ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: READING THE DEFENSE: CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF LITERACY BY COLLEGE FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES

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This study investigated how college football student-athletes conceptualize the academic and athletic literacies they experience inside and outside the classroom. Participants included sophomore, junior, and senior football student-athletes who all attended a large public university in the Mid-Atlantic area. Three distinct research tools (questionnaire, focus group, individual interviews) were used in this study. The data was systematically coded and analyzed using qualitative content analysis procedures. This study demonstrated that the football student-athletes were able to demonstrate their understanding of literacy through use of the discourse of football. Moreover, the participants used their football discourse to express their thoughts, support their views, and analyze texts, all literacy skills valued in the college classrooms. Also, the football student-athletes perceived a connection between academic literacy and football literacy. The participants recognized literacy in football in reading the plays, communication between players and coaches and the media, and executing plays on the field. Several

implications of this study are: the value of athletic literacy and football discourse in various settings, an improved connection between education and athletics, and the creation of future literacy programs to support the football student-athletes. This study is the first step in exploring the connection between athletic and academic literacy in order to improve the development of college football student-athletes. The results of this study compel us to rethink the stigma attached to football student-athletes in connection to their literacy, the locations of literacy events and the importance of literacy in football and school at the college level.

READING THE DEFENSE: CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF LITERACY BY MALE FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES

by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandmother Harriet Jaeger

and

in memory of my grandfather Burt Jaeger

I think if you tell life what it has to be, you limit it. But, if you let it show you what it wants to be it will open doors you never knew existed.

-Tortilla Soup

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal Narrative

I have always thought of myself as an athlete first, then a student or scholar. I spent my childhood and high school years swimming and hoping that I would receive a scholarship to a university. High school was an academic struggle for me but I was motivated to work hard to achieve grades that would make me a more desirable student-athlete. Standardized testing was not my strong suit and it posed a huge problem for me when applying to some higher tier universities. After several rejections and acceptances, I chose to attend a large public Midwestern university that was satisfied enough with my SAT scores and grades and considered me a successful enough swimmer to receive an athletic scholarship.

Throughout college, I worked harder than many of my teammates at academics where success came less easily to me. However, I was prepared for the challenge and graduated with a double degree in English and Secondary Education. I knew after I graduated that I wanted to become a professor of education but I was not sure where I wanted to go and whether I was destined for academia. Even with my two degrees in hand, I still saw myself as an athlete because athletics defined me throughout my college career and my grades did not necessarily reflect my goal of pursuing higher education. My negative academic perception of myself has continued even after receiving my master's degree in English and while pursuing my doctoral degree in literacy because I still consider myself an athlete who wishes to pursue academia.

When I began my doctoral studies at a large public university (DBU[1]) , I had no intention of becoming involved with their athletic department. Nevertheless, after my first semester I needed supplemental income and applied for a tutoring position in the athletic department. My tutors in college had been very helpful and I thought the job would be a good fit for me. They hired me and for the first semester I worked strictly as an English tutor for a few football and lacrosse players. Over the summer, I accepted a position as a mentor and tutor for the football team exclusively because of my expertise in writing, literacy, and reading. More specifically, I was asked to work with the students who were classified as Individual Admits (IA) by the university because of their low-test scores, unsatisfactory grades in high school, or various learning disabilities that impaired their grades. The athletic department recognizes that these students need more one-on-one attention to improve their reading strategies, writing skills, and overall academic knowledge.

At first, I did not see this job as anything more than an opportunity to earn some extra money. However, not only did I begin to get to know the students but I began to understand the difference between my experience as a college swimmer and theirs as college football players. The swim team often has the highest GPA of any other sport, not because they are smarter, but because the sport demands individual discipline, particularly in terms of time management. High school swimmers who are fast enough to swim at the collegiate level expect to secure athletic scholarships for college. Only a select few ever go beyond college to the Olympics and become professional swimmers. Furthermore, swimming is not a revenue-producing sport, so athletic departments care

[1] The name of the university has been changed to protect the participants' anonymity. DBU is not the actual acronym of the university. I have changed the acronym in order to

more about swimmers' GPAs than their titles. On the other hand, football student-athletes are at the center of a university because they play a team sport that produces revenue and their wins and loses are watched and chronicled in the media. From my perspective, in high school, some football student-athletes are given the impression by parents, coaches, and/or the media that college is a stepping-stone to playing professionally. Oftentimes, it appears that at the collegiate level, athletic departments are less concerned with the team's GPA (unless some players are ineligible) and more focused on whether they win games, titles, and bowl games (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Collegiate football players are often stereotyped as athletes and rarely is the word student associated with them. According to the NCAA, the Graduation Success Rate for DBU football team was 64% in 2003. A majority of the students earn average grades and the cumulative GPA for student football players in 2009-2010 was a 2.3. Overall, these student-athletes, like many students, are not always interested in school but I have seen many of them grow from believing that their only viable option was to play professional football to becoming driven to receive their degrees and see the future as college graduates.

Working with the football student-athletes over the past three years has given me the opportunity to get to know them as individuals through teaching an introductory study skills course (UNIV 104), helping them as individuals, and mentoring them as they progress through their collegiate career. My relationship with many of the football student-athletes has developed over time. It must be noted that a majority of the football student-athletes are black males and being a white female put me at a disadvantage

because they either did not trust me, saw me as nothing more than female, or thought that I did not understand the world of athletics. Therefore, when I began tutoring, many of the student-athletes were weary of a new face, and as a teacher and former collegiate athlete, I felt that I needed to remain professional but also focus on each student's needs in order to establish a mutually beneficial working relationship. When the students' find out that I was a former swimmer, surprising it does not phase them because I am so much older than them. This has proven helpful both for the students and for me because we have become more open, in both dialogue and needs, and built our relationship on mutual respect.

As individuals, many of these football student-athletes come from diverse family and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some of the students come from two family households, single parent households, while others had grandparent(s) or siblings raised them. Moreover, some individuals have lived a privileged life while others have had struggled through difficult times and played football as a means of escaping that reality. Where the students grew up and their circumstances dictated the high schools, public or private, they attended. Lastly, since the DBU is located in the Mid-Atlantic a majority of the student-athletes come from the East Coast of the United States (e.g., D.C., NJ, PA, NY, MD, VA, SC, FL).

My work with the football student-athletes has been recognized by the head of academics, for the athletic department and I have begun working with more student-athletes (e.g., baseball, women's swimming, field hockey, men's and women's soccer, women's lacrosse) and this has given me a broader perspective on student-athletes' literacy and what it means to be an athlete and be literate at the collegiate level. In

particular, while working with more student-athletes I have created a mutual respect and understanding that my purpose (as is many teachers) is to help and support them so they can become better students and achieve the academic success that they are capable of at the college level. Although I did not initially intend to work for the DBU Athletic Department or make this research the focus of my dissertation, my experiences have given me the opportunity to look at athletics and literacy beyond the scope that I had originally seen. I have been able to explore literacy as it pertains to the world of sports and not just the academic world, which has opened my eyes to new perspectives.

Problem Statement

Based on my own experiences as an athlete and my interactions with the student-athletes I work with, I have begun to see literacy as more than reading and writing, in school and the read world, but how to communicate, act, and the expectations and knowledge needed to succeed in a sport. I realize through my own experience that I knew what needed to be done in the pool but was unable to translate that into the classroom, much like the individuals I encounter who play for the football team. With so many football student-athletes not graduating, falling behind, and being left to fail at the college level it is essential to look at how these athletes perceive literacy both in the classroom and on the field. These student-athletes are a vital part of the university community and do often millions on T.V. and how those millions base their opinions on about the university. In general, athletes have a negative perception of themselves as students and it is imperative to recognize how this affects their college academic experience and what that means for graduation rates and these individuals. Lastly, looking at football student-athletes perceptions of literacy is important because

graduation rates are low for football student- athlete and are not improving to the extent that universities would like and in order to understand why, it is important that we need to explore these students literacies and what that means for them as college students.

Graduation Success Rate

The Graduation Success Rate (GSR) is the statistical representation of student-athletes that graduate in any given year and includes all freshman, transfer students, mid-years, and non-scholarship athletes in the sample. The NCAA instituted GSR in 1995 to keep track of graduation rates of athletes and is assessed per sport as well as in connection to the entire student-athlete population. This rate provides a more complete and accurate look at student-athletes success in graduation because it takes into account all the various participants in Division I athletics and tracking their academic outcomes (NCAA 2011).

Moreover, the current GSR rates available are based on the 2002-2003 entering class. This rate is determined by cohorts of students and are based on the year they entered and are not compiled or released till six years later giving students ample time to graduate. From 2003 to 2004 (expected graduation 2009-2010) there was an increase in GSR due to the inclusion of Ivy League schools. Overall the GSR for 2004 was at 82%, which is higher than any earlier class and the rates for males increased by 5 % and women increased by 2% (NCAA, 2011, p. 6). The GSR for African American student-athletes increased by 4% and for white student-athletes there was an increase of 3%. These numbers coincide with the fact that more black student-athletes graduate than their non-athlete counterparts (NCAA, 2011).

General Factors

For many of us, the word "literate" does not come to mind when we think of college football student-athletes. There is a prevalent assumption that college football players do not use sophisticated literacy practices, in or out of school. Often the perception is that student-athletes are more concerned and occupied with sports and pay less attention to academics (Horton, 2009). Over the past fifteen years, the NCAA has conducted an annual Graduation Success Rate (GSR) study to accurately show and understand the graduation rates of college student- athletes. The 2002-2003 athletic cohort (expected graduation 2008-2009, 2009-2010) of male student-athletes had a lower GSR (72%) compared to the female student-athlete population (88%) (http://ncaa.org). In addition, over a four-year period at Division I schools, men's basketball graduated 64% and football graduated 67%, which was up from previous years (http://ncaa.org). According to a study by *The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport* (Lapchick, 2010), among the 70 football Bowl-bound teams in 2010, GSR for black football student-athletes was lower (60%) than their white football student-athlete counterparts (80%). In addition, these athletes often grapple with feeling stereotyped (e.g., dumb jock, lazy, not in school to get an education), chronically underperform in the classroom and struggle academic inequities throughout their college years (Beamon & Bell, 2006; Benson, 2000; Mahiri, 1998; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006).. Athletes are frequently seen as being less prepared and motivated than their non-athlete peers.

Athletics and Literacy

The research conducted by the NCAA and other institutes focus on graduation statistics and the deficits of these football student-athletes instead of looking at the knowledge that these individuals have and how to work with it. More specifically, these

students are typically viewed from a deficit perspective because they are often failing at the collegiate level.

