regarding the perceived exploitation of Black male collegiate athletes. For example, Mark Emmert who is the current President of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) consistently defends the integrity of college athletics. In the documentary, *Money and March Madness*, Emmert maintained that male collegiate athletes (those who compete in revenue producing sports) are not being exploited, because they have access to the best collegiate institutions in the world, coaches, and trainers. Emmert further insists that the athletes, who are not lucky enough to play professional sports, still have an opportunity to be successful in life. University of Pennsylvania professor Camille Charles takes a different stance on the exploitation issue, when she declared:



I'm not sure where I come down on that, but I do think that there are things that college athletes are penalized for that don't make sense. The players that cut hair on the side for a little walking-around money, I just don't think that should be a problem. I think the bigger issue for me is that what college athletes are being compensated with is, through no fault of their own, something that they are often not equipped to cash in on. They don't have the skills to take advantage of the educational opportunity because they've been socialized to be athletes and moved along in school often at the expense of that academic preparation. So to then say, 'Well look, no, you don't get paid but you get this great college education ...' well, they often don't get this great college education. For most of them, they're more likely to be struck by lightning than they are to have a successful career in the NFL or the NBA. I think that the universities and the TV networks and the shoe companies all benefit from that, and that is problematic. (The Penn Current, 2010)

Leroy Ervin, a former administrator at the University of Georgia also rendered a different account from Emmert, when he told his staff, "I know for a fact that these kids would not be here if it were not for their utility to the institutions. They are used as a kind of raw material in the production of some goods to be sold as whatever product, and they get nothing in return" (Yost, 2010, p. 25). Although there are opposing views on the exploitation issue, one cannot overlook the fact that participants in revenue producing sports are disproportionately African American (Yost, 2010, p. 168). Regarding the profits that these "black bodies" help to bring in, the following was reported:

- 4.2 billion dollars generated from College Athletics (CNN, 2006).
- \$591 Million generated from College Basketball in 2009 (USA Today, 2009).

- An estimated 2.5 billion generated from the NCAA tournament in office pool and wagers (Forbes 2009).
- In 2007, corporate sponsors (i.e. Pepsi, FedEx) paid \$209 million to help finance bowl games and Fox paid \$83 million to broadcast 4 bowl games. That same year the University of Notre Dame was found to be the most valuable college football program (MSNBC, 2007).

Further, sneaker companies, television networks, coaches, and merchandising corporations are making millions of dollars per year, from the sweat and determination of male collegiate athletes (Yost, 2010; Rhoden, 2006). The Black males that I worked with at UD had strong views on the commercialization of college athletics. Concerning revenue from collegiate football, “Future Pro” said, “my jersey is in every store on campus, but I can’t even afford to buy it. I can’t even afford to buy a decent meal our go home on the weekend if I wanted to, that’s fucked up.” Mark Emmert (and others) believes that athletes who participate in revenue producing sports should appreciate their “opportunity,” but I argue that they should be afraid of a system that profits from their free labor, and then treats them as subservient beings.

### ***Condemnation and Conformity: the “miseducation” of Black male student athletes***

In the now classic book titled, *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1903) said, “For the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” I am sure if Du Bois were alive today, he would argue that one of the most precarious problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the negative plight of Black male students as it relates to education. This obstruction hinders Black males in both high school and higher education. To further this point, The Schott Foundation reported that only 47% of Black male students graduated on time from U.S. high schools in 2008, compared to 78% of White male students (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). It was also revealed that

in 2008, Black men comprised only 4.3% of students enrolled at institutions of higher education, the exact same percentage as in 1976 (Harper, 2006a; Strayhorn, 2010).

In revisiting the sociology of sport to explore the plight of Black males in education, it is important that we focus on the major social and systemic circumstances that fuel this sad narrative. One issue of particular concern to me is the condemnation and embitterment of Black male students, done by their educational leaders. This is a problem that Harper (2012) highlighted in his report, *Black Male Success in Higher Education*, when he shared the following, “When asked who helped them most in searching for and choosing a college, most participants named their parents, extended family members and high school teachers. After this was brought to their attention the overwhelming majority of participants explained that their counselors were more harmful than helpful.” (p. 10)

As it relates to athletes who compete in revenue producing sports, a major problem is that too many educational leaders do not value this population’s academic abilities or intellectual prowess, but rather, they view male collegiate basketball and football players as the main protagonist in the “Entertainment Product” (Yost, 2010, p. 13). Thus, it is not surprising that coaches will advise athletes to take “cake courses” so that they can remain eligible to compete. It is also not surprising that some individuals who work with this population, view them as “spoiled brats” who graduated simply because they are gifted athletes, “who weren’t born to learn”, but rather, “they were born to play” (p. 15).

The aforementioned breeds an attitude of complacency and conformity towards Black male student athletes. For example, Phil Hughes who is an Athletic Director at Kansas State University declared, “You accept it for what it is, that’s all you can do. I’m trying to make an impossible

equation work. It's a dogfight every day. I relish when can make it work" (Yost, 2010, p.19). In order to change this sad narrative, we need to shift from viewing Black male students athletes as mere entertainers, and start viewing them as young men that need to succeed beyond athletics. This is a subject that Dr. Nathan Tublitz (co-chairmen of the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics) raised a when he asserted, "As educators, we need to make sure that those kids from underprivileged backgrounds are given the skills to achieve their potential. We need to put more resources into that group of students" (p. 47). Failure to put more resources into "that group of students," will ensure increased revenue for higher educational institutions, and continued "cake courses," which ultimately sets them up for personal and professional failure!

***Young, Dumb, and Vulnerable: the exploitation of Black male athletes that begins in their early years***

Educating high school athletes and school leaders about the "system," is an important strategic action item that I need to focus on moving forward. This is especially critical given the fact that young athletes who show promise are pursued at an early age (sometimes as early as nine). This pursuit has severe consequences! Some teachers are coerced to overlook the academic difficulties of their athletic prize pupils, so that they can remain eligible throughout the basketball and football season. Coaches and family members become "black market" agents, and the athletes are duped into believing that they will earn a professional sports contract. To further this point, Rudy Washington used slavery rhetoric to illustrate the process:

How tough is it to buy and inner-city kid? Buy him some shoes, take him to dinner, get him some nice clothes, maybe a car. You become his best friend, and he gets hooked, like a Junkie. Then you control the product. The secret is controlling the product early.

It's just like slavery. Modern-day slavery is what it is. And you know the saddest part? The kids benefit from the system-at least a few lucky ones-with education and money, but what they often lose is any identification with the black community. (Rhoden, 2006, p. 178)

Rhoden (2006) suggested that these young athletes are in “psychological bondage” when he proclaimed, “The belt (the AAU system that targets these athletes in middle and high school) is also designed to dull any racial consciousness and eliminate communal instincts. Instead, the Belt cultivates a culture of racial know-nothingism. Indeed, the act of “processing” athletes along the Conveyor Belt involves a significant and often subtle element of “deprogramming” potential troublemakers-black athletes who might be tempted to think of themselves” (p. 177).

### **Research Study Design**

Through a four year period, both practitioner oriented and scholarly exploration, the author was able to gather narratives from several current and former Black male student athletes at institutions in the Northeast, Southeast, and Midwest corridor of the United States. Therefore, highlighted in the section, is the author's study design for his IRB study<sup>17</sup>.

#### ***Purpose of the study***

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how African American male student athletes who compete in revenue sports (e.g. Basketball and Football) at predominantly White institutions (Division 1 classification) experience and perceive the climate on their campus and team. Stereotype threat was employed for the conceptual framing of this study. Further, stereotype threat will also be applied to analyze the experiences of African American male student athletes at

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix B for The IRB's informed consent and interview questions.

PWI's. Steele and Aronson (1995) define stereotype threat as the risk of conforming, as self-characteristic, to a negative characteristic about one's group (p. 797). Although Steele's original work focused strictly on the standardized test performance of African American students, stereotype threat is relevant in any milieu where the stereotype is applicable. I sought to better understand how revenue playing African American male student athletes experience life at predominantly White institutions, where their "blackness" is often magnified. Further, I also hoped that this study would give me a better understanding about issues that impact African American male student athletes who attend PWI's.

### ***Significance of the Study***

African American male student athletes are a unique population. They are applauded for their athletic prowess, while simultaneously being disenfranchised by the athletic system they support. Further, stereotypes exist about African American male student athlete's superior athletic talent, and inferior intellectual abilities (Edwards, 1984). Not surprisingly, an academic achievement gap and lower persistent rate continues to exist between African American male student athletes and their White counterparts (Harper, 2006). Much of the current literature focuses on the following: (1) the academic achievement gap that exist between Black male student athletes and their White counterparts (Harper, 2013), (2) the commercialization of college athletics (Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005), and (3) negative stereotypes that continue to plague Black male student athletes (Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett, 2008; Oseguera, 2010). However, few studies fully explore how this population experiences daily life at their institution. My research emerged out of this context. This study hopes to offer insights into the types of programs, services, psycho-educational workshops, and interventions that predominantly White institutions might consider for their revenue playing African American male student athletes.

### ***Research design and procedures***

The purpose of this study was to explore how revenue playing Black student athletes experience and perceive the climate on their campus. This study was guided by a phenomenology approach to qualitative inquiry, which focuses on understanding the human experiences of individuals who have experienced a similar phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The researcher hopes to, “understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). Germane to this research, the phenomenon is being a revenue playing (Division 1) African American male student athlete who attends a predominately White institution. With the plethora of studies that highlight the academic shortcomings of Black male student athletes, the commercialization of college athletics, and negative stereotypes that depict African American male student athletes as “thugs,” a better understanding of how this population experiences college life is the aim of this work.

### ***Sample Selection and Size***

Critical case sampling, which is a technique of purposeful sampling, was used for this study. According to Patton (2002), critical case sampling can be decisive in explaining the phenomenon of interest (p. 237). The study participants were current and former African American male student athletes. Patton (2002) further suggests that within qualitative inquiry, rules for sample size do not exist. This research consisted of 11 participants. I chose to use current and former student athletes because both may offer strong insight about their experiences at predominantly White institutions. Further, I also compared the experiences of the participants to determine differences and/or similarities in responses.

### ***Recruitment of subjects***

All participants in this study were recruited from 6 universities in the Northeast and Midwest regions in the United States. I worked with athletic department and support staff personnel to identify study participants (See Appendix). All invited participants were 18 and older.

### ***Collection of data and method of data analysis/Instruments***

Focus group interviews and individual interviews were employed for this study, both were audio recorded and then transcribed by myself. A series of 10 to 15 questions were employed for the study (See Appendix). I checked (proofread) all transcriptions against the audiotape and revised the transcript file accordingly. All transcripts were audited for accuracy by me. Study participants had a chance to review transcripts for accuracy, and indicate any needed revisions. All conversations in the focus group and individual interviews were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identity.

### ***Site Descriptors***

The current and former Black male student athletes, who participated in the focus groups and interviews, were participants at institutions that were Division 1-A classification. Six large scale institutions spanned five states in the Northeast, Southeast, and Midwest regions of the United States. The accounts rendered in chapter four, are from the athletes at ***Seahawk University***, which is located in the northeast region of the country. The university is located in a suburban area of the state, and recruits student athletes to compete for the university in one of the top mid-major conferences of the NCAA.



## CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVES OF THE ATHLETES

### Introduction

The purpose of this *dissertation in practice*, was to develop *designs for action* that would lead to *generative impacts*. The author contends that the aforementioned would not have occurred without engaging Black males who are (or were) a student athlete at a PWI. Therefore, this chapter provides insight about the lived experiences of Black male student athletes who participate (or participated) in a revenue generating sport at an institution in the northeast region of America. The individuals that the author interacted with through interviews and focus group sessions have been given pseudonyms, however; the essence of the meaning of their narratives remain untouched.