Regrettably, there are few studies that explore how male student-athletes conceptualize the academic and athletic literacies in their lives. Much of the literacy and athletics research has focused on students either in middle or high school (Mahiri, 1994; 1998) or after having left the college setting (Mahiri & Van Rheenen, 2010). In addition, research has shown that boys often show literate behaviors and literacy skills in athletic settings but are unable to translate them into the classroom (Mahiri, 1991; Mahiri & Van Rheenen, 2010).

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and Universities

The NCAA is the governing body of college sports for Division I, IA, II, and III schools across the country. It funds college athletics and sets rules and guidelines for sports and academics, and each university, regardless of division, must belong to the organization if they choose to have their athletes compete in intercollegiate athletics. Furthermore, the NCAA has become more concerned with the education and academic performance of college student-athletes over the past thirty years. This is due to a history of low graduation grades, academic misconduct from students and universities, academic scandals and the increasing numbers of student-athletes who leave these programs for professional sports or other universities. For example, 63% of student-athletes graduated from the 2002-2003 cohort, whereas only 60% of men's track and field and 55% of men's football graduated. Both the NCAA and student-athletes report finding it difficult to balance academics, higher education, and participation in sports (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Academic institutions' goals for higher education are not always aligned with athletic departments, which has created a disparity and furthered the NCAA's push for more stringent rules and guidelines for student-athletes and academics (Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006). The NCAA states that student-athletes may work out no more than 20 hours per week and everything beyond that is voluntary (NCAA.org). However, a majority of athletes voluntarily devote more time to sports than allowed by the NCAA, thereby leaving little time for academics and other educational activities (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Consequently, athletic environments are not consistently conducive to successful academics and educational experiences on and off the field.

College Football Players and Literacy

College football student-athletes are often a forgotten population when it comes to exploring literacy. Often, it is assumed these students have the academic literacy needed for the collegiate level or are at the university because of an athletic scholarship. Since academics and sports are rarely seen as coinciding in education, there is the supposition that looking at college student-athletes perceptions of literacy is not needed or valid. College football players are often a forgotten population and according to the statistics less than 70% (http://www.NCAA.org) of them graduate from college. Additionally, this group is underrepresented in research because many individuals do not see them as students or that sport has anything to do with literacy. Yet, this group of individuals is important because many of them enter college as athletes not as students and they have taken on a persona that puts them at a deficit when entering into the college classroom. Therefore, these football student-athletes are left behind and not given the support and knowledge needed to support otherwise. Since literacy pertains to students of all ages and

abilities, we must take a closer look at male college student-athletes as a significant population. Understanding how college student-athletes conceptualize literacy can help us not only comprehend college level literacy more thoroughly, but also the effects and impact of literacy on these individuals throughout elementary and high

Research Questions

1. How do male college football student-athletes perceive literacy, both in the classroom and on the field, based on various social experiences (i.e. school, sports)?
2. How do college football student-athletes see literacy as it pertains to the various aspects of their lives (e.g., football, classroom)?
3. How do football student-athletes see themselves and their multiple literacies, on and off the field?
4. How do football student- athletes characterize and deal with the expectations of literacy held by coaches, themselves, college instructors, and university classrooms?

Summary

My own experiences both as a student-athlete and working with student-athletes piqued my interest of the connection between literacy and athletics and what significance it holds for academic literacy. By looking at athletes and literacy, I am able to connect and recognize the implications for college literacy and the academic world that many of these students participate. In particular, the study will be the first step in the process of exploring the connection between athletics and literacy in order to further the development of student-athletes at the college level. This study will also provide a starting point for future research examining college student-athletes and literacy from a student perspective.

There is an increasing need for research on literacy and athletics because so many students of all ages are involved in sports and their conceptions of literacy may be forming in these early years. Consequently, this study might open up the chance for more research between the connection between literacy and football and what this means for male athletes at an early age. Recognizing and acknowledging the literacy perspectives of student-athletes in college may lead to additional research on literacies that younger children who play sports engage in and construct, and may help make school-based literacy practices more appealing for student- athletes throughout their years in K-12 school and beyond.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Introduction

The literacy skills essential in elementary, middle, and high school are different than those needed at the college level. For example, a high school student needs to understand the basics when it comes to analyzing a single text and write about it. However, a literate college student needs to be able to comprehend the various texts that they encounter but also analyze and expound on them.

The literacy research that pertains specifically to male adolescent literacy has become increasingly more prevalent in recent years (Brozo, 2006; Gouws, 2008; Tatum, 2004; Wise, 2009). Little research has been conducted in connection with male college students' literacy. I have found from my own experience in the high school and college classroom, that students, parents, and often educators assume that once an individual enters college, he or she is considered literate on the basis of participating in higher education; thereby college students' literacy practices are rarely discussed (Wise, 2009). Yet, many students enter college with some sort of educational concern, such as low literacy skills, unpreparedness, and lack of basic skills needed to succeed at the college level, increasing the likelihood that they will either struggle academically, socially or simply drop out of school altogether (Astin, 1993). These issues are particularly true when looking at male college student-athletes. Male student-athletes have the second lowest graduation rate (67%) compared to any other population (http://www.NCAA.org) and often struggle with stereotypes and academic inequities throughout their college years (Beamon & Bell, 2006; Benson, 2000; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006). For example, over a four- year period at Division I

schools, men's basketball graduated 65% and football graduated 67%, which was up two percent from previous years (Lapchick, 2010). Moreover, according to a study by the University of Central Florida (Lapchick, 2010), the graduation rate for African American athletes is twenty percent lower (60%) than their white counterparts (80%).

The research pertaining to education and sports is vast, dating back to the seventies and eighties (e.g. Brede & Camp, 1987; Davis & Berger, 1973; Hanks & Eckland, 1976; Raney, Knapp, & Small, 1983). During the 1980's, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) became increasingly interested in the academics of student- athletes, prompting more studies pertaining to academics and athletics. Brede and Camp (1987) explored the academic performances of football and basketball student-athletes and found that out of 167 student-athletes, 19% passed easily, 55% were getting by, and 26% were struggling to pass. Many athletes take extra semesters to graduate, earn low grades for the work they complete, enroll in the minimum number of credit hours, and negotiate with faculty for grades and credit (Brede & Camp, 1987). In particular, the researchers found that the educational performance of student-athletes was not homogenous and should not be oversimplified. Additionally, Brede and Camp assert that there is no statistical expression (e.g., grade point average, graduation statistics) that can accurately capture the diversity of student-athletes without giving way to stereotypes (Brede & Camp, 1987). Therefore, the researchers contended that most statistics gloss over the issues pertaining to student-athletes and their education and it is important to look beyond them and understand the athletes as individuals.

In the past twenty years, research has been done in connection with athletics and academics, at the college level, and the deficit that continues to grow between the two

fields (Astin, 1993; Singer 2008; http://www.NCAA.org). Lastly, several studies have been done to show the lack of skills and education that some student-athletes have when they enter into the college classroom (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gurney & Winters, 2011). Nonetheless, researchers have yet to explore male college student-athletes' perceptions and practices of literacy. My proposed study is designed to be an initial attempt to address these gaps in the existing research literature.

In this chapter, I begin by defining several key terms that are used throughout my study. Secondly, I explain the theoretical framework of my study and how the theories work together and support my research. Third, I discuss how my research fits into the current research and where it is headed. Finally, I review the evidence from the existing research that supports the various aspects of my study: (1) the relationship between athletics and literacy (2) male college football perceptions of literacy on and off the field.

Definitions

In order to begin to explore the questions stated in Chapter 1, it is essential to define several key terms as they apply to male athletes and literacy. I draw upon research based on and emerging from African American scholars who write predominately about reading and literacy as they pertain to African American males.

Literacy

Heath (1983) defines literacy as "any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/ or comprehension of print plays a role" (p. 92). However, later she (1987) defines literacy skills as "mechanistic linguistic abilities which focus on separating out and manipulating discrete elements of text, such as spelling, vocabulary, grammar, topic sentences, outlines" (p. iv) and literate behaviors are seen as

being the ability "to analyze, discuss, interpret, and create extended chunks of language-types of discourse that lie at the heart of academic study" (p. iv). Heath's definitions revolve around the traditional view of literacy as applying only to reading and writing. Pendergast (2003) makes the point that over the last few decades' literacy scholars have moved away from misconceptions of literacy and a standardized definition of it. Many researchers have pushed toward arguing for multiple literacies, which allows them to be varied and no longer constrained by one simple definition. Gee (1991) defines literacy as "the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse" (p. 9) and there are only "fluent speakers [and] apprentices" (p. 10) because literacy extends beyond reading, writing and speaking, and involves more than Heath's basic ideas of print based material. However, Gee's definition is still too traditional and narrow in today's view of literacy and multiple literacies.

Literacy is complex, dynamic, and in many ways socially assembled. Tatum (2008) believes race and ethnicity influence an individual's literacy and the multiple conceptions of literacies and identities are situated within power structures such as class, gender, and race. Moreover, literacy is formulated inside and outside of the home. Therefore, to speak about literacy is to consider literacy events that are not isolated but that connect to a functional system that occurs within specific actions. Defining literacy within context makes literacy something that is "influenced largely by social institutions and not cultural membership" (Anderson & Stokes, 1984, p. 34). In effect, business, institutions, and other social milieu like popular culture, influence the literacy practices of individuals. Race, gender and ethnicity contribute to literacy as being socially assembled

but are not the only factors; popular culture, social interactions, businesses and academic institutions coincide in creating several influences that affect literacy.

Mahiri (2004) points out that literacy is never an "autonomous skill" (188) but does hold political and ideological significance within a culturally constructed system and practice. Also, he states literacy is "not unitary" either because it encompasses everything (e.g., reading. writing, speaking, etc.) and each literacy holds a different purpose and value in various settings in which literacy is used. Furthermore, Kirkland and Jackson (2009), much like Mahiri (2004) and Tatum (2006), state literacy is defined by "cultural practices that are embedded in social and cultural phenomena . . . Literacy, then, is capable of operating from a diversity of representational systems, particularly when combining written and oral forms with visual, gestural, and other kinds of symbols" (p. 279). Thus, in this paper, literacy is defined as being the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking and is embedded within social and cultural phenomena; moreover, it includes cultural and social knowledge to use appropriate Discourse in specific situations (e.g. home, school, community areas, stores, athletics, etc.).

Academic Literacy

Similarly to the general definition of literacy, academic literacy is difficult to define because it is comprised of more than the standardized definition of being able to read, write and participate in the academic setting. Additionally, academic literacy varies depending on the various levels of formal education; however, it is a form of "in-school literacy." Since this research focuses on college students, academic literacy is based on what is required of an individual once they reach the college level. The California

Education System (2002) compiled a document, written by Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates of the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California, that included the competencies that are expected of students entering the states' public college and universities. In the report, it is written that students who enter into the university system must be able to participate in the ongoing conversation that is appropriate to "college thinking, reading, writing, and speaking." (p. 2). Students must be knowledgeable of the various levels of an argument, pathos, logos, and ethos, in both speaking and writing, and be able to "define, summarize, detail, explain, evaluate, compare/contrast, and analyze" (p. 13) various texts.

In Morrell's (2004) book, he acknowledges that an individual who is academically literate posses skills that go beyond contributing, analyzing, and critiquing within the world of academia. He states individuals, who are academically literate have,

> the ability to summarize and synthesize various literacy and theoretical texts; the ability to compare and contrast academic texts with one another and with popular cultural texts and empirical data; the ability to critique arguments presented in academic and popular texts; the ability to explain and defend a written or oral argument; the ability to effectively challenge opposing arguments; the ability to engage and incorporate multiple theoretical perspectives into the formulation of research questions, the development or research methodologies, and the analysis of data; and the ability to use the appropriate tools or research and language (discourse) of the research community. (p. 53)

Morrell's definition is extensive and expands the basic expectations that the state of California maintains. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) refer to the importance of

Morrell's academic literacy expectations and how they will not only impact the student's lives but the world in which they live:

> These . . . skills will serve the students well throughout their lives because, whether we are talking about the world of work or the world of politics and advocacy, these students will not be able to divest from institutions and practices that they find problematic. (p. 102)

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell make the point that an individual who is academically literate will not only do well throughout their lives but they will be able to recognize and make an impact where they see problems and issues within the world. Furthermore, Gee's definition of literacy as "the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse" (p. 9) pertains to academic literacy. This secondary Discourse is learned and used not only in the K-12 but further mastered in the college classroom, preparing students to participate in the world in which they live. As a result, academic literacy is extended beyond the classroom and includes aspect of being a part of the collegiate community, such as how to act in school, interact with professors and fellow students, research, and be able to sustains one's knowledge and drive throughout their time in this environment. Thus, academic literacy is broader than the basic skills of being a student in the classroom and includes being able to participate in various academic environments (e.g., numerous classes, clubs, societies, groups, etc.) and recognize the expectations of society when he or she leaves the university and enters the real world.

Athletic Literacy

Athletic literacy has no set definition but for the purposes of this review, it is considered to be an out-of-school literacy. Every sport has its own literacy. From my

own experience, to be literate in swimming is to understand the stroke techniques, the strategy of racing, the discourse of the sport and one's role as part of the greater team. Mahiri (1991,1994) examines what it means to be literate in basketball but does not explicitly gives a complete definition. Mahiri (1991) researched a Young Boys Association basketball team and the discourse and language that they used on the court. He states, " the 'discourse of basketball' can be viewed as including specific language terms, cognitive images, and other interactional speech modes such as Burt's 'going baseline under pressure,' 'getting triple-teamed,' or 'making it talk off the glass'" (p. 309). Mahiri's research illustrates the terminology, images, and language used on the basketball court is a discourse and part of a larger sport literacy perspective.

But, athletic literacy also encompasses literacy events, as they take place inside the discourse of the sport and off the court. For example, Mahiri (1991) recounts his observation of the individuals in his study trying to comprehend the NCAA Final Four Basketball Tournament. Scoring system, analyzing the charts, and synthesizing all the information that is given on the 64 teams that participate in this tournament, all in an attempt to make educated guesses that might result in picking the winning teams and receiving praise from others. Furthermore, literacy events, such as learning and reading the football plays, understanding the swimming stroke technique to compete at a higher level, or the strategies needed to run past one's opponent on the soccer field, can be included in athletic literacy.

Yet, it is more than the discourse and language of the sport that makes one athletically literate, knowing the plays, the best course of action to achieve a goal, the skills needed to excel, and the expectations of the coach, teammates, and the game.

Mahiri (1991) states, "such literacy events require intensive application of both literate behaviors and literacy skills" (p. 310). In addition, the benefits of athletic literacy is that it transcends the basketball court and can be used in the classroom where these males feel insecure, out of place, and sometime incompetent (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004). Based on the above research and definitions, for the purposes of this study athletic literacy includes the language, discourse, knowledge of the plays, the body movements and skills, and the general knowledge of the sport needed to excel.

Gender

Gender is differentiated based on societal views (Lee, 2007; Mahiri, 2004; Moss, 2007). Moreover, gender can be seen as significantly distinctive depending on the scenario and the social atmosphere in which the context allows. Moss (2007) defines gender as socially constructed and involves the ability to interact and "produce the pattern of gender differences in performance outcomes" (p. 1). Lee (2007) contends that one's gender, along with being black, greatly impact one's identity. She asserts, "for girls, identity development includes risks associated with pregnancy, predatory relationships with males, problems figuring out their sense of self (physical beauty, outgoing personality, academic achievement, and so on), often influenced by how others respond to them" (p. 29). Defining oneself as a gendered female plays a role in the identity and the set of concerns and social issues one will encounter.

As for black males "there are issues related to figuring out the basis on which their sense of being a man will be based (i.e. physical attractiveness, physical prowess, assertive personality, academic achievement" (p. 29). In addition, Mahiri (2004) contends,

> The social practice view of gender suggests that the meanings we attach to being male or female. . . are shaped through social practices . . .Those meanings can change over time and across culture, situations, and contexts; while we are always either male or female, the fact of being male or female can have different implications and varying degrees of salience across a range of situations, and in interactions with other social categories. (p.190)

Therefore, gender is constructed much like how individuals and society construct the world in which they live based on the social practices that one encounters and the interactions that one has with others. As a result, gender is socially constructed and intertwined within one's identity.

Part of defining gender, for this study, is viewing it as it pertains to male college football student-athletes literacy and their lives in and out-of-school. Mahiri (2004) contends, "we must view gender- like literacy- as a social practice constituted through social interaction" (p. 189). He further states, "literacy and gender as contextualized social practices" (p. 187). Based on Mahiri's statements, literacy is a gendered social practice and socially constructed through social interaction and students negotiate their literacy through gender. In particular, Mahiri found that the literacy practices in connection with gender practices made an impact on academic literacy in the classroom. Students negotiated their view of gender through literacy because the various perspectives of gender that students bring to class shape literacy. For example, in his case study of Paula and Keri's personal views about literacy and gender were shaped by their social encounters with friends, teachers, and family. Lastly, Mahiri (2004) points out, "ultimately, by looking at how students bring their notions of gender to bear upon

literacy, both through what they do and through how they represent others can we begin to use academic literacy" (p. 206). Consequently, gender and literacy are both socially constructed, through social practice and based on the views of society and the education system. Thus, it is important to look at gender as it pertains to literacy academic literacy and literacies outside of the classroom.

Theoretical Framework

There are several theories that I will be using throughout to conceptualize male football student-athletes' perceptions of literacy. Each sport has its own discourse and literacy and the theorists below express the uniqueness of this. The theories in this framework are placed in the form of a historical progression, in order to show the connection between each and to understand and identify the social and cultural connection between athletics, education, literacy and society. I begin with Vygotsky (1978) and his sociocultural theory of development and interaction in order to understand student-athletes perceptions of literacy. Second, I move onto Bourdieu's *Sport and Social Class* (1978) and use his theory as the basis of the subsequent theories. Bourdieu provides a societal view on sport, space, and the student-athletes that are discussed within throughout this study. Third, I look at Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) to make sense of the language and literacy used in sports. Fourth, Bourdieu's *Program for a Sociology of Sport* (1988) offers insight into the "field of sport" and the actions that take place on and off the field. Lastly, Mahiri and Van Rheenen's (2010) contemporary theory of sports and the role they play in and out of the classroom setting is essential to understanding sport, education, and literacy in today's society.

Vygotsky: *Mind in Society* (1978)

I am using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development and interaction to look at how male student-athletes' perceptions of literacy are or are not formed through their social interaction with other players, on the field, and in the classroom.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social interaction is important in the development of cognition. He states:

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological) . . . All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)

A child's knowledge is deeply imbedded in culture and society. In addition, Vygotsky's theory takes into account that a baby or child learns from the communication between themselves and their parents.

Vygotsky's theory of social development argues that social interaction comes before development and consciousness and cognition is the product of socialization and social behavior. Vygotsky maintains: "the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity two previously completely independent lines of development, converge" (p.24). He further purports that speech and learning about one's own environment through the help of speech, later produces a child's intellect and becomes a human tool. A child's signs and words are the original and the most important way for a child to socially interact with other people.

Additionally, he focuses on the interaction between people and the sociocultural environments and contexts which they interact within and the shared experiences with

others. The interaction can be between a teacher, coach, older adult, peers, someone younger or even computers in today's age. After many experiences, a child learns that actions have cultural meanings, which teach them to act and participate in society in various ways. For example, when students participate in a sport, at any level, the sport includes literate behaviors that are acceptable on the field and within the culture of the sport. These literate behaviors and interactions with teammates and coaches carry cultural meaning and affirm that these individuals can participate in the sport. College student-athletes are not only knowledgeable of these literacies but are highly skilled in them, since they have made it to the collegiate level of competition. Furthermore, at the college level, students learn what actions are culturally acceptable and how to participate in the social world of academia. College students learn from the communication and interaction with various individuals throughout their college careers. In the case of student-athletes, the academic world is often difficult to navigate and many struggle in learning how to become part of the college setting. Consequently, by using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development and interaction, it is possible to explore the role that social interaction with players, coaches, professors, and fellow students plays in the formation of male student-athletes 'perceptions of literacy.

Bourdieu: *Sport and Social Class* (1978)

This theory is used in order to view sport as more than an activity or a game and to understand the social and cultural connection between it and the world in which it exists. This theory assists in thinking about where sport began, what is has become, the physical spaces it takes place, and what it means to be an athlete.

The history of sport has its' own major events, crises, evolutionary laws, social history, economic aspects, and own chronology, making it independent of itself but also impossible to understand sports without placing in within society. Bourdieu states, "The relative autonomy of the field of sport is most clearly affirmed in the powers of self-administration and rule-making, based on a historical tradition or guaranteed by the State. . . In addition, they award specific titles, such as championship titles" (p. 824). For this reason, the field of sport carries its' own culture, social structure and rules within the greater society in which it takes place. The field of sport is influential on its own.

The field of sport is connected to the philosophy and political nature of sport, which impacts the education of those that participate. Bourdieu points out that, sport was originally designed to teach manly virtues, in order to create future leaders who had courage and had the will to win within the rules. In addition, the history of sport tends "to value education over instruction, character or willpower over intelligence," (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 825-26). Sport appears to purport that achievement on the field of sport as an alternative to academic achievement. By glorifying sport, as the training or basis of character, implies that a certain amount of anti- intellectualism is important in the field of sport. This theory gives an alternate perspective to think about what it means to be defined as an athlete and what that means for individuals as they participate in sport and school. Bourdieu's theory gives perspective on how student-athletes are often viewed as athletes, not students, and their success is most often measured on the field, not in the classroom. Additionally, this theory places the field of sport in the context of education and literacy and presents an opportunity to explore the literate behaviors that are brought about and seen on the field of sport.