### Rendering an Account

In his book, *Whistling Vivaldi*, Steele (2010) talks about “identity contingencies,” which are the things a person has to deal with because they have a given social identity (i.e. Black male athlete) (p. 3). Steele argues that stereotypes are associated with one’s identity. More explicitly he shares:

We could all take out a piece of paper, write down the major stereotypes of these identities, and show a high degree of agreement in what we wrote. This means that whenever we’re in a situation where a bad stereotype about one of our identities could be applied to us—such as those about being old, poor, rich, or female—we know it. We know what “people could think.” We know that anything we do that fits the stereotype could be taken as confirming it. And we know that, for that reason, we could be judged and treated accordingly. (p. 5)

Presented in this section of the paper are the following themes that frame Steele's (1995) theory of stereotype threat: (1) individuals know when they are being stereotyped, (2) individuals know what people could think about them, (3) individuals are aware that anything they do that fits the stereotype could be taken as confirming it, and (4) individuals are aware that they could be judged and treated accordingly to those stereotypes. The aforementioned themes will be explored through the narratives of Black male student athletes whom I have had the privilege to work with at Seahawk University. Their stories have both inspired and convicted me to press forward with this work.

### ***Individuals know when they are being stereotyped***

Steele argues that individuals of society are cognizant about the stereotypes other individuals in our society might hold against a certain group (Steele, 2010, p. 5). "NJ" and "Dreads" would certainly agree with that claim. "NJ" is a 20 year-old junior who plays defense for Seahawk University football team. "NJ" is perceived as a "good kid" by the athletics support staff at SU. Meaning, administrators and counselors view "NJ" as a non-threatening African American male student athlete. Although "NJ" is skilled at managing his image as a good "company man" at SU, he still holds deep resentment towards the coaching staff for the negative stereotypes they hold against the Black players on the team. In an empowerment support group session, "NJ" shared the following:

Ya'll remember when coach "L" said that a black quarterback will never play for him. These coaches treat us like we're stupid. They say stuff on the "low" then they act like they joking. Then coach "N" I can't stand that mutha-fucka, I'm still mad how he tried to "play me" in front of the team saying that I can't read or play football.

“Dreads,” a 21 year old running back for the team, is also aware of the stereotypes that exist on campus against Black male student athletes. In a focus group session, “Dreads” talked about racial stereotypes that are prevalent on campus. More explicitly he shared:

I thought racism was dead, but when I got up here, ‘oh boy.’ These cops harass us for no reason. They know we football players, so they’re looking for a reason to ‘fuck with us.’ Then some of the White girls on campus are scared of us, they think we’re ‘eye raping’ them.

Both “NJ” and “Dreads” highlight critical issues pertaining to the anxiety caused by negative stereotypes. In the case of “NJ” he shares the trauma caused by being abused by an individual(s) who is entrusted for protection. “NJ” was adamant that he would never confide in his coaches about anything of importance, because he feared they would either misuse the information or make a joke out of it. Further, “NJ” expressed that he doubts his intellectual abilities because of the coach’s constant verbal abuse. Probably unbeknownst to “Dreads,” his comments (the night of the focus group session) spoke to two of America’s dirty little secrets that have existed for years against Black males, which are: (1) Black males are criminals, and (2) Black males are hypersexual beings who want to harm the “purity” of White women<sup>18</sup>. “Dreads” is particularly a target because of his presentation. Raised in the south, “Dreads” adorns himself in the cultural attire common for Black males in that region of America (i.e. Dreadlock hairstyle, gold teeth, several tattoos, “wife beater t-shirts”, and “Jordan” sneakers). His southern “drawl” and car (an “old school Chevy” on 20 inch wheels) also helps “Dreads” to stick out in the conservative

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<sup>18</sup> The depiction of Black males as criminals and being sexually aggressive towards White women was the major theme of the 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation*.

White campus community. As “Dreads” would assert the night of our focus group session, “this place be pissing me off, I’m just trying to survive.”

***Individuals know what people could think about them***

Stereotypes regarding the perceived academic limitations of student-athletes are common on collegiate campuses and society (Burke, 1993). Some of these negative stereotypes are probably fueled by statistics that continue to show the academic underperformance of Black male athletes who play collegiate basketball and football. For example, Lapchick (2012) reported that there is a 35% graduation success rate (GSR) disparity between White and African male basketball student-athletes who played on “Sweet 16” team’s from this year’s NCAA Division 1 men’s basketball tournament. Further, CNN reported that the University of Connecticut (UCONN) graduates only 25% of their men’s basketball players within six years. If we were to break that number down racially, only 14% of Black male players graduated during that same time span at UCONN. Other top revenue producing basketball programs also have dismissal graduation rates including: only 38% of players from the University of Florida, only 45% of players from the University of Michigan, and only 47% of players from Indiana University (CNN, 2012)

Although the aforementioned numbers accentuate major changes that need to occur in collegiate athletics<sup>19</sup>, I agree with Lapchick (2012) when he declares, “College campuses are often not welcoming places for some students.” “Pitbull” and “Badnews” are probably the “some students” who Lapchick is referring to. “Pitbull” is a 20 year old redshirt sophomore from southern Virginia who plays linebacker for SU. Although “Pitbull” is a full time student and

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<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that new rules are in place to penalize schools that have a poor Academic Progress Rate (APR). For example, the University of Connecticut’s men basketball team will be banned from postseason play in 2013, because of the programs dismal graduation percentage.

athlete, he still finds time to raise and sell Pit bulls (hence the reason for his name) to teammates and friends. I spent a lot of time with “Pitbull” given the fact that he was one of the male athletes assigned to my counseling caseload. During our sessions, “Pitbull” often talked about his relational problems with his girlfriend and “babymother,” and also his desire to be a good father and provider to his three-year old son. But two months into our counseling sessions, “Pitbull” started to share insecurities about his academic abilities. Below is a conversation that we had during one of our sessions:

*RWWII*: Good to see you today. Before we get started, I was informed by SSA (Student Services for Athletes) that your mid-semester grades aren’t that strong. I don’t want to pressure you, but is there anything you want to share?

*“PitBull”*: You talking about Com 101 and Sociology?

*RWWII*: Yes, all of your grades are pretty low, but you’re failing those classes.

*“PitBull”*: It’s like I was starting to share with you last week, I don’t feel comfortable talking in those classes, so I don’t participate. I don’t want to ask a question or speak, because I don’t want those White-muthafuckers looking or laughing at me.

*RWWII*: How does that make you feel?

*“PitBull”*: I know “they” don’t want me in class, so I’m not going to say anything wrong. I don’t want them to think I’m a dumb nigger.

The theme of feeling unwanted in the classroom and community, was shared by many of the Black male athletes who I worked with, but best articulated by “Badnews.” “Badnews” is a 19 year old running back from Eastern, Virginia. If there ever was a poster child for the perceived “young Black thug,” “Badnews” would be it. Short in stature, dark-skin, muscular, and known for his intimidating facial expression, “Badnews” persona is reminiscent to the character “O-Dog” from the movie, *Menace II Society*. Apparently “Badnews” is also cognizant of how he is viewed by his peers and others. Recalling a time when an Asian student (who he did not know) asked him

for a car ride back to campus, “Badnews” said, “I didn’t think anybody would ask me for a ride that was crazy!”

My relationship with “Badnews” emerged, after a few of my SU colleagues had a hard time connecting with him. Our first few sessions were extremely difficult given the fact that “Badnews” has a hard time trusting people and also talking about himself. We hit a connection during our third session, when “Badnews” talked about his love for Hip Hop music, and in particular, the slain rapper Tupac Shakur.

I figured since “Badnews” was a fan of Hip Hop, it would only make sense to engage in music therapy, and bring in lyrics from one of Tupac’s most popular songs, *All eyez one me*. That strategy proved to be a pivotal moment in my therapeutic relationship with “Badnews,” given the fact that he started to open up about his frustrations about having “All eyez on him.” During one of our sessions, “Badnews” shared, “I hate this place, you can’t do shit, you can’t trust nobody. I don’t expect White people to change, it’s a culture here.” Not only did “Badnews” express anger towards his coaches and the White community at Seahawk University, but he also was mad at the “regular” African American students (the good Black kids), because he felt they wanted to disassociate themselves from the Black male student athletes (out of their fear of being labeled intellectually inferior also). The intraracial divide is an important aspect that often gets overlooked in the stereotype threat discourse, but “Badnews” was savvy enough to recognize that “black on black” labeling is also problematic at Predominately White Institutions (and in society).

***Individuals are aware that anything they do that fits the stereotype could be taken as confirming it***

There is a pervasive belief that male student athletes do not care about their education. Sure, there are always going to be male student athletes who are solely concerned about athletics, but the same is true for some traditional students who attend college for reasons other than receiving a good education or degree. My experiences working with this population has caused me to conclude that male student athletes do care about their education, in addition to succeeding in non-sports related careers. This is certainly the case for “Future Pro.” “Future Pro” is a junior running back and the team’s best player. “Future Pro” is the quintessential “rags to riches” story. Not recruited out of high school, “Future Pro” made the team as a walk-on player, which meant that his tuition and room and board was not paid for (initially), and he also had to beat out seven other running backs to earn a starting position. Not only did “Future Pro” beat out the running backs on his team, but he has also been beating up on opposing defenses during his first two seasons. “Future Pro” is on pace to shatter the offensive record books at SU. Athletically gifted, handsome, humble, physically strong, and soft spoken, “Future Pro” is the perfect face of the program.

One would think that an athlete of “Future Pro’s” caliber would enjoy his college experience, but this is not the case for him. During an empowerment support group session, “Future Pro” talked about being harassed by the police (even though everyone in the community knows who he is), and also his academic difficulties. Regarding his academic challenges, “Future Pro” disclosed:

Because of my success, everybody be thinking I care about football. But the truth is, I could care less about that, I'm trying to get my academics together. At the end of the day that's what counts, and I'm trying to get my stuff together. I'm trying my hardest to get my grades up, but compared to White and Chinese students, I ain't going to lie, I feel dumb as shit.

The thought of feeling inferior in relation to other racial/ethnic groups, is something "Church Boy" can relate to. "Church Boy" is a tall (lanky) redshirt freshman wide receiver from South Carolina who oozes "southern charm." "Church Boy" is the type of young man that most parents would want their daughters to marry. Funny, respectful, and committed to his Christian upbringing, few people have anything bad to say about "Church Boy." During an empowerment support group session, "Church Boy" acknowledged that racial stereotypes exist on campus, but he primarily focused on his desire to get better grades. More explicitly he shared, "I'm trying my hardest to study and get better grades, but it's not working. I just don't want 'people' to think that I'm the average dumb football player."

"Future Pro" and "Church Boy" dispel the myth that Black male student athletes do not study and are not concerned about their educational attainments. Quite the contrary, they study hard and want to experience success in the academic domain, but they are still saddled with challenges. In his book, *Whistling Vivaldi*, Steele (2010) talked about the differing studying styles of Asian, Black, and White students. Steele shares:

Asian students studied in groups, formal, and informal, more than black and white students. Asian students also made little distinction between their academic and social lives. Saturday night studying in the library counted as social life for a group of friends



bonded, in part, over studying and doing math problems together. White students studied more independently. But they readily sought help from other students and teaching assistants. They talked shop about calculus outside of class, even compared notes on difficult problems, but focused their social lives less on academics than did Asian students. Black students, Treisman found, offered a contrast to both styles. They were intensely independent, downright private about their work. After class, they returned to their rooms, closed the door and pushed through long hours of study—more hours than either whites or Asians. Many of them were the first of their family to attend college; they carried their family hopes. With no one to talk to, the only way to tell whether they understood the concept of a problem was to check their answer in the back of the book. They spent considerable time doing this, which made them focus less on calculus concepts and more on rechecking their arithmetic against answers in the book. This tactic weakened their grasp of the concepts. Despite great effort, they often performed worse on classroom tests than whites and Asians, who they knew had studied no more, or even less, than they had. In light of the racial stereotype in the air over their heads, this was a frustrating experience, which made them wonder whether they belonged there. (Steele, 2010, pp. 100-101)

The aforementioned analysis gives vivid insight into the personal turmoil that many Black students experience at predominately White institutions. Contrary to popular beliefs, Black students do study, and they endeavor to do well. But isolation, a lack of peer support and in some cases a lack of holistic college readiness, plays a major role into the mediocre academic outcomes for African American students who attend universities where negative stereotypes are prevalent. I suppose “Future Pro” and “Church Boy” were reluctant to seek help from professors and/or

classmates, because of their own beliefs about their intellectual abilities. By the time I concluded my empowerment support group sessions, both were discouraged and doubted if they would ever experience academic success at SU.

***Individuals are aware that they could be judged and treated accordingly to those stereotypes***

The title of Steele's (2010) book, *Whistling Vivaldi* was inspired by the narrative of *New York Times* columnist Brent Staples. When Brent Staples was a graduate student at the University of Chicago, he realized some "individuals" appeared scared of his presence in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood. Recognizing that he was being negatively stereotyped (i.e. young African American thug) by "residents" in that community, Staples decided to whistle popular tunes to ease the tension. That intervention caused Staples to be viewed as a polished African American male, instead of a violence-prone criminal (pp. 6-7).

"House Negro" a 20 year old transfer student from Maine, is also skilled at using interventions to counteract negative stereotypes associated with young Black males. Raised by two professional parents, "House Negro" attended private schools, and was socialized to show deference to authority figures. His parents also prohibited "House Negro" from wearing fashionable trends associated with young African American males. During the focus group sessions, most of the participants had harsh feelings towards the police, because of their constant harassment of Black male student athletes. In an effort to respond to that theme, I tried to teach the group "code switching" techniques to avoid being harassed by the police. To that end, most of the participants had visceral responses. For example, "Pit Bull" said, "man it's my fuckin car, if I want to have tinted windows and blast my music, that's my right" and "Badnews" was consistent with his stance of, "I ain't 'selling out' for nobody, that's bullshit!"

“House Negro” took a different approach. Not only did he agree with my interventions, but he also told the group that they need to stop looking like ‘targets’. During one of the sessions things became contentious between “House Negro” and “Pitbull.” Below is an exchange that emerged between the two:

*“Pitbull”*: So you telling me I need to change my image to stop being harassed by the cops?

*“House Negro”*: Yes look at you. “Pitbull” you walk around here with “wife beaters” on, you have tattoos and you always blast your music. You make yourself stand out, that’s your fault.

*“Pitbull”*: Man fuck that! I’m a man just like them; I can do what the fuck I want to do.

*“House Negro”*: Then do what you want to do, and see what happens. You’re stupid! If you want to keep putting yourself out there then do that. That’s why you keep having the same problems.

What “House Negro” brought to the group was a belief system that many middle and upper-middle class African Americans hold to. More plainly, “House Negro” was socialized to believe that if African Americans presented themselves in a respectable manner, they would gain acceptance by White Americans. Although many of the participants agreed with most of what “House Negro” was saying, he still was viewed as a “sell out” by teammates who had more “street credibility” than him. Ironically, towards the end of our sessions, “House Negro” privately revealed to me that he was seeing a psychologist for depression and substance abuse. I surmise that “House Negro” was starting to rethink the teachings of his parents, and starting to ponder on what Frazier (1957) wrote in his book, *The Black Bourgeoisie*, in which Frazier asserts, “The black bourgeoisie, who have striven to mold themselves in the image of the white man, have not been able to escape from the mark of racial inferiority.”

## CHAPTER 5: DESIGNS FOR ACTION

### Chapter Introduction

This chapter highlights the author's suggested *designs for action*. The *designs for action* presented in this chapter, are a result of the author's lived experience and scholarly exploration. Design 1, offers culturally relevant interventions to engage Black male student athletes who attend PWI's, and Design 2, offers a conceptual decentralized diversity initiative that PWI's might want to consider for their revenue playing Black male student athletes.

### Designs 1 Introduction

In his influential book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1903) declared:

Between me and the other world there is ever and unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, **How does it feel to be a problem?** I answer seldom a word (pp. 7-8.)

Du Bois's question, "how does it feel to be the problem (?)," will be the guiding thought for The first *design for action* for the following reasons. First, as depicted in my problem of practice, Black male student athletes who attend predominately White institutions (PWI's) struggle with what Stevenson (2003) calls *conspicuous invisibility*-which is the persistent, pervasive, and perpetual systematic imaging of Black men as problematic and the systematic blindness or refusal to acknowledge and remember African American male talent and potential (p. 86). Second, vital

to “improvement research,” is challenging the biases, low expectations, and negative stereotypes that resonate in individuals that work with Black male student athletes.

To further this point, Harper (2013) asserts:

Any effort to **improve** rates of completion and academic success among Black male student-athletes must include some emphasis on their confrontations with low expectations and stereotypes in classrooms and elsewhere on campus. Provosts, deans, and department chairs should engage faculty colleagues in substantive conversations and developmental exercises that raise consciousness about stereotypes and racist/sexist assumptions they possess about students of color and student-athletes in general, and Black men in particular.  
(p. 17)

The latter will be my focus in this first design for action. Thus, this section seeks to: (1) challenge professionals who work with my population on a daily basis, to confront barriers that cheapen the educational and college experience(s) for Black male student athletes, (2) engage in discourse around culturally relevant interventions that are contextually applicable to Black male student athletes, and (3) interrogate educational institutions and systems (i.e. National Collegiate Athletic Association NCAA) for their lack of responsiveness to improving the college experiences for revenue playing Black male student athletes.

### ***Affection, Protection, Correction***

Harper (2013) was precise when he asserted that improvement cannot happen for Black male student athletes who attend PWI's without challenging the ways in which they are viewed, in addition to the low expectations set for them (p. 17). His philosophy compliments my psycho-educational approach regarding the racial and ethnic socialization of Black male students in

general, and Black male student athletes in particular. Specifically, I am suggesting that we need to take a “both/and”<sup>20</sup> approach toward improving the conditions for Black male student athletes. Professionals need to be challenged about the way they see, think about, and interact with Black male student athletes, but they also need to employ culturally relevant interventions to help this population manage stressful racial/ethnic encounters that they experience at predominantly White institutions. Thus, racial/ethnic coping appraisal and socialization theory (RECAST) will be used for the conceptual framing of this Problem of Practice Report.

Stevenson (2011) states, “RECAST theory assumes that one’s lack of skills or fear of incompetence with managing racial/ethnic stress explains why most individuals use avoidance to cope with racial encounters.” He offers *Affection, Protection, and Correction*, as a way to engage Black males. Below is an example of how to employ those interventions, when working with African American male student athletes who attend PWI’s:

### **1. Affection (“Stickin’ to”)**

- *Physical nurturance*- giving a handshake, hug, or other form of “respectful” physical affection, before engaging in anything of substance (i.e. talking about mid-semester grades).
- *Emotional nurturance*-letting them know that it is okay to hurt, be angry, or scared.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The “Both/And Theory” assumes that the synergy of physical and human resources, intellectual property, creativity and technology transforms the resources beyond the traditional assumption of scarcity to an assumption of abundance. <http://www.bothand.org/>

<sup>21</sup> This approach is in direct opposition to athletic culture (particularly football and basketball) which views the aforementioned emotions as “sissy,” “gay,” and “weak.”

- *Cultural nurturance*-informing them about programs and/or centers on campus (i.e. Black Cultural Center) where they can feel “safe” and validated.

## **2. Protection (“Watchin’ Over”)**

- *Physical monitoring*-talking about the importance of taking care of one’s physical self, and not feeling bad for doing it.
- *Emotional monitoring*-having courageous conversations about the threat involved with arguing with authority figures (i.e. coaches, cops, professors).
- *Cultural monitoring*-affirming them that their Black face is not a “curse,” despite how others might view you.

## **3. Correction (“Gettin With”)**

- *Physical Accountability*- how one presents themselves on a daily basis (i.e. pants sagging and walking around campus with no shirt on), in addition to gestures (i.e. shooting a gun) that they choose to make, has legitimate consequences for every individual that looks like them.
- *Emotional Accountability*- teaching that “code switching” does not mean that you are “selling out.”
- *Cultural Accountability*-teaching that “strategic submission,” is a useful and wise tactic.<sup>22</sup>

The aforementioned interventions provide suggestions for counteracting negative stereotypes that Black male student athletes might experience at predominantly White institutions. Further, as Stevenson (2011) suggest, “Claude Steele’s work on stereotype threat serves as the best description

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<sup>22</sup> I define “strategic submission,” as deferring (not a lifestyle of deference to White supremacy and inequalities) to a stressful situation because one recognizes the bigger picture and the risk involved with making an unwise decision.

of the effects of systemic racism on the psychological and identity processes of individuals. How adults and youth react to the stereotype of Black inferiority is not inconsequential and represents a context in which **R/ES** may have particular influence” (p. 25).

### ***Culture in Context***

In his book, *Whistling Vivaldi*, Steele (2010) talks about the journey that led him to focus on the link between identity and intellectual performance during the early stages of the formation of stereotype threat. He states:

The Ann Arbor trip raised questions and provided some clues. There was hard evidence: the achievement problems of black students at Michigan weren't caused entirely by skills deficits. Something about the social and psychological aspects of their experience was likely involved. At the time, I had no idea what it was. There was softer evidence: the students themselves worried about whether or not they belonged, or ever could belong, at Michigan. Martin Luther King once worried about black students in integrated schools might not always be taught by people who **“loved them.”** These students had the same concern. I wondered on that flight home whether these two pieces of evidence-about their grades and about their sense of belonging-had anything to do with each other. (p. 20)

As it pertains to my population, it is critical that we engage in a “real” conversation relating to the historical existence of African American male student athletes at predominantly White institutions. Rhoden (2006) declares that Black male athletes admittance into PWI's “was not to embrace quality, but to seize an opportunity for exploitation” (p. 135), and Leroy Ervin asserts that “I know for a fact that these kids would not be here if it were not for their utility to the institutions” (Yost, 2010, p. 25). The aforementioned claims from Rhoden and Ervin compliments King's philosophy



that Black students (for the purpose of this paper, Black male student athletes) who attend majority White institutions might not always receive love and validation from those entrusted to educate them (Steele, 2010, p. 20).

It is my belief that understanding and employing culturally relevant interventions precedes the love that King talked about. Thus, Recast Theory is culturally and contextually applicable to Black male student athletes who attend PWI's. It is ignorant to continue to engage Black male student athletes in a manner that negates their "significant history and common cultural and historical heritage" (Jonassen and Land, 2012). Recast Theory imbeds those tenets into practice. Dr. Naim Akbar (scholar, psychologist, and retired professor at Florida State University) contends that African Americans need to have "a conceptualization that rolls out of the view of who we are out of our perspective" (personal communication, July 15, 2009). I theorize that the holistic educational experiences for Black male student athletes will begin to improve, once this population starts to conceptualize who they are, and institutional professionals start to engage (and respect) them in that manner.

### ***Confronting the Mis-Education***

The "mis-education" of Black male student athletes continues to be a profound problem that plagues their success. Harper's (2013) recent *Black Male Student-Athletes* report underscores the impact that this "mis-education" had on the six-year graduation rates (I will highlight these numbers in a later section of the paper) of African male athletes who competed in major athletic conferences<sup>23</sup>. When Woodson (1933) coined the term "mis-education," he was talking about the

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<sup>23</sup> The author's chose to analyze the ACC, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac 12, and SEC, because every NCAA Division 1 football champion and each Division 1 men's basketball championship team since 1991 has come from them. They were also selected because their football conference

systems refusal to educate Black people from a perspective that uplifted African history and culture. Woodson considered this approach to be deplorable, because it caused Blacks to develop an inferiority complex, as a result of their educational socialization.

Woodson's philosophy is still applicable in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and should be explored by every individual that advocates for educational equity and social justice. This is why I take issue with remarks by Phil Hughes (and others) when he states, "You accept it for what it is<sup>24</sup>, that's all you can do. I'm trying to make an impossible equation work. It's a dogfight every day. I relish when can make it work" (Yost, 2010, p. 19). I interpret "accepting" as conforming to a corrupt system, and subconsciously believing that Black male student athletes are not worth investing in (educationally speaking). The aforementioned claim is not based on theoretical knowledge, but rather, on practical experience. During my time at the SU, I interacted with colleagues who were too timid to challenge the system, and too steeped in their biases to advocate for the improvement of Black male student athletes. Support for my work (using tenets from Recast Theory), only came when department colleagues saw the success of my program, and an opportunity for them to facilitate similar work at other institutions (i.e. presenting workshops). I argue that Recast Theory does challenge the current interventions employed for Black male student athletes who attend PWI's, but in order for universal changes to be made for this population, Macro systems (i.e. the NCAA) will also need to be challenged.

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champions receive automatic bids to the Bowl Championship Series (BCS). The authors conclude that the aforementioned conferences are likely sites at which trends reported in published research on Black male student-athletes are most problematic. (p.4)

<sup>24</sup> Phil Hughes (Associate Athletic Director at Kansas State University) was talking about the economics of college athletics that cheapen the educational experiences for athletes.