Bourdieu: *Language & Symbolic Power* (1991)

With the use of Bourdieu's theory of *Language and Symbolic Power*, the responses of the football student-athletes to literacy questions can be put into perspective within an academic and sport discourse.

Bourdieu (1991) asserts specialized discourses can derive their efficacy from the correspondence between the social space in which they are part of (political, education, religious, sport) and the structure of the social classes. The spaces that he speaks about are physical spaces because they are actual places where culture and activities take place (e.g., soccer field, classroom, church) but they are also theoretical because these spaces extend beyond the actual physical space and include a conversation between individuals or an understanding of certain social practices that are acceptable within that space. This is pertinent when it comes to space of sports because of the discourses that are used within sport. Also, each sport has its own discourse that is used and necessitated in order to participate in that space. This language is used and supported by all who participate, on and off the field (see diagram below). Furthermore, the language of sport takes place within, on, and around the "field of sport" (Bourdieu, 1978). Therefore, one must take into account that the discourses of sport is contextual because it is used on the various fields of sport but is not often used or accepted in academic spaces. There are two main spaces that are discussed within this review, sport and academic.

The language and discourse that are most valued is the one that pertains to academics (e.g., classroom, higher education). Bourdieu states:

> Obligatory on official occasions and in official places (schools, public administrations, political institutions), this state language becomes the theoretical

> normal against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured. Ignorance is no excuse: this linguistic law has its body of jurists- the grammarians- and its agents of regulation and imposition- the teachers- who are empowered universally to subject the linguistic performance of speaking subjects to examination and of the legal sanction of academic qualification. (p. 45).

This language separates individuals into categories of those that are part and can participate in the world of academics and those that are not. In the academic space legitimate language has to be sustained which is done so through correction and falls on institutions designed for and by individual speakers- professors, teachers, grammarians, upper class, all of who impose and codify legitimate speakers. Bourdieu comments the power of words is "nothing other than the delegated power of the spokesperson, and his speech" (p.107). In other words, academia has taken on the power of legitimate language and those that do not master it are not given the power. This can be seen at the university level with athletes who do not master academic language, thereby pushing them farther away from academia and giving them the impression that their language of sport and literacy skills are not relevant or transferable in the academic institution.

The language of sport (e.g., basketball, swimming, football, soccer, etc.) is not legitimized in academia (i.e. academia has not legitimized it), making it inferior to school and academic language, lessening the student-athletes that are well versed in sport discourses. The power and authority of legitimate language (academic language) and the field of education overshadows the language of sport and the literacy because it is not valued beyond the space of sport. It is with this that literacy plays a role in the language of sport and what it means for student-athletes to be literate in other discourses and

cultures that do not pertain directly to academics. Bourdieu would contend that the literate behaviors and language used by athletes is just as important and as useful as academic language and its' value has been lessened because it has not been validated by academia, the upper class, and teachers. Furthermore, he would assert that by looking at discourse of student-athletes the connection between the field of sport and education becomes clearer and viewed disconnect is narrowed. Through academic and sport discourse it is possible to see the various literate behaviors and language used by student-athletes.

Bourdieu: *Program for a Sociology of Sport* (1988)

Bourdieu's key principles of sport and space are being used to frame and theorize the connection between sports, school, and society. Bourdieu's theory comes ten years after *Sport and Social Class* and he combines, refines, and rethinks his principals on sport and space.

When looking at the relationship between sports, school and society, it is essential to take into account the space in which learning occurs and the value that it has been assigned within the sporting practice. As Bourdieu suggests, "a particular sport cannot be analyzed independently of . . . sporting practices" and "one must conceptualize the space of sporting practices as a system [from which] every element receives its distinctive value" (p. 153). Additionally, he notes, "this space of sports must then be related to the social space of which it is an expression" (p. 154). Bourdieu's principles give meaning to the space of sports, such as the football field and the swimming pool, in connection to the social space (i.e. the college campus or academics) of which it is an expression. College

student-athletes play a role within their space of sport. This role is defined by their place and interaction within academia, the sports world, and society.

Bourdieu determined that in order to understand the sociology of sport one must realize that a sport cannot be analyzed just by the basic aspects of the sport. Rather sport must also be analyzed within the greater and larger space and system (i.e. the university, the greater sports world, society) in which is exists (1978, 1988). The space of sport must be related to the social space of sport of which it is an expression. Moreover, "the correspondence . . . is established between the space of sporting practices, or, more precisely, the space of the finely analyzed different modalities of the practice of different sports, and the space of social position" (p. 154). The social construction of the structure of the space of sporting practice affects the particular sport and those that partake in it. It also must be noted that the space of sport is different at the college level because of the impact that sport has on the university as a whole. Oftentimes, at NCAA Division I universities, if the school has a history of or has a currently successful football or men's basketball, team athletics are a driving force in the recruitment of students, alumni support and national recognition . As a result, it is important to look at the space of college football and what that means for the student-athletes and their literacy perceptions.

Additionally, Bourdieu refines his original theory to state that the space, the field of sport and the people that participate within it are inserted into society so none of them are able to be without the influence or participation of society. For example, definitions, sport practices, and the words that are used, such as "Jocks, eggheads," marks the reality of sport as it placed within society and how individuals are viewed within the sport.

Bourdieu's theory is significant in understanding beyond the space, the culture, and the athletes that are involved in sports. His theory offers a sociological view of space, culture, and the athletes involved and how they are placed within the greater society and what that means for the individuals that participate in this sport, specifically at the higher level of college sports. Bourdieu's sociology of sport connects to football student-athletes not only because of how sporting practices change but because these changes are social whether they are between the teammates, coaches, or from outside sources. His principles of sport and space offer a new perspective on the practices and conceptions of literacy by athletes and what this reveals about literacy and social position, in higher education, on the field and in life; furthermore, his theories further support a sociocultural perspective of how sport, discourse, and perspectives might be formed through sport. Thus, sport and space must be looked at together in order to understand the program, the language, outside perspectives, society, and those individuals that are part in the sport.

Mahiri and Van Rheenen: *Out of Bounds: When Scholarship Athletes Become Academic Scholars* (2010)

Mahiri and Van Rheenen (2010) use Bourdieu's (1978; 1988) principles of sport and space to offer a new perspective on the practices and conceptions of literacy by student- athletes. Mahiri and Van Rheenen, assert that sport organizations and education institutions need to embrace sport as something that can positively impact language, race, social class, gender, education and intelligence at all levels.

Both Mahiri and Van Rheenen (2010) and Bourdieu (1978; 1988) speak about athletics and the connections they have to space and life off the field. Though, Mahiri and Van Rheenen's theory is the most recent and practical when it comes to looking at

literacy and academia together, they draw on Bourdieu's various theories when they speak about the spaces of sport and education, the language of sport, and the impact of sport on an individual. Mahiri and Van Rheenen maintain school systems and/or the nation are often the ones that support the position that athletes are non-students: "As a nation, we need to change the language and practices of sport and school to include rather than exclude, to redefine measures of success, and offer more rather than fewer opportunities for mobility and freedom" (p. 113). Many athletes accept being seen and defined as solely athletes and the academic disassociation strengthens in adolescences where social exposure and peer pressure are greatest.

Mahiri and Van Rheenen contend that by bringing the qualities and activeness of athletics into the classroom is very important in this type of research. Both sport and academia create a space wherein identities interact both on the social and physical level. The social construction of identity through sport activities is shaped by cultural and historical positions. Students are affected by the structure of power within cultural identities based on race, gender, class, and sexuality. Mahiri and Van Rheenen speak about examples from their research of the social and physical construction of an identity of a student-athlete because many of them never thought of themselves as both a student and athlete and many view themselves as players not students.

Mahiri and Van Rheenen purport that players are active agents that confront cultural systems of powers on a daily basis and trespass within spaces that they think are closed to them or that they feel are not suited for them, such as academics. In addition, student-athletes hold and have value at their individual institutions because of the importance of the sport to the university, the fans that follow them and the money,

recognition, and spirit they bring to the school. Sometimes the place that athletes hold at an institution comes with contempt and disdain from those within the university. Mahiri and Van Rheenen's (2010) contemporary theory intersects time, race, class, gender, and sport and school practices and offers insight into the disconnect between athletic and academic practices in both institutions and the individual.

Review of Empirical Research

This review of empirical research is based on and follows the theoretical framework set above. In addition, this review is not meant to be exhaustive. Due to the various aspects of this research study the literature base related to all areas, reviewing each study and article, in each of these fields, was neither practical not productive for the purposes of my planned study. Thus, I selected studies for this review based on the following criteria: (1) the studies that focused on male literacy for college age students (2) the studies were published in peer-reviewed articles, chapters, or books and (3) the studies were related to athletics and education in the United States.

Sport and Education

Athletics and academics have had an ever-changing relationship over the years. Prior to the mid-1980's, research on college athletics looked at youth involvement in activities as it pertained to injuries, academic and athletic self-esteem, how many students were involved and the parent and participant involvement (Braddock, 1981). Over the past two decades, studies have begun to look at the connection between sports and learning (Astin, 1993; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Mahiri & Van Rheenen, 2010) the imbalance between academics and athletics at the high school (Benson, 2000; Hawkins & Mulkey, 2005) and college level (Gayles & Hu, 2009), and graduation rates as they relate

to revenue-producing sports (e.g., male basketball, football) (Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006).

Sports and K-12 education. Some studies have shown that African American males usually begin their academic career with much enthusiasm but eventually respond less and less to their academic pursuits (Hawkins & Mulkey, 2005). This lack of drive for academics appears to go unnoticed by educators and exceedingly gets worse until students no longer feel connected to education, resulting in less goals and little success with literacy strategies (Hawkins & Mulkey, 2005). Hawkins and Mulkey explored the relationship between gender, intramural athletic participation, and resilience in African American students through a quasi-exploratory, multivariate analytical approach. Intramural athletics are recreational sports that take place between students within school, whereas intercollegiate sports occur between different schools. The researchers used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, which was conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (1998). The participants were 24,599 eighth grade students in 1,052 participating schools. The students were given a survey and the researchers were given information on each student, including basic demographics, test-scores, school achievement and the participant's aspirations in life. The results for intramural athletic participation were statistically significant and showed that involvement positively impacted African American students' motivation and engagement in school. More specifically, participation in intramural sports helped the social status and popularity of students because they felt important in their role as an athlete. However, Hawkins and Mulkey's results did not clearly demonstrate the link between athletic participation, academic behaviors, and attitudes.

College sports and academics. Studies have explored the troubling academic performance of African American male student-athletes and how school structure and social and economic order is connected (Benson, 2000). In Benson's (2000) qualitative inquiry, at a large Division I university, eight academically at-risk and highly athletically ranked sophomore and junior African American football student- athletes were interviewed. All the participants were asked the same open-ended questions that focused on their experiences in academics, the classroom, and studying activities. The participants stated that their initial academic expectations, when they entered as freshman, were low and based on the need to remain eligible to participate in athletics. In particular, many were not comfortable speaking in class and adopted attitudes of "going with the flow" or "being lazy" (p. 234) because it was easy to be passive in the collegiate environment, and because that was the message they were given by their professors, academic advisors, and coaches. Essentially, the student-athletes were told that they needed to remain eligible by receiving the average grade of a C, thereby creating an atmosphere that a C grade will not only maintain eligibility but also earn a degree. Lastly, the students felt that the mentality and lack of higher expectations became the "culture of the sport" and it helped in making and creating the situations and dissonance between athletics and academics (Benson, 2000). The "culture of the sport" refers to the words, mentality, expectations and experience as they connect to being within an athletic department, specifically a college football program. Benson states that the "culture of the sport" affected the student-athletes' literacy and academic success in college because the lack of expectations created the ability for the athletes to not connect academics and athletics and not see academics as important as athletics.

Current research has also begun to focus on the effects that athletic participation has on school based experiences and the link between sports, academics, and occupational achievements (Mahiri & Van Rheenen, 2010). Mahiri and Van Rheenen's (2010) case study explored the lived experiences of six former student-athletes, of various genders, races and sexual orientations. The researchers explored the former student-athletes' voices, which created a dialogue critiquing their paths from an athlete to an academic (i.e. college professors or individuals who hold PhD's). The individual experiences of the participants offered a view of the intersection of sports, schooling and society through multiple perspectives; moreover, the participants spoke about how they individually navigated the institutions and organizations as student-athletes. Also, their narratives provided insight into how and why lines have been drawn between sports and school. The research looks across race, gender, class, and ethnicity to see the various levels of sports and school practices from the perspective of former athletes. Additionally, the participants call for the language of sport to change so that college-athletes can make their student-athlete experiences work for them, on and off the field. The participant's added that oftentimes they were aware of how they as athletes were viewed on and off the field but they state that it is important that educators, academics, and the athletes themselves need to be aware of how sports are viewed in society and what that means for athletes and academics. Finally, Mahiri and Van Rheenen suggested that educators and institutions need to take a greater responsibility in promoting and encouraging a playful and open spirit in the classroom because many of the participants believed that they had to conform to certain actions not only in their physical sport but in the academic environment as well.

Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, & Hagedorn, (1999) sought to address the limitations and findings in previous studies (e.g. Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, & Terenzini, 1996; Pascarella & Smart, 1991) by calculating the cognitive impacts of intercollegiate athletic participation on 2,755 students in their second and third- year and controlling for students' academic experiences and background characteristics through statistical tools and analyses. Specifically, the study looked to approximate the effects of athletic participation on standardized measures of science reasoning, reading comprehension, writing, and critical thinking skills. The sample included eighteen four-year and five two-year colleges located across the country in sixteen states. The institutions were selected from the National Center on Educational Statistics database, which represents differences in colleges and universities based on institutional type, size, location, and student body. The students random sample included 562 second-year men, 1056 second-year women, 390 third-year men, and 747 third-year women who participated in the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL), which looked at the factors that influence learning and cognitive development in college. Pascarella et al. divided the athletes based on if their sport was a revenue (i.e., sports that make a profit) and non-revenue (i.e., sports that do not have profit) producing sport. The findings of Pascaralla et al.'s, study suggest that the non-revenue producing sport males (e.g., wrestling, swimming, etc.) did not have significant differences in cognitive abilities, whereas revenue-producing sports (e.g., football, basketball) had significantly lower writing and critical thinking skills. Therefore, the revenue producing sport students were not repeating the same benefits from their college education as their non-revenue producing counterparts. As a result, the researchers conclude, "male intercollegiate

football and basketball players are not receiving the same cognitive benefits from an undergraduate education as are other men" (p. 21). Lastly, Pascarella et al., purport that one of the reasons for the male student-athletes' results might be that competing in revenue producing sports might extend more physical and psychological energy than non-student-athletes and thereby has a limited amount of energy left for the intensity of academics at the collegiate level.

Umbach et al. (2006) compared student-athletes with non-athletes in terms of engagement in effective education practices. The researchers used data from The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to compare the experiences of student-athletes and their non-athlete peers. The NSSE collects information directly from random samples of freshman and senior undergraduates at higher education institutions all over the country. Also, the NSSE assesses the extent to which students engage in positive educational practices and what they gain from their college experience. Umbach et al. emphasized that despite the media portrayal of student- athletes, the research data showed few, if any, differences between these students and their non-athlete counterparts in educational purposeful activities. Therefore, student-athletes are just as engaged in academics and collegiate life as their non-athletic counterparts. However, I question the results of being involved in purposeful activities since the participant population was comprised of first-year students. Often first-year students are not as engaged in school as sophomores, juniors, and seniors because they are taking required general classes and have not completely integrated into the university setting until the latter part of their first year.

Subsequently, Gayles and Hu (2009) quantitatively examined student-athlete engagement through interaction with faculty, involvement in student groups, interaction with students other than teammates and participation in academic related activities. Gayles and Hu used the Basic Academic Skills Study (BASS), which is designed by the NCAA to measure athletes' interests, attitudes, and academic skills, and the Progress in College (PIC), and Social and Group Experiences (SAGE) studies, which both measure college experience. The researchers' found that for the overall sample (using all three databases) there was a statistically significant result for interaction with students other than teammates, demonstrating that student-athletes interacted with various student populations other than their teammates. Additionally, a student's background characteristics were not a statistically significant factor on the BASS, PIC or SAGE studies, thereby supporting that engagement in educationally purposeful activities was not influenced (i.e., interacting with faculty, joining groups and organizations, academically related activities), which contradicts previous research that student-athletes spent too much time playing their sport and did not have time to interact with their non-student-athlete peers (Bowen & Levin, 2003). Consequently, the researchers argue that engagement has a positive and significant impact on student-athletes, but the cognitive outcomes depend on the sport the athlete plays. The findings of this study add to the research literature on the positive aspects of being a student-athlete by reiterating that student engagement is beneficial and supports positive outcomes in student-athlete populations.

Beamon and Bell (2006), in a qualitative case study, explored the socialization process that encourages participation in sports and the emphasis placed on athletics not

academics and the influence of parents on future aspirations and motivation of the football student-athletes. Specifically, Beamon and Bell (2006) looked at how socialization can be an indicator of the success or failure of football-student athletes. The researchers used a questionnaire and administered it to 99 college football players (51% African American/Black, 44% Caucasian/White, 2% Native-American, 1% Hispanic, and 2% Asian American) (p. 396), at a predominately white Division I institution. The questionnaire included demographic questions and items constructed to find the "differences in the content of socialization" (p. 395). The questionnaire identifies the socializing influences on the lives of the participants. The data was analyzed using eight scales (i.e., education socialization, sport socialization, academic performance, parental support for academics, and parental support for athletics) that were tested and found to be both reliable and valid. An analysis of the data confirmed Beamon and Bell's hypothesis that an emphasis on athletics, by parents, during early socialization can lead to poor academics and behavior. In this study, neither white nor black athletes were less successful in academics, but black students had a greater instance of academic probation or ineligibility (32%) than white students (22.7 %). For example, although white students flunked college courses at a higher rate (18.2%) than black students (16%), blacks were placed on academic probation, suspension, and were ineligible at a slightly higher rate. Beamon and Bell (2006) found that the black student athletes placed more emphasis on academics than athletics than their white counterparts. Particularly, white parents and players discussed schoolwork, went to museums, attended parent-teacher conferences, went to sporting events, and discussed sporting performance (.20) more often then black players and their parents (.09). In addition, they found that the more black parents

emphasized academics, the better the football player did, and, a strong positive relationship between parent support for athletics and support for academics was evident. Nevertheless, neither black nor white students were more unsuccessful academically and the impact of sport on socialization, based on parent involvement, affected students, no matter their race, when it came to their academic performance (Beamon & Bell, 2006).

Additionally, research has shown that students-athletes are more often satisfied with their university than non-athletes (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Smart, 1991). Yet, Mahiri and Van Rheenen (2010) would argue that is not the case for individual athletes. In their study, they found that all six participants were disappointed in how they were treated as athletes by the athletic department and the university, which impacted how they felt about their university as a whole. In particular, Ernest, a participant, stated that his entire image in college was centered on his athletic accomplishments, creating a divide between his academic and athletic pursuits. At the same time, Pascarella et al. (1999), Umbach et al., (2006), and Gayles and Hu (2009) used vast databases for their research to create large samples, which might not be completely representative of Division I athletes and their perspectives on higher education because the participants filled out surveys and did not have the opportunity to voice their opinions and thoughts through interviews or writing.

Race, Literacy and Sports

The research on race, literacy, and sports is limited. However, the theme of how sports is part of socialization and how one's race plays a role in graduation or is treated as an equal on and off the court are all valid concerns.

Studies have also shown that because of the legacy of racial discrimination in academics, many African American athletes see sports as a viable option to upward mobility and future societal success (Donner, 2005; Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010). For example, when black males participate in sports they are more likely to have aspirations that surround the sport professionally than their white counterparts because they feel that they will be treated fairly (Donner, 2005). Donner takes a legal perspective in order to understand the role race plays in the education experiences of African American football student-athletes. He argues educational differences between racial groups are based on coercion and ideology in society, creating a bias education system and environment that students are encounter. For this reason, Donner calls for further investigation and the need to establish strategies to help improve these student-athletes educational experience and outcomes at all levels. Maintaining that African American student-athletes might feel that their sport is the best way to achieve their career aspirations, Donner (2005) also asserts that while some black football players in college may be interested in receiving a college degree, "other educational stakeholders such as football coaches and institutions of higher education may be more interested in personal (e.g., cash bonuses for meeting academic incentives) and institutional advancement gained through association with or exploitation of the physical talents of these student athletes" (p. 48).

In 2001-2002, the graduation rate for black student-athletes was at 43%, whereas the rate for white student-athletes was 57% (Lapchik, 2010). The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2002) also reported that black student-athletes graduate less often than their non-athlete black student counterparts. Furthermore, in 2003, the *Journal of Blacks*

in Higher Education looked at the academic performance of black student athletes at highly ranked universities (e.g., University of California Berkeley, Georgetown, Rice) and after an analysis of the NCAA statistics concluded that 11 of the 13 universities graduate black student-athletes at a lesser rate (sometimes up to 50%). In a yearlong study (2006), conducted by the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) and the American Institute for Research, researchers found that African American athletes had greater expectations (20% higher) of becoming professional athletes than other student-athletes.