## *Raising Consciousness*

In his movie *Malcolm X*, director Spike Lee portrays a speech that the slain former Black Muslim leader delivered at a unity rally in Harlem (August of 1963). In this poignant scene, Malcolm X (played by Denzel Washington) declared, “Oh, and I say it again, you've been had, you've been took, you've been hoodwinked, bamboozled, led astray, run amok!”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, it is my belief that individuals who explore issues of concern in college athletics have also been, “hoodwinked, bamboozled, and led astray.” Much of the dominant discourse pertaining to Black male student participation in intercollegiate athletics focuses on: (1) the commercialization of college athletics (i.e. Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005, Haper, 2009), and (2) should revenue playing college athletes be paid. While those issues are important, they speak primarily to the “business” of college athletics, and not to, the main protagonist of this narrative. It has been my experience that when the athletes (especially Black) are brought into the discourse, many people suggest that they should simply shut up and appreciate their “opportunity.” Individuals who subscribe to the “opportunity” rhetoric confirm Harper’s (2009) point that, “One could easily summarize their status as Niggers with balls who enroll to advance their sports careers and generate considerable revenue for the institution” (p. 701).

My goal is to educate individuals on how revenue playing African American male student athletes experience and perceive the climate at predominantly White institutions. In a recent study, it was found that women, **student athletes of color**, sexual minorities, and third and fourth year

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<sup>25</sup> In the actual unity rally speech, Malcolm X did not include those words in his discourse.

students reported more campus harassment than their counterparts (Student Athlete Climate Study [SACS], 2011). In an effort to dramatize my problem of practice, I must adopt West's (1999) philosophy of being an "organic" public intellect when he suggests, "To be an intellectual really means to speak a truth that allows suffering to speak. That is, it creates a vision of the world that puts into the limelight the social misery that is usually hidden or concealed by the dominant viewpoints of a society." In my endeavors to become a *Scholar in Practice*, my charge is to continue to illustrate the sorrow and exploitation of Black male student athletes who attend White institutions.

### ***Interrogating Systems***

In an attempt to analyze if revenue playing Black male student athletes who attend PWI's are being valued ethically, I first find it necessary to interrogate systems that are entrusted for their well-being. Mark Emerett, who is the President of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) stated, "Our mission is to be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student athlete" (NCAA, 2010). I find that statement very shocking, given the fact that Emerett and the NCAA is aware of the historical dismal graduation rates for revenue playing Black male student athletes. If he was really concerned about the development of "all" student athletes, one would think that he would establish culturally relevant programs to meet the academic and social needs of Black male athletes who attend PWI's.

Harper (2013) also perceives the NCAA's lack of responsiveness to be problematic by asserting, "What we find shocking is that these trends are so pervasive (the depressing graduation rates for Black male student athletes), yet institutional leaders, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and athletics conference commissioners have not done more in response to them." In reaction to the Black male Student Athlete report (Harper et al., 2013), the NCAA

asserted, "Postseason eligibility is now tied directly to academic success, and new initial eligibility standards are designed to better prepare incoming student-athletes to be successful in college," and further, "'We appreciate the report's authors noting that relatively few student-athletes go pro,'" the NCAA said. "That is why student-athletes need to take advantage of their scholarships and stay in school and earn their degrees" (USA Today, 2012).

In my opinion, the NCAA seems to place more value on making sure that teams remain eligible for postseason play (which yields the institution additional revenue ), instead of actually helping the athletes who might need extra academic and social attention. Equally guilty, are institutions who do not challenge their coaches and athletic programs for only caring that athletes remain eligible for athletic competition. This is an issue that I experienced firsthand. During my time at SU, I was barred from starting my minority male athlete support group (which utilized Recast Theory), until after the season was over. My director told me, "Ron, we're going to table your program until after the season. The team is probably going to make it to the championship game (1-AA) and we don't need anything to jeopardize the player's eligibility<sup>26</sup> or ruffle feathers." The emphasis was not on the holistic well-being of the players (many of whom were struggling with serious academic, relational, and social stressors,), but rather, it was on maintaining continuity so that the football team could compete for a championship. It is my strong belief that the NCAA and higher educational institutions have failed in valuing "all" student athletes, thus, no one should be surprised that embarrassing graduation rates and social stressors continue to persist for Black male student athletes.

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<sup>26</sup> I must note that football players only had to maintain a 1.8GPA to remain eligible for athletic competition.

## *Data Driven Decisions for Designs*

The data presented in the Black Male Student Athlete report (Harper et al., 2013) reflect the need for enhanced advocacy for educational equity and excellence. Major results of their study include:

- Between 2007 and 2010, Black men were 2.8% of full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students, but 57.1% of football teams and 64.3% of basketball teams.
- Across four cohorts, 50.2% of Black male student-athletes graduated within six years, compared to 66.9% of student-athletes overall. 72.8% of undergraduate students overall, and 55.5% of Black undergraduate men overall.
- 96.1% of these NCAA Division 1 colleges and universities graduated Black male student-athletes at rates lower than student-athletes overall.
- 97.4% of institutions graduated Black male student-athletes at rates lower than undergraduate students overall. On no campus were rates exactly comparable for these two comparison groups.
- At one university, Black male student-athletes graduated at a comparable rate to Black undergraduate men overall. On 72.4% of the other campuses, graduation rates for Black male student-athletes were lower than rates for Black undergraduate men overall<sup>27</sup>.

I argue that improvement cannot be made without confronting the “residue” that continues to be a problem at predominantly White institutions. Specifically, I assert that negative stereotypes and low expectations is an ever-present and harsh reality for Black male student athletes who attend PWI’s (Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett, 2008; Oseguera, 2010). I feel the need to revisit

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<sup>27</sup> A robust description of the data can be found in the Executive Summary of the Black Male Student Athlete report.

Harper's (2013) earlier comments (in the section), because I feel that he points us in the proper direction for improving the circumstances of Black male athletes, by asserting, "Provosts, deans, and department chairs should engage faculty colleagues in substantive conversations and developmental exercises that raise consciousness about stereotypes and racist/sexist assumptions they possess about students of color and student-athletes in general, and Black men in particular" (p. 17).

The truth is, we cannot "Africanize" Eurocentric campuses, and so it is critical that leadership find culturally relevant ways to engage Black male student athletes. In the words of one educator, "Culturally Relevant leaders help people (students and teachers) who don't know, realize that they don't know and move them to growth" (Beachum, 2011). Recast Theory, is one suggestion for improvement, but as Steele (2010) affirms, "Helping to shape the narratives that stereotyped students use to interpret their experience in a school may be a "high leverage" strategy of intervening" (p. 166). It is my belief that by helping to shape the narratives of African American male student athletes, their intrinsic motivation will be intensified<sup>28</sup>, which could make them less vulnerable to unwelcoming cues at their universities.

### **Summary of Design 1**

In this season of my life, I identify with the lyrics from the song, *Keep Your Eyes on the Prize* (The Civil Rights spiritual of the 1950s and 1960s), which declares, "And the one thing we did right is the day we started to fight. Keep your eyes on the prize and hold on." I am fighting for educational equity, culturally relevant interventions, and protection for my population, because

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<sup>28</sup> My knowledge about Intrinsic Motivation was enhanced by James Schreiber lecture on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation (October, 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

as Stevenson (2011) contends, “Youth of Color<sup>29</sup> are ill-served and unprotected by authority figures who interpret their behaviors without using developmentally appropriate knowledge and training” (p. 10). My eyes are focused on the joy that I find in knowing that I was able to impact young Black male student athletes at SU (see APPENDIX C topic discussions). Further, my eyes are also focused on the promising work of colleagues (i.e. Shaun Harper, professor at the University of Pennsylvania) who continue to challenge systemic inequalities that impact African American male student athletes who attend PWI’s.

I need to further explore the intersection of improvement research, evaluation, and what that looks like for the aforementioned criteria questions. In closing, I will continue to challenge what Asante (1987) calls the “peculiar arrogance” of hegemonic practices that continue to dehumanize African American males. Because I am arrogant enough to believe that employing culturally relevant interventions, will lead to improvement for Black male’s student athletes who attend predominantly White institutions.

## **Design 2 Introduction**

1968 will be forever steeped in American history<sup>30</sup>, because of several major events that occurred during that turbulent year. In 1968, the United States was still engaged in a war (Vietnam) that many people considered unjust. It was also the year with the highest casualties<sup>31</sup> of the entire war (Kurlansky, 2004, p. 375). Student protest and demonstrations were the norm on campuses across America (i.e. the Columbia University protest), and the counterculture movement recruited more disciples than those “souls” being “saved” at a Billy Graham crusade. Two

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<sup>29</sup> I must note that I consider Black male student athletes to be young men (not men) who are in need of nurturance, guidance, and protection from leadership at their institutions.

<sup>30</sup> I am cognizant that major events that occurred in 1968 cannot strictly be confined to an American context, yet for the purpose of this paper, I am focusing on events that specifically impacted the United States.

<sup>31</sup> 14,589 was the reported number of American Servicemen who died in 1968 (Kurlansky, 2004, p. 375).



polarizing figures were also slain in 1968. On April the 4<sup>th</sup>, Martin Luther King Jr., was assassinated in Memphis, TN, less than 24 hours after he declared, “We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop.” And two months later, Robert Kennedy, who many people perceived to be the only politician to unite America, was shot hours after winning the California presidential primary<sup>32</sup>. King’s death also symbolized a philosophical shift in the Black liberation movement. Nonviolence was buried with Dr. King, and now, “Black Power” was the preference of many Blacks (and also liberal Whites and others). To further this point, Julius Hobson proclaimed, “the next black man who comes into the black community preaching nonviolence should be violently dealt with by the black people who hear him” (Abernathy, 1989, p. 452).

The Olympic Games of 1968, in Mexico City, Mexico, also left an enduring image, thanks to two American sprinters. More specifically, after placing first and third respectively in the 200 meter dash, Tommie Smith and John Carlos dramatized the plight of oppressed people on the victory stand. On the surface, one could solely focus on the two Black men who stood shoeless during the medal ceremony, with raised gloved fists and bowed heads, but to do so would cheapen that significant moment in American history. The authentic purpose for their demonstration in Mexico City was rooted in athletes<sup>33</sup> taking a stand against the exploitation and oppression of Black people. For Smith and Carlos, their consciousness about the aforementioned did not happen at the Olympics, but rather, it was birthed on the college campuses that they attended in the United States. Although Tommy Smith held two world records in track and field events (while in college), he was not immune to hate mail being sent to him while he was a student at San Jose State, and

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Kennedy was shot on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1968, but he died early in the morning on June 6<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Tommy Smith and John Carlos were the athletes most maligned for their demonstration, but other athletes had less publicized protest at the 1968 Olympic Games.

John Carlos was so dismayed by the hostile climate at East Texas State College (now Texas A&M University) that he left the school.

Sadly, even though John Carlos and Tommy Smith are 45 years removed from being college students, significant “improvement” has still not occurred for current Black male student athletes, given the fact that this population still experience(s) a less than receptive environment at predominately White institutions. Even more insidious, is the fact that institutional leaders and the NCAA have not done more to address the climate for Black male athletes who attend PWI’s. Thus, for the purpose of this section, I seek to address four bold challenges concurrently and with an integrated approach: first, to facilitate a discussion on theoretical issues pertaining to diversity, through the lens of Black male student athletes who attend PWI’s, second, to provide a conceptual campus diversity plan, with evaluation measure that is geared specifically for my population, third, to examine the aforementioned diversity initiative and evaluation plan through the criterial questions, and fourth, to share my personal philosophy about this particular subject in the next steps session. While, the second design, explores both the scholarship and contemporary theory behind diversity, the ultimate goal of this paper is to present a practical conceptual diversity framework (with evaluative tenets) for individuals who wish to advocate and build programs that are specifically focused on “improving” the campus climate of Black male student athletes who attend PWI’s.

### **Theoretical issues pertaining to Diversity**

One of the major challenges that hinder diversity initiatives in higher educational institutions is that the term diversity is widely used, but rarely agreed upon or defined (Williams, 2013). Simply put, an institution may want to enrich diversity, but the facilitators of the established initiative(s) engage in ideological differences that impedes progress. To further this point, Pope

(1993) shared, “Individuals may use the same words but have very different ideas about what is to be accomplished and how” (p. 201). To avoid ambiguity, for the purpose of this paper, I am defining diversity as a social construct that impacts all aspects of human difference, including individual differences (i.e. personality, learning styles, and life experiences) and group and social differences (i.e. race and ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation). Although there is no universal definition for diversity, it is paramount that institutional leaders proactively embrace issues surrounding diversity in this new millennium with vision, skill, and cultural intelligence.