Finally, Lapchick, Lily, and Kuhn (2010) found that the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) for the seventy teams in the study was 60 % for black students and 80% for white students, a 20% difference between the races. In a study of seventy Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) schools that played in 2010, the academic progress of black football student-athletes was below white student-athletes, (Lapchick, Lily, & Kuhn, 2010). Seventeen of the seventy teams graduated less than half their black student population. Still, male student-athletes graduate at a higher rate than their non-athletic peers (38 % black, 62 % white). Also, only five of the seventy schools had higher success rates for blacks than whites (up from four the year before), which the researchers state is not promising. Lapchick et al., find these statistics appalling and recommend that the NCAA work diligently to make sure that the graduation rates and the gaps between the races improve.

The researchers all contend the importance of education and athletics and that something must be done to improve the numbers and the way athletes are learning in today's higher education institutions. However, Donner (2005) and Lapchick, Lily, and

Kuhn (2010) do not offer suggestions on how to improve graduation rates. Also, the question arises that if both Donner and if Lapchick, Lily, and Kuhn's (2010) research had an interview component would the results differ? The world of athletics is constantly evolving and inquiring about students' perceptions of themselves and how race and literacy play a role in their lives and education would be beneficial to educators and institutions of higher education in supporting and understanding student-athletes.

Literacy On and Off the Field

Overall, there is little research on the literacy practices or perceptions of literacy when it comes to student-athletes; more specifically, there is even less research on the literacy practices and perceptions of literacy by football players. Much of the research paints a very dim view of athletes and does not showcase who they are and how they feel about literacy on and off the field. There are an ever-growing number of research studies on academic literacy as it pertains to adolescent boys. Unfortunately, there is little empirical research on academic literacy for male college students and college student-athletes.

College academic literacy. McCabe, Kraemer, Miller, Parmar, and Rusica (2006) investigated the effect of text format on underachieving first-year college students' self-efficacy and compared the self-efficacy ratings with reading comprehension. The quantitative study included seventy-six students (50% African American, 25% Hispanic, 20% Caucasian, 5% Asian who participated over a two-day period at a large Northeastern university. There were twenty-four males and fifty-two females. On day one, the participants viewed eight passages (two different texts in various formats, fonts, shapes, and lengths) and were asked to make judgments on their self-efficacy for reading each.

On day two, the participants were asked to read and answer questions based on the passages. The results showed that the comprehension scores for the highest self-efficacy rated format were significantly higher than the lowest rated format. In particular, McCabe et al. found that the participants focused on a feature or features that they connected to in the visual display of the text and formulated a belief and assessed their ability to comprehend it. The researchers conclude that the students' initial judgment of the reading influenced them immediately and impacted the likelihood of comprehending the text.

Banks (2005) phenomenological inquiry assessed African American students' experiences with literacy tasks and critical thinking, at the college level. He explored the underlying causes for this situation with eleven first-year African American students to examine their high school preparation for college. The participants consisted of four males and seven females, all of who were interviewed three separate times and asked to participate in one focus group. The results illustrated three key findings: 1) students perceive their literacy preparation as inadequate, 2) students believe that teachers assumptions impact their academic self-perception, and 3) students developed academic strategies to remain successful. Themes resulting from the interviews were divided into three categories: "(a) influence of teacher expectation; (b) influence of social comparison; and (c) coping strategies" (p. 27). Banks concludes that based on the results that teacher expectations greatly affected a students' perception of their literacy preparation. As evidenced in the comments they expressed, students developed strategies that varied according to their perceived academic strengths and weaknesses. All students reported spending more time on reading and writing assignments than they did in high school.

Many believed that verbal participation is necessary to remain successful in the college classroom. Most students, however, did not think they have the verbal skills to participate during class discussion therefore they actively listened. In addition, culturally relevant course content enhanced their participation and confidence in the classroom. The researchers found that the social comparison was both a positive and a negative source of motivation when literacy was viewed as complex (e.g., text analysis, historical perspective). Furthermore, the students saw themselves as above average when comparing themselves to their high school peers because they were enrolled in upper level English classes but below average when comparing themselves to their college peers. This perspective was the result of students reasoning that they were less prepared in comparison to their peers they viewed as academically confident and competent.

Finally, despite the frustration of feeling unprepared, Banks found that once in college, students developed strategies and skills needed to compensate for their lack of literacy and negotiate the teaching styles of their professors. Thus, students developed individual strategies (e.g., verbal participation, more time spent on reading and writing, and active listening) based on their academic strengths and weaknesses and were able to articulate the strategies they were using. The opportunity to extend this study and its' boundaries is enticing by adding literacy as a component and asking students' perceptions of themselves and others as literate in connection to the college setting, their peers, and fellow teammates. By looking at students' perceptions of literacy it is possible to learn how and if they define and distinguish themselves as literate and what place they see holding in academia and what this means for them as college students.

Sport literacy. Despite the limited research specific to football and literacy, some research suggests that there is a connection between literacy and sports and this connection benefits the school environment. Mahiri (1994) found that there was a connection between the communication skills, literacy, and discourse in sports between the youths themselves in this research and the adults that they interacted with on the basketball court. This research was part of a lager ethnographic study on language use by African American males in a Youth Basketball Association. The findings in this article are based on the 2 ½ year ethnographic study on the uses, functions, styles, and literacy practices of African American boys (ages 10-12) who played for the Youth Basketball Association (YBA) program. Mahiri used audiotaping, field notes and analysis, interviews, personal introspection, and basketball artifacts. The data showed that the basketball court huddle was where the majority of verbal exchanges took place between the youths and their coaches. In particular, the exchanges showcased that the boys' opportunity in communication with adults and other teammates (e.g., talking about plays, asking questions, speaking about issues on and off the court; praise by coaches and other players) included a wider range of communication skills and contrasted with their experiences in the classroom. For example, the players were constantly being praised by their coaches but were also being encouraged by each other. Therefore, Mahiri found that the language and communication skills used on the basketball court were "fundamentally different from school and other settings" (p. 373) and helped these youths find their voices on the court. Mahiri states that these communication skills are vital to social and relational components of learning. The results of Mahiri's (1994) study suggest that schools need to take another approach to accommodate individuals whose literacy skills

(i.e., athletic literacy, athletic discourse) are practiced and developed in culturally diverse settings, such as on the basketball court.

Football literacy. Football and academics rarely appear to coincide with one another. In a 2010 study that investigated college football graduation rates, for Bowl game participants, Lapchick, Lily, and Kuhn (2010). NCAA statistics, collected from NCAA member institutions across the country for a graduation rate study, were used in the study. The researchers reviewed the statistics from the six-year graduation rates of the freshman class that were enrolled in the year 2003-2004. After compiling and analyzing the data, Lapchick, Lily, and Kuhn found that the graduation rate for college male football players was lower (50%) than all other student-athletes (65%), and at the majority of schools the African-American football student-athletes had a 10-20% lower graduation rate.

Melendez (2008) explored the social experiences of black football players who attended a predominately white university in the northeast centered on team, campus, and university experiences for the players through a qualitative grounded theory study. Each player, through interviews and writing, spoke about their teammates, experiences, faculty, coaches, and social interactions within the university community. When asked about their experiences as black athletes many of them stated that they were subjected to stereotypes and felt that professors and fellow students misjudged them. At the same time, the athletes expressed that they experienced double standards in comparison to their white counterparts and that they were not viewed on the same on the campus, creating animosity toward teammates and coaches and a perception of different sets of standards for the white athletes. The research also indicated that players, despite the idea that they

were a team, believed they did not receive the same support as other teammates and that the presence of different standards made it difficult to buy into the team effort. All the athlete participants were subjected to being viewed as less than their counterparts because they were black student-athletes, which created a stigma on campus. The themes showed that these athletes attempted to adapt to a very different social environment and its corresponding social and value expectations, and as a result did not feel comfortable and safe in the classroom and university setting.

The benefits and detriments of a major college football program were explored through a qualitative case study of four black male athletes (Singer, 2008). Singer used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data collected through focus groups and interviews with the black male athletes. The participants in the study considered "student-athlete" an incorrect term to describe them because the viewed their coaches' expectations based on football not academics, consequently supporting the importance of being an athlete first and a student second. Moreover, the term was not an appropriate label because of the amount of time they were asked and expected to give to football and not their academics. Lastly, Singer asserts that in the end, despite the concerns of the football players, the players were all successful (i.e., athletically and academically) because one went on to graduate school and the others were playing professionally. However, one must take into account current perceptions of success in society and at the university. Society values both sports and academics but rarely views them as coinciding; one most often exists without the other. At the university level, success in sports is valued as it pertains to the popularity of the school but more often than not being successful, as gauged by society, is graduating and entering the workforce.

The individuals (e.g., teachers, fellow students, mentors, coaches) that a child encounters in elementary school can impact their K-12 schooling experience and the activities that a college student participates in can impact how he or she interprets his or her university years. In Jules' (1991) study, she created a cross-age tutoring program between student-athletes (a majority were football players) and at-risk elementary school students. The college students were responsible for tutoring the grade school children in reading and writing. One of the goals of the program was for both the college students and the children to gain a feeling of achievement and a positive attitude toward learning. A majority of the tutors had academic problems and some came from low socioeconomic homes thereby identifying with the poverty and issues that the students had in school. The tutors were in a class once a week to learn literacy strategies and brainstorm ideas for tutoring the students. There were 20 students involved and all were in danger of being detained. At the end of the spring, 18 students had been moved up to a higher reading group and were not detained. Specifically, all the student-athlete participants benefited because they were able to choose the novels to read that were relevant to them and many expressed that they finally enjoyed reading and finished an entire book. Juels suggests the program was a success because the student-athletes were able to connect to the students because they were able to relate to many of the children's backgrounds, act as role models, experience positive outlook and feedback from the tutors, and college athletes saw themselves in their younger counterparts. The impact that the tutors had on their students was significant because many parents commented that their children were having positive experiences with the players and they were positive role models for their children.

Being Masculine and Literate

Males often fall behind their female counterparts when it comes to literacy at all grade levels (Brozo, 2006; Kehler & Greig, 2005; Orange & Horowitz, 1999; Tatum, 2006; Tatum, 2008). Much of the research on masculinity and being literate focuses on K-12 males; however, there are several research studies that explore college age males and literacy (Gouws, 2008; Martin & Harris, 2006).

K-12. Tatum (2006) review on the education of African American adolescent males found that most research was not speaking about the role of texts and how they should inform the curriculum. He asserts that teachers and administrators need to find appropriate reading material for these students which results in them not mastering skills, strategies and knowledge that will help them in life and the outcomes they wish to achieve. By looking at this need, he states that this is a shift in literacy and shows that these student's literacy needs, academic, cultural, emotional and social have not been taken into account, which has resulted in African American males struggling with reading. Furthermore, this lack of focus on these students and the texts that they would enjoy has disabled these students and lacks a broader perspective needed to influence these students. Tatum outlines how to pick texts that can help shape the male adolescents life trajectories and he goes as far as to give suggestions of books that will help students. For example, he suggests James Baldwin's *My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation* (1963) because it gives students a chance to critique society and their place within it. He also suggests excerpts from David Walker's *Appeal* (1829) to ask the question "Should African Americans integrate or separate" (p. 48). He concludes that enabling texts is not the only way to help African

American adolescent males but it is a start that will make an impact and provide students with the knowledge they need to be successful.

Brozo (2006) contends that schools and educators do not take into account boys and their unique imaginations. Boys have passions, hobbies, aspirations, and experiences that allow for school curriculum linkage but schools do not take advantage of these and in turn create achievement disparities between males and females. He proposes that boys want to have relationships with adults because they want mentors and this type of relationship helps bridge the connection between personal experiences and literacy development that many boys are lacking. Therefore, he emphasizes the need to look at boys' interests, personal needs, and knowledge as a resource rather than something that works against the school curriculum. By bridging the gap between boys and the classroom environment, teachers can capitalize on this knowledge.

A disconnect between teachers and students can occur when literacy expectations differ, creating problems in the classroom (Orange & Horowitz, 1999). Ten high school classes were randomly selected, Ten teachers and eighty-three males (63 African American, 20 Mexican American) in grades 9- 12, agreed to partake in the study. Orange and Horowitz developed 42 literacy task scenarios and asked students and teachers to use the Likert scale to rate them 1-5, where 1 was a strong dislike and 5 was a strong like. For example, a literacy task would include a student reading to him or herself as they give an oral presentation. The researchers created a student and teacher version that was similar, the only difference was the directions that were given. The results showed a statistically significant preference for reading to themselves, which was different than teachers expected. During student interviews, many participants had implied beliefs that teachers

should want to help students and not just get paid, which led to a dissonance perspective that teachers only care about their paychecks. In particular, students had less interest in reading comic books, which surprised teachers because they believed that students enjoyed them. Also, students believed that teachers did not give choices, creating, a greater dissonance between the students and the teachers. When teachers were interviewed they believed that students should produce quality work. But the cause of the dissonance came from the teachers' perspectives that students did not care about their work and therefore students thought they should not care either. Moreover, teachers trusted that students would come to school ready to learn so when students did not, teachers assumed that students did not care about school or learning. This division between the teachers and students impacted the students' literacy development. Consequently, this influenced how the students viewed their teachers negatively and in turn teachers' negatively viewed their jobs.

Kehler and Greig (2005) contend that in order to help male students understand literacy it is essential that educators and researchers address masculinity and schooling in the classroom. The researchers draw on the school experiences of four high school boys and examine how the boys read and misread masculinities through socially literate practices in and out of the classroom. The participants' perspectives and experiences of being young men went against the common stereotypes for boys and the researchers emphasize that these experiences need to be acknowledged and supported. In addition, Kehler and Greig argue that there are some strategies that are more "boy friendly" than others, such as books that pertain to sports and cars, more male teachers, and technology based literacy, however, they argue that these are easy fixes. More specifically, teachers

and educators need to encourage young males to look at their gender identity in and out of the classroom. Yet, Kehler and Greig discovered that many times researchers and teachers do not acknowledge masculinity and literacy practices creating disconnect in literacy education. Tatum (2008) would agree that Kehler and Greig's ideas are sufficient, but would argue that schools need to address topics that boys want to read and create complete literacy programs.

Tatum (2008) states the current way we see and review adolescent literacy does not take into account the in and out of school challenges that African American male adolescents deal with in today's world. In his 10-month case study he worked with Quincy, a 16-year old African American male, to identify and describe the aspects of texts that he enjoyed. After analyzing the interviews and discussions Tatum found that Quincy's text difficulties came down to three separate themes: a) Quincy felt that teachers were not supportive, b) he also had not engaged in meaningful texts, c) he did not realize that texts had power in connection with his life choices. Tatum concludes that there is need for more of a complete model of literacy not only when it comes to adolescents but also to African American males at all levels. Tatum devises a more complete model of literacy by using instructional methods that are based on theories of how literacy can help young African American males to get them ready for school, the immediate context and ready these individuals for professional development. Nevertheless, Tatum's study does not provide sufficient enough data when one considers the adolescent literacy crisis and the increasingly larger number of males that are entering the university setting.

Simply catering to boy's general interests (e.g. fishing, sports) will not improve literacy (Kehler & Greig, 2005) but teachers need to be better equipped to deal with gender binaries in the classroom, which will enhance school-based literacy practices for boys (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004). Smith and Wilhelm's (2004) research study centered on the reading experiences of six successful boy readers. The boys' reading preferences focused on stereotypical male hobbies (e.g. football, basketball, space, dinosaurs). Through reading the boys became experts in the stereotypical field, which in turn, gave them respect from their male peers. They found that by embracing activities that boys felt competent in and ones where they felt they would improve were the literacy activities that they embraced. If the boys felt that the activity was worthwhile they were more willing to work toward competency; moreover, boys did not reject literacy, rather, they rejected school literacies that highlighted the weakness they perceived in themselves. In many ways, this seems too obvious and simple that if a student is knowledgeable or perceives being good at something then they would enjoy doing that activity more. Yet, the simplest answer might be the one that is best suited for the situation.

College. The literacy education of males is imperative to creating leaders in academics and life. Gouws (2008) taught, what he calls, a male-positive literature class at a university. The class concentrated on exploring the impact that literature, with positive masculine characters made on the male students and their perception of themselves as leaders and learners. In his qualitative inquiry, Gouws' found that by teaching positive strategies, when it concerned literature, such as advocating males expertise as socially literate beings and encouraging disarming and dismantling of gender stereotypes, that are seen in society and literature the students learned to be more male-

positive and it was a useful analytical tool to get the students involved in the literature. Also, it enabled the men in the study to be encouraged to see themselves as part of literature but also in becoming positive masculine role models in the college community. Gouws' further advocates that high school and colleges need to celebrate the different masculinities in society and various cultures, but at the same time negotiate the issues of gender and privilege in society and culture.

Martin and Harris's (2006) phenomonological study explored the views of masculinity of 27 academically successful African American male student-athletes (5 sophomores, 6 juniors, 16 seniors, ages 18 to 24). The student-athletes were asked questions about their self-image, identities, academic histories, and their experiences outside of the classroom. The data was analyzed using phenomenological analysis techniques. The participants defined masculinity not with material possessions or athletic status but with "as a call for accountability, making unpopular decisions, and setting positive examples for others to follow" (p. 368) because the athletes equated masculinity with having strong character, being upstanding and having moral characteristics, and integrity. The researchers suggest that participants embraced a wide range of gender related behaviors and attitudes that are not common among male student-athletes. For example, several participants, instead of devaluing education because it is not seen as a masculine pursuit, expressed that despite being a Division I athlete, their academic achievements were more important to their success than their sporting achievements. Likewise, when asked about dating relationships several of the participants expressed their exclusiveness, and their respect for their girlfriends. The researchers conclude that the participants placed a high value on academics and even stated that their view of

academics was divergent from some of their teammates. This study breaks the stereotypes that exist for male African American student-athletes; yet, the results might differ if the student-athletes were more successful on the field than in the classroom.

Where To Go From Here

The gap in the research pertaining to athletics and literacy is significant considering how many males play sports and are involved in out of school activities that pertain to athletics. In particular, the gap is much larger when exploring male college student-athletes and literacy. Based on the research, athletics has a profound effect on adolescent males and their academic practices; however, schools do not connect sports literacy to the literacy that takes place in the classroom, creating a gap in many male students' literacy practices. Also, participation in athletics gives adolescents' self-esteem and a sense of importance but does not directly communicate or translate to academic or school based literacy practices. With all the research that relates to male athletics and male literacy little of it is relevant to how athletics and literacy coincide (Mahiri & Van Rheenen, 2011; Mahiri, 1991).

The research studies in this review are situated on opposite sides of the research spectrum. A majority of the research studies in this review, concerning athletic and academics, are based on large-scale quantitative research databases that focused on student-athletes graduation rates, social impact on academics, and failure of black male student-athletes in higher education. On the other hand, the qualitative research studies had fewer participants, less demographic information, and lacked a direct connection between literacy and athletics. Thus, the lack of literacy research at the college level a limit for this review. For these reasons, the need for a qualitative study is imperative to

understanding more about the literacy practices of male college student- athletes, specifically football players.

Furthermore, there are numerous studies that connect to male student-athletes and the feelings of disconnectedness many pinpoint between the sports they play and the university in which they study. Furthermore, a majority of the research does not connect to literacy but rather much of it focuses on the inability of the student-athlete to do well at the college level. Yet, it is evident from the research that athletes are not all homogeneous, are intensely affected by their sport, want to learn, and a majority of them are degree-seeking when they enter college.

Basketball is at the center of the athletic and literacy research; however, football and literacy has been explored in several research studies. The literature on academics and football is confined to student-athletes' lack of performance in academia, specifically black males, and does not address literacy. In particular, a majority of the literature included in this review does not directly address the research questions due to the lack of research surrounding football student-athletes and literacy. Yet, the lack of literature on literacy and football is also seen as advantageous, from a research perspective, because the opportunities to explore this topic are endless.

More importantly, there is little research on the conceptualization of literacy or any literacy concerns that college students have or are faced with, creating a gap in the research that needs to be addressed in order to understand where male college students, specifically male college-athletes come from educationally and what that means for them enter college as an athlete.

Chapter III: Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore male college football student-athletes' perceptions of literacy. Specifically, this study investigated how sociocultural influences, sport, school, and literacy intersect and what that means for these athletes as college students.

In my dissertation study, I present four primary research questions as stated in Chapter 2: (1) How do male college football student-athletes perceive literacy, both in the classroom and on the field, based on various social experiences (i.e. school, sports)? (2) How do college football student-athletes see literacy as it pertains to the various aspects of their lives (e.g., football, classroom)? (3) How do football student-athletes see themselves and their multiple literacies, on and off the field? (4) How do football student- athletes characterize and deal with the expectations of literacy held by coaches, themselves, college instructors, and university classrooms?

In this chapter, I describe the research methods that I used in this investigation. I provide (a) an overview of the pilot study, (b) current study overview, (c) research design, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, (f) an outline for the data chapters and (g) summary.