In his book, *Strategic Diversity Leadership*, Williams (2013) enhances the diversity discourse, by suggesting that institutional leaders operate from a practical framework. Thus, he offers the following model, which he calls the *diversity idea*:

- **“Conceptual Perspective**-An evolving concept that features continually shifting language to describe groups and terms like multiculturalism, diversity, equity, access, and inclusion.
- **Group Identity Perspective**-Diversity is understood from the perspective of group membership as each person has multiple identities that partially define their experience, worldview, and ways in which others respond to them.
- **Ideological Perspective**-Diversity is understood from the perspective of different ideologies that govern the way people think about, discuss, and engage with the issue of diversity.
- **Institutional Perspective**-Diversity is crystallized in formal institutional definitions and statements of policy expressing what the institution values and believes regarding the diversity idea” (pp. 84-85).

Williams also states the diversity is an evolving concept that is socially and politically contested, since colleges and universities now exist in a broader social context (p. 86). This “evolving

concept” is different from previous notions of diversity. For example, in his book, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Gould (1981) suggested that early beliefs about diversity equated “some people” as deviant and inferior<sup>34</sup>. Years later, the *deficit model*<sup>35</sup> perspective did not celebrate the differences of “some people,” but rather, this classification argued for social and cultural assimilation (Birman, 1994). More recently, the *affirmative identity thesis*<sup>36</sup>, allowed former silenced groups a counter-narrative to the deficit and assimilation models.

The *affirmative identity thesis* is central to this account, because it is my belief that revenue playing Black male student athletes should take an active role in articulating and defining their own experiences at predominantly White institutions (Williams, 2013, p. 87). Equally important, is the role of institutional leaders who work with Black male student athletes. These individuals should facilitate the process, in addition to helping to structure diversity as a critical component in conversations surrounding “improvement.” Therefore, the next section of the paper will present a conceptual decentralized diversity plan that explores the intersection of diversity and Black male student athletes at predominately White institutions, through the lens of the equity, racialized, and centric ideological dimensions of diversity<sup>37</sup>.

### **Diversity Plan in Higher Education**

For over 50 years, diversity plans have been utilized on campuses across America. According to Peterson (1978), the first plans emerged in the 60s and 70s as a direct response to

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<sup>34</sup> Deviant and inferior were aspects of scientific racism which was especially prevalent in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>35</sup> Williams’s (2013) argues that even today cultural standards are that of the dominant culture. He terms this tendency the *assimilation thesis* (p.86).

<sup>36</sup> The “affirmative identity thesis” can be characterized by principles of self-acceptance, identity affirmation, and community empowerment (Williams, 2013, p.87).

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix D for an understanding of the Ideologies of Diversity.

African American students being admitted into non- historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's). Early successes of diversity initiatives include: (1) minority affairs offices, (2) ethnic studies departments, (3) student support offices, and (4) affirmative action offices (Williams, 2013, p. 304). Despite progress, I argue that White institutions have still not addressed the unique needs of African American male students in general, but for the purpose of my work, Black male student athletes. Thus, a robust diversity model with a clear infrastructure is needed to improve this sad narrative. This is exactly what Williams<sup>38</sup> (2013), offers in his book, *Strategic Diversity Leadership*. In this section of the dissertation in practice, my goal is not to “copycat” Damon William’s ideas, but rather, to apply my knowledge of his ideas to my problem of practice.

Similar to the term diversity, there are also multiple connotations for the phrase, *diversity plan*. This paper follows Williams (2013) definition for *diversity plan*, which is, “any intentionally created documents that includes a diversity definition, rationale, goals, recommended actions, assignments of responsibility, timelines, accountability processes, and a budget” (p.306). According to his research, the following three diversity planning and implementation approaches, were utilized by colleges and universities in the United States:

1. **The Integrated Approach**-diversity goals are infused into the institution’s academic and strategic plans.
2. **The Centralized Institutional Approach**-diversity is created as an area of strategic focus and priority in its own right.
3. **The Decentralized Diversity Approach**-individual departments, schools, and colleges construct their own unique plan (Williams, 2013, p.303).

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<sup>38</sup> Damon A. Williams is the vice provost and chief diversity officer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a clinical member of the faculty in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis.

For my problem of practice, I propose a decentralized approach. I make this recommendation for a few reasons. First, the decentralized approach offers a greater level of autonomy and shared governance for the institutional leader, which is consistent with the decentralized culture of the academy (Williams & Clowney, 2007). This approach is also micro driven (on the ground) that focuses on the specific needs of individuals within one's particular area of responsibility (Williams, 2013, p. 338). The aforesaid leads to my second reason, which is, apart from a crisis and/or embarrassment, integrated approaches<sup>39</sup> do not address the specific needs of Black male student athletes. Further, I also contend that because of the vicious legacy of racism, White supremacy, and Jim Crow laws, the plight of Black males at White institutions is cheapened, when compared to other minority groups (i.e. Native American females) who attend the same colleges and universities<sup>40</sup>. More explicitly, it is my belief that too many academic leaders still have an aversion for conversing about "root issues" that plague Black athletes at PWI's. Consequently, no one should be surprised by the surface level remedies that are offered for my population.

### ***A Decentralized Approach Model***

The construction of a decentralized plan is based on a three-year planning cycle, which includes 10 phases (Williams, 2008). During the first year, the diversity plan should be written and implemented; year two should conclude with a quality review, and year three should be comprised of an accountability review (Williams, 2008, p. 4). Table 1 presents a conceptual summarization of a decentralized plan for Black male student athletes who attend PWI's.

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<sup>39</sup> According to Damon William's research, the integrated approach is the most commonly utilized diversity plan in higher educational institutions.

<sup>40</sup> While I want all students to feel safe and validated at their college/university, I still believe rhetoric such as, "we want to improve the campus climate for our students of color," does not dramatize the unique needs of African American male students at PWI's.

**Table 1.1  
Timeline and Action Steps for Diversity Planning and Implementation**

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Phase</i>	<i>Action</i>
Year 1	<i>Phase 1 Launching the Planning Process</i>	The diversity planning process should be launched by the institutional leader. Council's should be formed, and activities and services should dramatize the plight of Black male student athletes at PWI's.
Year 1	<i>Phase 2 Selecting the Diversity Planning and Implementation Team</i>	A team should be nominated to serve as the diversity planning and implementation team. The team should include various stakeholder groups, including: student athletes, students, faculty, staff, (i.e. counselors) and administrators (i.e. Director of Multicultural Center).
Year 1	<i>Phase 3 Establishing Readiness</i>	Psychological, behavioral, and material readiness must be fostered, before implementing the plan.
Year 1	<i>Phase 4 Leveraging a Strategic Diversity Leadership Scorecard(SDLS)</i>	Utilize an SDLS to audit all relevant data, past evaluations (if any), other campus diversity plans, diversity related programming, and intended outcomes.
Year 1	<i>Phase 5 Writing the Diversity Plan</i>	The diversity plan should have common elements, including a statement defining the challenges for Black male student athletes, a department rationale for diversity, recommendations, and SDLS.
Year 1	<i>Phase 6 Diversity Plan Review</i>	The diversity plan is reviewed, and recommendations are provided to senior leadership.

		The use of technology is also encouraged in this phase.
Year 2	<i>Phase 7 Implementation</i>	The implementation phase should include a creative theme (i.e. I'm more than an athlete), the recognition of diversity leaders, working toward short and long term goals, and working through systemic challenges.
Year 2	<i>Phase 8 Quality Review</i>	The diversity progress report should detail progress made during the first year of diversity progress implementation.
Year 3	<i>Phase 9 Evolving the Implementation</i>	A major launch event may be needed to reinvigorate the next phase of implementation.
Year 3	<i>Phase 10 Accountability Review and Celebration of Successes</i>	At the end of the three year process, a robust accountability review should occur for leaders.

### **Designs 2 Summary**

Although the aforementioned decentralized diversity model is conceptualized, with proper planning and keen implementation, it has the potential to achieve “improvement” for Black male student athletes who attend predominately White institutions. Certainly, the decentralized approach is arduous, but as William’s (2008) declared, “this process is the only way to transform our institutions and better meet the needs of the 21st century. The future of higher education demands and deserves nothing less” (p. 15). Germane to the “improvement” theme, is having an evaluation mechanism throughout the entire period of the diversity strategic plan. Thus, the strategic diversity leadership scorecard (SDLS) will be explored several times in Chapter 6.



## CHAPTER 6: GENERATIVE IMPACTS/RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

This chapter of the dissertation will attempt to conceptualize if my designs will lead to *generative impacts*. While the designs offered in this work are a conceptual account, I explore the succeeding questions through the lens of proven models (i.e. decentralized diversity plans), evaluation methods (i.e. SDLS), and theories (i.e. stereotype threat). I also acknowledge the other “elephant in the room,” which is, context matters! To further this point, Yarbrough (2011) asserts, “contextual factors exert considerable influence on all aspects of evaluations” (p. 93). Therefore, I note that the following suggestions would have to be modified to compliment the culture and needs of a specific institution and diversity plan.

### *Performance Management System*

In many ways diversity, equity, and inclusion, has become the “soup of the day” in higher educational milieus. Not too many people are going to publically denounce efforts to make their institution a more diverse learning environment. The problem is, diversity efforts without a performance management system, has the potential to hinder advancement. To further this point, Williams (2013) declares:

Those outside of academia often criticize higher education for its failure to hold individuals accountable for their actions, a practice held sacrosanct in the private sector. To make diversity a matter of excellence is to require more than improving the headcount of minority students. It demands that we hold ourselves to the highest standards of accountability through systems of performance management that allow us to understand the implications of efforts across many facets of our institutional diversity agenda. These

include everything from access and equity initiatives to the scholarly efforts of our faculty, and to the role of leadership in creating a new context in which enhanced diversity efforts become possible. Thus, accountability for better results is clearly imperative. (p. 257)

In an effort to foster accountability, Williams offer's a tool which he calls the strategic diversity leadership scorecard (SDLS). SDLS is a multidimensional performance measurement tool that is designed to facilitate transformation against the following four dimensions: achieving access and equity, fostering a multicultural and inclusive campus climate, preparing all students for a knowledge-based, global economy, and enhancing diversity themed research and scholarship (Williams, 2013, p. 260).

As it pertains to my problem of practice, this account will solely focus on and measure the multicultural and inclusive campus climate perspective,<sup>41</sup> through the SDLS for the following reasons. First, the climate at PWI's has historically been insensitive to meeting the core needs of Black students. I have theoretical and practical reasons for making the aforementioned claim. For example, stereotype threat emerged within the context of examining reasons for the underperformance of minority students at White institutions. Contrary to beliefs that Black students lacked the skills to be successful at PWI's, Steele (2010) found that a lack of motivation, skills gap, and inferior intellectual abilities was not the reason for the academic gap, but rather, minority students sensed cues that they were not welcome at their institution. To further this point, Steele (2010) declared:

There was hard evidence: The achievement problems of black students at Michigan weren't caused entirely by skill deficits. Something about the social and psychological aspects of

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<sup>41</sup> According to Hurtado (1998), climate describes the psychological temperature of the campus.

their experience was likely involved. At the time, I had no idea what it was. There was softer evidence: the students themselves **worried about whether or not they belonged, or ever could belong at Michigan.** (p. 20)

Unfortunately, the feeling of not belonging is a theme that is shared by many Black students who attend predominately White institutions. During my work with Black male student athletes at a PWI, many of them struggled with the psychological aspects of being cheered on the field, but scorned in the classroom and campus community. While it is extremely difficult to create a system that measures all aspect of the campus climate, Table 1.2 provides a snapshot of progress and outcome indicators from the multicultural and inclusive campus climate perspective.

**TABLE 1.2**  
**Conceptual Strategic Diversity Leadership Scorecard**

<i>Perspective</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Sample Tactics</i>	<i>Sample Progress Indicators</i>	<i>Sample Outcome Indicators</i>
Multicultural and Inclusive Campus Climate Perspective	In an effort to advocate for the holistic development of Black male student athletes who attend PWI's, it is critically important that this population perceives a sense of belonging in all aspects of the campus community.	1. Culturally relevant workshops that focuses on Black athletes professional and personal development  2. Partnerships with diversity themed student organizations  3. Diversity training programs for student athletes, family, coaches, staff, and faculty	1. Number of diverse student organizations  2. Courses that focus on the plight of Black males, in addition to including a diversity, inclusion and/or campus climate statement  3. Number of campus climate incidents (i.e. being called a last nigger)  4. Number of faculty, staff,	1. Perceptions of belonging  2. Perceptions of engagement  3. Perceptions of satisfaction  4. Perceptions of the campus climate  5. Number of racial discrimination cases  6. Number of lawsuits and settlements

			<p>and administrators who have attended diversity training, education, and leadership trainings</p> <p>5.Minority student participation in campus-wide student organizations</p>	<p>7. Level of use and participation in diversity and campus-wide activities and initiatives</p>
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Even with the development of a robust scorecard that measures the campus climate, I am still cognizant that institutional leaders will have opposing thoughts towards the proposed task at hand. To further this point, Langley (2009) declares, “People will usually have some reaction to change. This reaction can range from total commitment to open hostility” (p. 46). Thus, it is critically important for a diversity leader to involve various stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and evaluative process, isolation is not an option (Williams, 2013, p. 274)! With institutional collaboration, and the utilization of an evidence based measurement tool (SDLS), the full narrative for my population and the institutions that they attend, can be conveyed through accessible data<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> In all likelihood, a scorecard will include both qualitative and quantitative data, but senior leadership is often driven by quantitative assessments (Williams, 2013, p.301).

### *Change in the Practice of Educational Leadership*

Many higher educational institutions claim to be progressive, innovative, and “cutting edge,” but unfortunately, as it pertains to issues surrounding advancing diversity, too many colleges and universities are reactive to humiliating campus diversity events. For example, in 2005, Harvard University’s then President-Lawrence Summers suggested that the underrepresentation of female math and science faculty members might be attributed to cognition differences in women, and also their reluctance to work in demanding STEM fields. The backlash from those comments (and his questionable leadership) led to student and faculty protest, negative media attention, and two task forces to explore gender equity and achievement issues<sup>43</sup> (Bradley, 2005). More recently (and relevant to my problem of practice), the Rutgers’s University scandal highlights the abusive behavior in college athletics that is often unreported. Still reeling from the Tyler Clemente incident<sup>44</sup>, it is safe to assume that in the very near future; Rutgers University will unleash a diversity initiative that focuses on sensitivity training and homophobia.

While the aforementioned incidents should have been addressed by the universities respective institutional leaders, they all fall in the category of what Williams calls the “diversity crisis model,” which is a diversity plan that is constructed in direct response to an embarrassing diversity crisis and/or racially themed campus parties (Williams, 2008). Diversity plans that are symbolic will ultimately produce superficial results. To further this point, Williams, Berger, and McClendon (2005) outline the following reasons that campus diversity plans fail:

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<sup>43</sup>\$50 million dollars was the amount Harvard University pledged towards faculty diversity efforts, following the remarks from Lawrence Summers.

<sup>44</sup> Tyler Clemente was the Rutgers’s student who committed suicide in the fall of 2010, the day after he found out his roommate and fellow hallmate had secretly taped him kissing another man. The duo also urged followers to watch the encounter via social media.

- “failure to conceptualize diversity work in terms of changing the organization and enhancing institutional culture;
- resistance to the logic that diversity is fundamental to excellence;
- low levels of meaningful and consistent support from senior leadership;
- failure to allocate sufficient resources to the process of change;
- lack of a comprehensive and widely accepted framework to define diversity and track progress;
- lack of accountability systems and the means of engaging individuals in the change process at all levels; and
- lack of leadership and infrastructure to guide and facilitate the change journey and direct campus diversity efforts at all levels of the institution” (p. 29).

As an emerging educational leader that is committed to changing the practice of my discipline, I strongly advocate for the decentralized approach, which offers a counter-narrative to the reasons that too many diversity plans fail. The decentralized approach is especially critical to my population, given the current and historical issues they have endured at PWI’s. For example, the conceptual decentralized plan (that I offer in this account), directly forces institutional leaders to have a “courageous conversation” about race and stereotypes, which Harper, Williams, and Blackman (2013) argue is needed for “improvement” for Black male student athletes (p. 19).

Langley et al. (2009) is precise in signifying, “Change and improvement are never easy. Even an apparently simple system appears much more complex when change is contemplated or introduced” (p. 89). Although change is challenging, leaders within higher educational institutions and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) consistently take risks to improve the athlete’s performance (on the field and hardwood), in addition to the branding of college athletics

(i.e. commercials, creative slogans). It is now time for educational leaders to become just as audacious in suggesting models that could potentially facilitate a "change" in the campus climate for Black male student athletes. The models presented in this paper are not intended to be the final statement in improving the campus experiences for Black male student athletes at PWI's, but rather, it is simply one deliverable that should be included in the conversation.

### ***The Need for Interventions***

Dr. Harry Edwards posits that the first principle of the sociology of sports is that, "sports inevitably recapitulate the character, structure, and dynamics of human and institutional relationships within society." An exegetical critique of Edward's philosophy leads the author to conclude that it is not sufficient to solely explore inequalities and racist stereotypes that impact Black male student athletes at PWI's, without also exploring societal inequalities, exclusionary practices, and negative caricatures deployed against Black males in general. For example, a 2012 report by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, *The Urgency of Now: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, reported that only 52 percent of Black males graduated from public high schools in the 2009-2010 school year. Further, the educational crisis of Black males is also connected to the following dismal outcomes highlighted in the article titled, *Plight Deepens for Black Males*:

- "In 2000, 65 percent of black male high school dropouts in their 20's were jobless-that is, unable to find work, not seeking it or incarcerated. By 2004, the share had grown to 72 percent, compared with 34 percent of white and 19 percent of Hispanic dropouts. Even when high school graduates were included, half of black men in their 20's were jobless in 2004, up from 46 percent in 2000.

- In 1995, 16 percent of black men in their 20's who did not attend college were in jail or prison, by 2004, 21 percent were incarcerated. By their mid-30's, 6 in 10 black men who had dropped out of school had spent time in prison" (New York Times, 2006)

Either Black males are a degenerate group that brings the aforementioned pathologies on themselves (as some people in the past have suggested), or systemic inequalities exist for this group from birth. Obviously, I agree with the latter, thus, pertinent to my work is partnerships between schools, the academy, and the community (SAC). One such SAC partnership that is addressing the plight of African American males is the Black Male Leadership Development Institute (BMLDI) at Robert Morris University, in collaboration with the Heinz Endowments and the Urban League of Pittsburgh. BMLDI is a program that prepares high school students to pursue higher educational and community leadership pursuits.

As it relates to Black male student athletes, The University of Wisconsin recently initiated *The Beyond the Game Initiative (BTG)*. *BTG* is a program that helps athletes (Black males in particular) to strategically develop and support post-graduation options. The "Beyond the Game Initiative" is funded by the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics, the Lumina Foundation, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement. The decentralized conceptual plan that I propose would include aspects of both BMLDI (through the lens of Black male student athletes) and BTG in phase 5. It is unrealistic to think that the NCAA and higher educational institutions will be able to address the holistic needs of Black male student athletes alone; therefore, the author contends that network improvement communities will be solicited to improve "educational research and development" (Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow, 2011, p. 7) for Black male student athletes who attend PWI's.



### *Moral Imperative*

It is no longer acceptable for colleges and universities to profit from the free labor of Black male student athletes; while simultaneously overlooking the academic and campus climate problems that has persisted too long for this population. The collegiate athletic system is, and has been “plantation like” in its operations, in addition to being socially unjust for a countless number of Black male student athletes. The author contends that Martin Luther King jr. provides the mandate for advocating for socially just schools when he declares:

I said to my children, 'I'm going to work and do everything that I can do to see that you get a good education. I don't ever want you to forget that there are millions of God's children who will not and cannot get a good education, and I don't want you feeling that you are better than they are. For you will never be what you ought to be until they are what they ought to be (King, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1968).

In a critical exegesis of the aforementioned quote, I audaciously proclaim that Black male student athletes are not receiving a quality education that will allow them to compete in the global economy. I make this declaration for a few reasons. First, in my work with revenue playing Black male student athletes at White institutions, the emphasis was not on educating them, but rather, it was on making sure that they maintained their academic eligibility for athletic competition. Another reason for my claim is due to the lack of responsiveness by institutional leaders, to the “true” plight for masses of Black male student athletes at PWI’s (Harper, 2013). Instead of making the public aware of educational disparities and prevalent campus microaggressions committed against this population, too often, campus gatekeepers and the NCAA over exaggerate the

academic and campus experiences of Black male student athletes, by highlighting a few token examples of success<sup>45</sup>.

The decentralized plan and evaluation mechanism proposed in this paper, does offer a moral, ethical, and political vision for socially just colleges and universities, because the models are framed by the following ideologies of diversity:

- ***The Equity Perspective*** believes in fair treatment and a socially just campus for “all students.” Equally important, is recognizing and eliminating systemic institutional inequalities that hinders the potential of Black male student athletes.
- ***The Racialized Perspective*** recognizes that being a Black male in the context of American institutional systems matters! Further, the racialized perspective looks to expose exclusionary practices that may exist within institutions.
- ***The Centric Perspective*** seeks to empower Black male student athletes through culturally relevant pedagogy and workshops that speaks directly to their existence at PWI’s.

This new economy is only soliciting highly educated individuals with marketable skills. To further this point, the new commission on the skills of the American workforce, *Tough Choices or Tough Times* reported, “the best employers the world over will be looking for the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth, and will be willing to pay the top dollar for their services” (NCEE, 2006, p. 7). The reality is that a stellar “40 yard dash” and superior “vertical leaping” will have little consequences for the masses of Black male student athletes at the conclusion of their last collegiate game. Therefore, the ideas presented in this section

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<sup>45</sup> This was the case at the 2010 NCAA annual convention, when then Baylor University quarterback and Heisman award winner-Robert Griffin III (RG3) was applauded for his academic and athletic success. Unfortunately, RG3’s success was not the norm at Baylor, given the fact that only 29% of the Black athletes graduated from the university in 2009, and only 44% over a six year span.

organically enhances the diversity discourse for Black male student athletes, in a manner that is morally, ethically, and politically obligatory.

### ***Defining Improvement***

The *designs for action* presented in this dissertation offer a counter-narrative to the traditional ways of engaging Black male student athletes who attend PWI'S. More explicitly, personal tutors, mandated study halls, and exclusive academic and athletic facilities will not improve campus ills that have historically existed for Black male student athletes who attend White colleges and universities. To further this point, in his book, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sport 1890-1980*, Martin (2010) poignantly details the tough decisions that Black male student athletes and their families had to contemplate, regarding committing to play athletics at a PWI, once those schools started to integrate their teams. He writes:

African American themselves experienced mixed feelings about the changing nature of southern college sports. In principle they strongly supported the elimination of all racial barriers in sport, but some of them also voiced misgivings about the human cost involved in the process. A few hoped to see black high school stars continue to join their favorable black college teams, while others feared that these young men would be mistreated at white colleges. The mother of Wendell Hudson, Alabama's first black basketball recruit, literally cried when she learned that her son wanted to enroll at the Tuscaloosa school. The sister of basketball player Collis Temple Jr. repeatedly begged her brother not to attend LSU, because of her concern that he would be mistreated at the university. Other African Americans worried more about neglect than mistreatment, fearing that white coaches could

not provide the emotional support that such pioneering athletes would need in their unprecedented roles. (pp. 301-302)

The concepts presented in this paper have the potential to be revolutionary, because of the commitment to critical inquiry and strategic planning that is essential in the implementation process. Central to the author's aforementioned claim, is Langley raising the question of, "What is meant by the term improvement?" (p. 16). Within the context of my work, I define improvement as attention given to the holistic development of Black male college athletes, and not just to their athletic identity. Further, improvement is when my population feels safe and validated in their uniform on the football field and basketball court, but more importantly, also in their Black skin in the classroom and campus community. It is my belief that if institutional leaders can develop plans to construct premier athletic facilities to entice prime recruits to join their "program," then they certainly can also develop plans to improve their campus collegiate experiences once they commit. "Improvement" cannot be trite rhetoric that comes out of the mouth of leaders in times of crisis, but rather, institutional leaders should persistently utilize data to "improve" the campus experience for "all students." Thus, it is my belief that the *designs for action* recommended in this paper, foster improvement efforts, because they complement the PDSA framework.

### **Summary of Generative Impacts**

The point of this work is that campus inequalities and racist stereotypes are prevalent and pernicious to Black male student athletes, yet campus leaders have consistently overlooked these offenses. What I attempted to do in this dissertation is to construct *designs for action* that would directly confront historical injustices committed against my population at PWI's. Although this is

a conceptual account, the author considers the following two questions to be limitations to the *designs for action* that were presented in this account:

1. What department would initiate the decentralized diversity initiative? and
2. Why would an institution see the value in supporting a diversity initiative specifically for Black male student athletes?

Germane to the aforementioned limitations, is Langley's declaration that "every system is perfectly designed to deliver the result it produces." In fully exploring Langley's quote, it is critically important to understand that Black male student athletes were not recruited to PWI's to become scholars, but rather, they were recruited as commodities to help "the program" win and produce revenue (Edwards, 1969; Rhoden, 2006; Beamon, 2008; Yost, 2010). The collegiate athletic system has done a fantastic job in that respect. The author believes in the potential of a decentralized diversity plan for Black male student athletes at PWI's, yet, he lacks confidence in the feasibility of the proposed initiatives, due to conformity and cowardice by too many institutional leaders who are in deference to a corrupt system. Just as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was established to advance the cause of Civil Rights in America (Garrow, 1986, pp. 83-125), it is also conceivable that an outside entity might be the only option for dramatizing the plight of Black male student athletes at PWI's. The author will explore the above-mentioned assertion in the future work.

## Implications for Practice

The charge for this *dissertation in practice* was to begin to think about strategies to recruit others to my problem of practice. In this initial recruitment stage, I felt it was necessary to take a psycho-educational stance towards informing others about stereotype threat and also the corruption in college athletics. The reason for my philosophical stance is simple- it is true that I want individuals to invest their “time, energy, and resources” into my problem of practice, but I also want to confront the preconceived biases that they may hold about my population and/or the sanctity of college athletics. Moving forward, I plan to create an empowerment and life skills curriculum for the athletes and a documentary for SAC that illuminates the hardships of Black male student athletes who attend predominately White institutions (which will be an enhanced version of Appendix C). But in keeping with the psycho-educational theme, I offer the following:

1. **Support groups-** educational programs that address the social stressors of Black male student athletes are invaluable. During my time at SU, I facilitated an empowerment group that was supportive and educational in focus, and although it was not group therapy, the sessions were therapeutic for a population that often felt marginalized and invalidated. Further, utilizing critical pedagogy, the empowerment support group sessions will allow participants to question the contradictions within their institutions (Marshall & Olivia, 2010, p. 42).
2. **Cultural Competence-** During my time wrestling with my *problem of practice*, the one issue that remained obvious was that race still matters! The aforementioned claim was supported by the current and former Black male student athletes who I interacted with during my *dissertation in practice* journey, given the fact that many of them articulated the impact that racial stress had on their being. Therefore, individuals that work with Black

male student athletes must become culturally competent and facilitate culturally competent programming, and that can only be accomplished by negating notions of colorblindness and post-racial society rhetoric.

3. **Advocacy work-** it is important to advocate for the hiring of professionals of color (i.e. coaches, faculty, and counselors) at predominately White institutions. Equally important, is supporting policies and practices that seek to advance diversity and inclusion. Rhoden (2006) underscores the importance of advocacy work, in reporting the following, “of 5,889 vacant administrative positions between 1991 and 1994, only 10 percent were filled by blacks” (p. 140).
4. **Collaboration-** It is critically important to get Black male student athletes integrated into other aspects of their collegiate experience. For example, some of the Black male student athletes that I interviewed at Seahawk University expressed a desire to get involved with functions with the Black student group. Unfortunately, given their strict practice and study hall schedules, they were unable to participate in programming offered by the Black student group that could have enhanced their self-confidence. If athletic departments are truly concerned about the holistic development of their student athletes (for the context of this work Black males), then they must collaborate with other departments on campus that have programming and resources for minority students.

### **Conclusion**

This *dissertation in practice* explored the narratives of Black male student athletes who either previously or currently participated in a revenue sport at a PWI, through historical literature, empirical studies, and individual and focus groups interview sessions. But the core of my work is deeper than the plight of Black male student athletes who attend PWI's, it is really about Black

male identity and the threat that the Black male body poses in society. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, Black male athletes have been negatively depicted. From the 60s to the current, scholars, educators, and activists have advocated for “improvement” for Black male student athletes who attend PWIs. Unfortunately, the moral of this work is that even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Black males are cognizant that race still matters, and as a result we continue to deal with the Dubosian (1903) notion of “double consciousness,” from being viewed as the “wretched of the earth.”



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## APPENDIX A

Since the writing of this *dissertation in practice* there have been several hot topics, and potentially monumental decisions regarding the future of revenue sports including: (1) The NCAA Likeness Lawsuit, (2) Players right to unionize, (3) Academic Fraud at UNC, and (4) Four year athletic scholarships. Given the fact that these topics have just recently emerged, and in some cases, are still being argued through the courts, a robust exploration of the aforementioned was omitted in this *dissertation in practice*. But given the critically importance of these issues, a brief synopsis of all four topics is rendered below:

### **The NCAA Likeness Lawsuit**

Former and even some current NCAA players are engaged in a heated court case over the unauthorized use of the players' images and likenesses in video games and other merchandise. The case was brought up by the former UCLA basketball standout and collegiate All American, Ed O'Bannon, who starred on the 1995 Bruins championship team. The main argument of the case is that athletes should receive a share of the revenue generated off their "likeness," their image, or an image depicting an athlete (i.e. O'Bannon playing for the UCLA Bruins). The NCAA argues that paying athletes would compromise their "amateurism" status.

### **Player's Right to Unionize**

Football players at Northwestern University voted on their right to unionize. Specifically, under labor relations laws, the Northwestern players want to be recognized as employees. Ramogi Huma who is the president of the College Athletes Player Association said, "We welcome the review so that college athletes' employee status can be confirmed nationwide by the federal government" (Inside Higher Education, 2014). This case has the potential to set a national precedent for the unionization at other schools.

### **Alleged Academic Fraud at UNC Chapel hill**

Academic Fraud and collegiate athletics (particularly with athletes who compete in revenue sports), has been a taboo issue for decades. Recently, these allegations have emerged again at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. UNC Chancellor Carol Folt and system President Tom Ross have commissioned former federal prosecutor Kenneth Wainstein to investigate the alleged athletics-academic scandal. The heart of the scandal involves Julius Nyang'oro the former chairman of the African Studies department at UNC, who is accused of receiving \$12,000 from the University for teaching a lecture course, in which he never lectured students. Former UNC basketball standout Rashad McCants, a star on the 2005 national championship, added more logs to fire, by suggesting that academic fraud at UNC was prevalent, and that Hall of Fame coach Roy Williams was aware of it (ESPN Outside the Lines, 2014).



## **Four Year Scholarships**

Since the 70's, schools only offered athletes one-year scholarships that were annually up for renewal, which meant that if athletes did not "perform" up to the standards of coaches, or if they got hurt, or if they did not fit the "culture" of the program or school, student athletes could potentially be "fired." A new policy gives schools the option to offer multi-year scholarships, it's not required, but it does override the longstanding practice of annual renewals. The University of Southern California (USC) recently announced that they would offer four year scholarships to current and future revenue sports participants. USC Athletic Director Pat Haden said, "In taking this action, USC hopes to help lead the effort to refocus on student-athlete welfare on and off the field" (LaTimes, 2014).

APPENDIX B



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

Office of Research

301 ADMINISTRATION BUILDING ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282-0202

Dr. Joseph C. Kush  
Chair, IRB-Human Subjects  
Office of Research  
Phone (412) 396-6326 Fax (412) 396-5176  
E-mail: [kush@duq.edu](mailto:kush@duq.edu)

January 27, 2013

**Re: Beyond the Touchdowns and Slam-dunks: *A Critical Examination of How Revenue Playing African American Male Student Athletes at Predominately White Institution Experience and Perceive The Climate on Their Campus.* – (PROTOCOL # 13-01)**

Dr. Rodney Hopson  
School of Education  
Duquesne University  
Pittsburgh PA 15282

Dear Dr. Hopson,

Thank you for submitting the research proposal of you and your student Ronald W. Whitaker, II to the Institutional Review Board at Duquesne University.

Based on the review of IRB representative Dr. Carol S. Parke and my own review, I have determined that your research proposal is consistent with the requirements of the appropriate sections of the 45-Code of Federal Regulations-46, known as the federal Common Rule. The intended research poses no greater than minimal risk to human subjects. Consequently, the research is approved under 45CFR46.101 and 46.111 on an **expedited** basis under 45CFR46.110.

The consent form is attached, stamped with IRB approval and expiration date. You should use the stamped forms as the original for copies you display or distribute.

The approval pertains to the submitted protocol. If you or Mr. Whitaker wish to make changes to the research, you must first submit an amendment and receive approval from this office. In addition, if any unanticipated problems arise in reference to human subjects, you should notify the IRB chair before proceeding. In all correspondence, please refer to the protocol number shown after the title above.

Once the study is complete, please provide our office with a short summary (one page) of your results for our records.

Thank you for contributing to Duquesne's research endeavors.

Sincerely yours,

[Joseph Kush](#)

Joseph C. Kush, Ph.D.

C: Dr. Carol S. Parke

IRB Records

## Recruitment Letter

Dear Athletic Director (or Athletics Rep),

We are writing to ask you for your help with identifying eligible students to participate in a new study. This project focuses on how African American male student athletes who compete in revenue sports at predominately White institutions (PWI's) experience and perceive the climate on their campus and team. The results could lead to a better understanding of the climate in intercollegiate athletics, which hopefully will provide additional knowledge into the types of programs, services, psycho-educational workshops, and interventions that predominantly White institutions might consider for their revenue playing African American male student athletes. Further, the researcher hopes this study will give him a better understanding about issues that impact African American male student athletes who attend PWI's, for his forthcoming dissertation work.

Focus group interviews and individual interviews will be employed for this study, both will be audio recorded and then transcribed. Current student athletes will participate in focus group interviews. The goal is to elicit open-ended comments and questions during the focus groups. The focus group is expected to last one to two hours with an occasional break as needed. A series of 10 to 15 questions will be used to guide the focus group. Individual, semi-structured, open ended interviews will be utilized for former student athlete participants. Each former athlete will participate in a 60 to 90 minute interview. All conversations in the focus group interviews and individual interviews will be kept confidential.

If you have athletes that may be interested in participating, please designate a contact person within your athletic department to facilitate the project's process. For more information, please contact me, Ronald W. Whitaker, II at [whitakeriir@duq.edu](mailto:whitakeriir@duq.edu) or (484) 686-4743. Thank you for your consideration.



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**TITLE:** *Beyond the Touchdowns and Slam-dunks: A Critical Examination of How Revenue Playing African American Male Student Athletes at Predominately White Institution Experience and Perceive The Climate on Their Campus.*

**INVESTIGATOR:** Ronald W. Whitaker, II  
405 Canevin Hall  
600 Forbes Avenue  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15214  
484-686-4743  
[whitakeriir@duq.edu](mailto:whitakeriir@duq.edu)

**ADVISOR:** Rodney Hopson PhD  
Department of Foundations and Leadership  
412-396-4034

### Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine:

1. Do African American male student athletes who attend predominantly White institutions (Division 1 classification) feel comfortable and/or safe on their collegiate campus/community?
2. Do African American male student athletes experience negative stereotypes in the classroom by professors and classmates?
3. Do African American male student athletes feel negatively stereotyped by coaches, counselors, professors, teaching assistants and White/other minority (i.e. Asian) students?

Through this study, the researcher seeks to better understand how revenue playing African American male student athletes experience life at predominantly White institutions, where their “blackness” is often magnified. Further, this study is part of a larger dissertation project that the researcher will conduct, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education (Ed.D) degree, in the Professional Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program (ProDEL), at Duquesne University.

### **Information about the participant’s involvement in the study**

Current players will participate in a focus group, former student athletes will participate in an individual interview. The purpose of the focus group/interview is to talk about your experiences of being a revenue playing athlete at a predominately White institution. Both the focus group and individual interviews will not last longer than 90 minutes.

The interview will encourage open dialogue. You will be encouraged to share your experiences of being a Black male athlete at a predominately White institution. A series of pre-guided questions will be used to guide the interview. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Study participants will have a chance to review transcripts for accuracy, and indicate any needed revisions.

### **Risks**

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. However, some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort if you have experienced discrimination, harassment, or negative stereotypes at a predominately White institution. You are free to skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable with, or withdraw from the study. The researcher will assign each participant an alias to protect confidentiality.

### **Benefits**

This study may contribute to programs, services, and interventions that predominately White institutions might consider for revenue playing Black male student athletes. Additionally, your participation may confirm why you have “certain” feelings pertaining to your experience(s) at your institution.

### **Compensation**

Participants will not be compensated for participation in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

All conversations will be kept confidential. In an effort to protect your identity, you will be given an alias that will be used to reference your comments. Other participants will also be assigned an alias that will be used to reference their responses.

All information pertaining to your identity will be locked in a secure office at Duquesne University. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to interview information. After the data from the interviews has been recorded and transcribed, it will be deleted from the audio recorded.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions about the study or procedures, you may contact Ronald W. Whitaker, II at 600 Forbes Avenue, 405 Canevin Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, or call at (484)-686-4743. If you have any questions pertaining to your rights as a participant, you may contact the office of research at (412) 396-6326

**Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may remove yourself from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

**Summary of Results**

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**Consent**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Ronald W. Whitaker II (484) 686-4743, Dr. Rodney Hopson (412) 396-4034 and Dr. Joseph Kush, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board 412-396-6326

**Participant's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Interview Script**

Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me. I greatly appreciate your time and willingness to take part in this research. You have agreed to participate in a study that explores how African American male student athletes who compete in revenue sports at predominantly White institutions experience and perceive the climate on their campus and team. The information you share may offer insight into the types of programs, services, psycho-educational workshops, and interventions that predominantly White institutions might consider for their revenue playing African American male student athletes. Further, I hope this study will give me a better understanding about issues that impact African American male student athletes who attend predominately White institutions, for my forthcoming dissertation work.

I anticipate the interview lasting between 60-90 minutes. Everything you say will be kept confidential and findings will be reported without identifying information. However, for our own purposes, we would like to record our conversations so we can be sure to capture all the information and your insights. Lastly, there are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. However, you may feel emotionally upset, angry, or discomfort if you have experienced discrimination, harassment, or negative stereotypes at a predominately White institution. You are free to skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable with, or withdraw from the study. I will assign you with an alias to protect confidentiality. Do you have any questions before we begin?



## Interview and Focus Group Protocol Questions

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview/focus group. The purpose of the interview/focus group is to explore how African American male student athletes who compete in revenue sports at predominately White institutions experience and perceive the climate on their campus and team. All responses will remain confidential and will not be associated with your name or institution. Any reporting of responses will be done with pseudonyms and will be in the form of general themes.**

**I would like to cover the following four main topics, all related to understanding the climate on your campus and team:**

- 1. Issues related to expectations and adjustment**
- 2. Issues related to experiences with campus personnel (i.e. coaches, counselors)**
- 3. Issues related to experiences on campus**
- 4. Issues related to support**

**With your permission I would like to record the interview/focus group. This will help to assure that I capture all of your responses.**

**Do you have any questions before we begin?**

### **Expectations and Adjustment**

- 1. How would you describe your current (or previous) experiences as an African American male student athlete?**
- 2. Life at college can be much different than life in our own communities. Can you give me some examples of adjustments you have made in your life or things you have had to get used to being at this university?**
- 3. Would you say that your experiences at this university thus far are different from what you expected?**

### **Experiences with Campus Personnel**

- 1. Can you share your experiences related to staff (i.e. support counselors) interactions?**
- 2. Can you share your experiences related to your coaches, do you feel that you can talk with them about issues not related to athletics?**
- 3. How are your experiences in the classroom, do you feel welcomed by professors and classmates?**
- 4. Please explain how faculty perceptions of you as a Black male student athlete influenced your ability to learn in the classroom? Please give examples**

### **Experiences on Campus**

1. What comes to your mind when you think of revenue playing Black male student athletes who attend predominately White institutions (PWI's)?
2. Have you ever felt the need to change your behaviors or appearance in order to fit into the culture on your campus? Why or Why not?
3. What is the most common stereotyping (if any) that individuals on this campus (i.e. White classmates) have about Black male student athletes? Why do you think this exists?
4. Has there ever been a time (on or off the field/court) when you felt out of place? Can you give me some examples?

### **Campus Support**

1. Give examples of how university personnel should motivate, engage, and inspire Black male student athletes to succeed athletically, academically, and personally?
2. What social and/or academic activities have helped you feel a sense of belonging on campus?
3. What (if any) support and encouragement have you received on campus? How important has this support been in helping you to persist at this institution?
4. What are the primary institutional factors that you think makes it difficult and/or easy to achieve success?

***As necessary, give examples of primary institutional factors (i.e. support counselors, meet and mingle)***

## APPENDIX C

# Empowerment Support Group Goals



1. Giving and receiving support
2. Increase self-esteem/self-efficacy
3. Encourage students to find their voice
4. Discuss strategies for students to have holistic college success
5. Learn healthy coping skills
6. Learn leadership philosophies and skills
7. Build community amongst each other
8. Think critically about roles often attributed to males

### ***Group Session Topics***

The following topics highlight issues that I will discuss with students during the empowerment support group sessions:

1. **“All Eyez on Me”**- This session will address issues of being stereotyped. The goal is for students to express their feelings about being labeled, in addition to exploring if they have conformed to the beliefs of others.

#### *Resources*

- “All Eyez on Me” lyrics- Tupac Shakur
  - Niggers No More: A Critical Race Counter-narrative on Black Male Student Achievement At Predominantly White Colleges and Universities-Dr. Shaun Harper
  - The Mis-Education of the Negro (excerpt from chapter 1)- Carter G. Woodson
2. **You’re Not Crazy, But Now What?** - This session will allow students to share freely about the social challenges they face on campus, with the goal of developing strategies to counteract environmental resistance.

#### *Resources*

- “Double Consciousness” essay- W.E.B. Du Bois
- The History of Code Switching-Learn NC
- Tips for Avoiding Police Harassment -Action Handbook
- Self-Care Assessment Form-RWWII

- 3. I'm Keeping It Real-** This session will deal with identities that may be misinterpreted by those unfamiliar with African American culture. The goal of this session is to talk honestly about “keeping it real,” when other might perceive that behavior as “keeping it wrong.”

*Resources*

- The Fab Five-30 for 30 excerpt
- “I’m so Hood”-lyrics DJ Khaled
- Barack Obama brings new example for young Black men-The Birmingham News

- 4. Real Men Don’t Cry, Right?** – This session will encourage males to express their feelings through journaling, biblio-therapy, and spoken word. The goal for this session is to educate students on various coping strategies they can utilize, in addition to thinking critically about roles often attributed to males.

*Resources*

- Prescribed male script- Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, Adolescent Development
- Power, Money, and Sex: How Success Almost Ruined My Life (excerpt)-Deion Sanders
- “So Many Tears” lyrics-Tupac Shakur

**5. Leadership 101** - This session will teach leadership qualities to the group. The goal of this session is for the students to understand that they are capable of creating positive change on SU's campus, even though inequalities may exist.

*Resources/Discussion Questions*

- Do you consider yourself a leader?
- Are you ready for the challenges of Leadership?
- Letter from a Birmingham Jail (excerpt)- Martin Luther King, Jr

**6. Still I Rise (Session 6)** – This session will empower students to think differently about their current situations, with the goal of challenging them to stay focused and motivated on their athletic and academic commitments at Seahawk University.

*Resources/Discussion Questions*

- The Resiliency Quiz-Nan Henderson M.S.W.
- Still I Rise (Poem)-Maya Angelou
- Group Evaluation Form-RWW

## Attachments

### Self-Assessment Tool: Self-Care

How often do you do the following? (Rate, using the scale below):

- 5 = Frequently
- 4 = Sometimes
- 3 = Rarely
- 2 = Never
- 1 = It never even occurred to me

#### Physical Self Care

- Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast & lunch)
- Eat healthfully
- Exercise, or go to the gym
- Lift weights
- Get regular medical care for prevention
- Get medical care when needed
- Take time off when you're sick
- Take care of your body through proper stretching and adequate rest
- Do physical activity that is fun for you (i.e. swimming, dancing, play wii games)
- Take time to be sexual
- Get enough sleep
- Wear clothes you like
- Take a walk around campus for leisure
- Take time away from texting, tweeting, Facebook, and reading emails
- Other:

#### Psychological Self Care

- Make time for self-reflection
- Talk to a counselor when needed
- Write in a journal
- Read literature unrelated to work
- Do something that is a challenge to you
- Remove yourself from stressful relationships (i.e. your partner)
- Minimizing stress in your life (i.e. worrying less about things you can't control)
- Takings steps to conquer your fears and/or improve your weaknesses
- Engage your intelligence in a new area - go to a museum, lecture, performance, sports event, exhibit, or other cultural event on campus
- Listening to **positive** advice from others
- Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes
- Spend time outdoors
- Other:

#### Emotional Self Care

- Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in your life (i.e. friends back home)
- Positively Affirm yourself (i.e. I deserve to be on this team or a student at this University)

- Listen to cds, your iPod, or watch your favorite show
- Reread favorite books, review favorite movies
- Identify and seek out comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places
- Allow yourself to cry or be vulnerable
- Find things that make you laugh
- Express your outrage in a constructive way (i.e. working out, writing a poem)
- Other:

**Spiritual Self Care**

- Make time for prayer, meditation, reflection
- Spend time with your faith community (if applicable)
- Listen to inspirational songs or messages.
- Be optimistic and hopeful about possibilities that exist
- Be aware of what's really important in life (i.e. good health)
- Be open to exploring your true purpose for living
- Identify what is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life
- Express gratitude through songs, dance, or another spiritual ritual
- Invest in others holistic wellbeing
- Contribute to or participate in causes you believe in
- Be aware of things that bring you inner peace
- Other:

**School Life**

- Take time to eat your meals
- Take time to chat with your peers
- Make time to complete homework assignments and task
- Identify events/resources on campus that are exciting, growth promoting, and rewarding for you
- Set limits with your teammates and peers
- Arrange your dorm/apartment so it is comfortable and comforting
- Get regular feedback from your professors and coaches
- Express your needs to the appropriate people
- Other:

**Please list the top three things that bring you peace and happiness**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

***Empowerment Support Group Evaluation Form***

**1. What did you like best?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**What did you like least?**



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**2. For each of the following statement please circle the response that best reflects your feeling about that statement.**

The empowerment group has made an important difference in my life  
Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

I feel welcome when I attended support group sessions  
Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

I have learned skills in this program that I use each day  
Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

I felt safe when raising my point of view in meetings  
Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

**3. How relevant was the sessions to your experience at Seahawk University?**

(Please circle)  
Not at all, Somewhat, Very

Comments:

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**4. How would you rate the way the facilitator interacted with participants?**

(Please Circle)  
Very Poor, Poor, Well, Very well

Comments:

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**5. How do you think I could improve future group sessions?**

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*Thanks for helping us to assess and improve future group sessions!!*

## APPENDIX D

### The Ideologies of Diversity

Williams (2013) argues that academic and institutional leaders must appreciate philosophies that individuals in society hold about diversity. The following seven categories are common diversity ideologies in higher education:

1. **“Economic Perspective**-Diversity is defined primarily as a concept of economic background and class.
2. **Racialized Perspective**-Diversity is generally defined in terms of race and ethnicity, and more broadly in terms of historically underrepresented groups.
3. **Centric Perspective**-Diversity is defined from the unique perspective of a particular cultural group.
4. **Universal Perspective**-Diversity is defined broadly, and every diverse group is valued and supported equally, with no attention to historical differences in experiences and contemporary situations.
5. **Reverse Discrimination Perspective**-Diversity is defined broadly to include many different dimensions of difference, but any application of racial preferences is staunchly resisted and defined as reverse discrimination.
6. **Colorblind Perspective**-Diversity is not acknowledged as an idea of any importance or continuing significance as we should all strive to not see differences and assimilate into the mainstream.
7. **Equity Perspective**-Diversity is defined by achieving equity of outcomes among historically underrepresented groups of African Americans, Latinos/as, Native Americans and also women” (pp. 104-105).