Pilot Study

Overview

In Spring 2010, I had the opportunity to conduct an exploratory pilot study with some university male football student-athletes, asking them what their perceptions of literacy were and what it meant for them as students and athletes. Fifteen athletes (all

freshman and sophomores) agreed to participate and were given a questionnaire (see appendix I) and of those seven were interviewed (see appendix II). The data collected was used for an initial analysis of the connection between literacy and football student-athletes.

Data Analysis

I systematically coded and analyzed the interview data using qualitative content analysis procedures (Patton, 1990). In the first phase, *informal analysis,* I coded the data based upon coding schemes generated from the literature. For example, I used *M* for the connection between women and men's literacy based on Godley's (2003) ethnographic study on gendered identity; *C* was used for when students conceptualized literacy based on Mahiri's (1991) literacy study of male youth basketball players. In the second phase, *theme formation*, I used the same codes to code the data. In looking across the data for patterns, these categories were refined and became preliminary themes. For example, one category focused on how participants viewed literacy at different points in their educational lives. Based on analyses, I developed another category to explain the difference in perspectives that the participants took from K-12 to their current college education. To be considered a general theme, at least half (4 of the 7 interviewees) of the participants' data had to include supporting evidence.

Results

The pilot study was successful and yielded interesting and stimulating results, prompting me to explore more questions and investigate these students' perspectives and experiences when it comes to literacy. The results from my pilot study showed a connection between literacy and football that the students' themselves did not outwardly

recognize; yet, they all believed that literacy played a role, although separately, in the classroom and in the game of football. An analysis of the personal interviews indicated there may be a relationship between literacy, athletics, and academics for college male student-athletes.

One of the prominent themes that emerged from the pilot study was communication and the connection it has to literacy and football. For example, these student- athletes verbalized how they were expected to know the plays, the specific vocabulary associated with the sport, and be able to communicate with coaches and teammates, which conforms to basic literacy skills like reading, writing, and communicating. For these student-athletes, literacy played a role in football, and this kind of literacy stood apart from literacies in the other contexts (e.g., college) and used by others (e.g., coaches, media) with whom they interacted. One of the participants, Wendell, described a former teammate who was a higher draft pick because he was able to communicate. He later gave an example of a recent draft pick who did not interview well and was subjected to patronizing comments in the media about his intelligence off the field. Wendell concluded that both situations were disappointing. It is with these comments that Wendell addressed how football players' intelligence is perceived. Oral communication is a serious form of literacy and Wendell as well as other student-athletes' responses evidenced its' importance. Accordingly, communication with the media and coaches is a deciding factor in public perception of a player's literacy.

Another emergent theme from the pilot study centered on masculine and feminine literacy in opposition. Some of the male student-athletes viewed themselves as being less literate than girls. During one of the interviews, Pat asserted:

> I think women just read more, you know, or even if they don't read more, I think women tend to read better educational stuff, not even educational stuff, but just more and better stuff for you. Men only read *Sports Illustrated* but my one sister reads Jane Austen. I can't compete with that. (March 18, 2010)

Pat's response reveals his self-perception as opposed to his perception of his sister while comparing male and female literacy. He does not see what he reads as powerful or intelligent compared to what his sister chooses to read. Also, he looks at himself as being less literate then his sister. He "reads" literacy as something feminine and justifies it through what one reads and how others perceive those choices. Pat's idea that being literate is feminine is supported by research on male literacy, which purports the perception of one's identity as standing in direct antagonism to what is female (Dutro, 2003) and relates to how one reads, writes, and interprets texts in the classroom (Godley, 2003).

In addition, the student-athletes emphasized the importance of literacy in elementary school and then again in college. For example, in elementary school the students focused on being able to read and write. As for college, many of the student-athletes voiced that literacy at the college level was something they have had to catch-up or adapt to in order to succeed in academia. Moreover, when it came to college the student-athletes viewed literacy as being able to do school work, talk to professors, read articles, read exams, and write the required papers. Lastly, many voiced that in college they need literacy more than they needed it in high school, because of the amount of reading and writing they have been assigned in university coursework.

Further data analysis demonstrated that the student-athletes in the pilot study have tackled literacy in various aspects of their lives, because of the strong idea that they never needed to excel in school, only in football. The student-athletes expressed that communicating with the media, coaches, and fellow players qualifies players as "literate" in football. In education, these student-athletes have perceived literacy as a feminine discourse that opposes their notions of masculinity. The connection between school and literacy has not been positive for these student- athletes, so it appears difficult to embrace these practices, despite the fact that they are in college. Moreover, the findings suggest that freshman and sophomore male student-athletes are able to define literacy both inside and outside of school. Nevertheless, they seemed to have great difficulty connecting their uses and understandings of literacy from multiple and diverse environments (e.g., school, sports) in ways that support their academic progress in college.

The initial pilot study had several shortcomings that will be addressed in the final research study. The results may not be generalizable because all football players are not created equal and do not all have similar views. Therefore, these views only represent a select number of individuals' views and we need to know more. Second, the questionnaire showed that some of the questions were too general and did not yield specific answers. Questionnaire questions that did not have a high degree of specificity were modified or eliminated and a revised questionnaire draft was created. For example, the question "Have you been exposed to different literacy practices throughout your college experience? If so where and when? " was changed to "How does literacy play a part in your college education? Explain." Also, the freshman students were part of the pilot study; however, they will not participate in the current study. The reason for

excluding freshman is twofold. In the pilot study, the freshman students were not as open to speaking about literacy and were unable to articulate literacy as it pertained to the various aspects of their lives. Moreover, freshman student-athletes have not experienced an entire year of school at the university and as a result they could have difficulty discussing literacy at the college level; thus, freshman students were not asked to participate. Additionally, the pilot study group of students represents a population (e.g., Individual Admits (IA), first and second-year students) whose college admissions were based on constantly changing academic criteria with the condition of participating in a learning program for the first year of school (and longer if so deemed); for this reason, the participants do not represent the ideas and thoughts of the entire football team. However, there is the likelihood that several IA students will be participating in the proposed study and there will be a place on the questionnaire for the student-athletes to identify themselves if they choose. Finally, this was a small-scale study; a larger study needs to be completed to further analyze and explore the themes and results. Despite these limitations, the data from this study help rethink current views of sports and literacy, assumptions about student-athletes, and the impact this might have on future student-athletes attending college and universities across the country.

Dissertation Study Overview

In my dissertation study, I asked a total of forty-four male football student-athletes who were in their sophomore, junior, or senior year, to take part (see appendix III). The study had been reviewed and cleared by the universities athletic department to make sure that no NCAA rules were broken if the student-athletes chose to take part. All student-athletes were presented with an overview of the study (see appendix IV) during a

team meeting and were given consent forms (see appendix V) and asked to participate in the initial aspect of this study, the questionnaire. In addition, all the football student-athletes who agreed to the questionnaire were asked to participate in the focus groups and personal interviews. In this section, I present the setting of the study and the participants that were involved.

Setting

The university. The participants in this study were recruited from a large public university (DBU) located in the Mid-Atlantic. There are over 20,000 undergraduates, 5,000 graduate students, and 2,500 faculty members. The university boasts that *U.S. News and World Report* ranks many of its academic programs nationally.

Athletic facilities. DBU has two major buildings that house the many athletic teams that it promotes. The largest building, located on the southern part of the campus, is where a majority of the student-athletes (i.e. men's and women's basketball, field hockey, wrestling, volleyball, etc.) practice, attend study hall, and where many of the coaches' offices are located. The football student-athletes have their own building, the football team house, which is located in the middle of campus and is attached to the stadium. This building consists of a cafeteria, a weight room, the main training room, locker rooms, coaches' offices, and an academic center. Many of the participants call this building their home away from home due to the amount of time they spend in it. Thus, the football team house is the center of the football team and where the greater part of the football student-athletes' time is spent throughout the day.

The football team house. The football team house building is situated on the northwest side of campus and is attached to the football stadium. All of the football

coaches, administrators, and academic advisors, and the primary training facility are located in this building. The first floor consists of the coaches' and administrative offices, as well as the Academic Study Center (ASC) where this study took place. The basement houses the athletic training room, football weight room, and football locker rooms.

The ASC is fairly large and the entire football team has access to it. Sometimes, other student-athletes utilize this space but because it is within the football team house, this is rare. As you walk into the ASC, on the left an entire wall is devoted to the football student-athletes who have graduated in the past five years; moreover, the student's major and year of graduation accompany their pictures. However, there is no indication of whether these graduates presently play professional football, despite the well-known fact that many currently play for the NFL. Across from the pictures, one notices a framed university cap and gown and a poster-sized list of the important dates for the semester. Furthermore, on the back wall of ASC, all of the university football players who have been named to the NCAA Academic All-American list[2] are featured. It is difficult to miss these pictures or ignore them as you walk into the ASC; they appear as a constant reminder of what others have accomplished in the football program.

There are three academic advisors and one learning specialist who specifically work with football and who have their own office in the ASC. The center of the room contains thirty-five computers in cubicles and to the right is a large space that consists of twenty desks where students can study throughout the day. The perimeter of space is

[2]This is a student-athlete recognition given by *ESPN the Magazine*. The program selects honorary sports team members, composed of various teams based on their outstanding academic and athletic achievements.

lined with five individual rooms that can be used to study, conduct a tutoring session or to work in groups. Furthermore, toward the back of the center there are two larger rooms, including one with six individual computers and a center table with chairs. The adjacent room, where the focus groups took place, contains twelve desks and a large white board and is where players can study or participate in tutoring sessions.

The student-athletes participated in the questionnaire part of the study in the auditorium in the front of the team house. At the front of the auditorium is a large projection screen and facing it are oversized theatre chairs with individual pull-out desks. The capacity of the room is 300 but the only people there on the day I administered the questionnaire were the athletes, the academic staff, and myself (approximately seventy-five people). For the focus groups, the players participated in the larger classroom. A huge white board takes up the northwest side and is usually filled with notes, formulas, and miscellanea from the tutoring session the night before. The carpet is red, and the desks a deep dark brown and oversized in order to accommodate the individuals that inhabit them. The chairs are ergonomic chairs and are supposed to be better for one's back but most of them are broken from the wear and tear they endure. The north and the northeast sides of the room are lined with huge eight-foot windows that overlook the stadium. Lastly, the individual interviews took place in one of the private study rooms. Inside, a table and four chairs are in the center and a large white board is located on one of the walls. The red carpet carries over to each room and a small window that looks out to the practice field is on one side. I had my computer and a recording device set up to record audio.

Participants

The DBU football team consists of 110 male student-athletes. For the purposes of this study, only the students who were sophomores, juniors, and seniors were asked to participate. At the time, there were sixty-five football student-athletes that were considered to be sophomores, juniors, or seniors, based on the number of credits they had toward receiving their degree.

The university football team consists of student-athletes primarily from eastern states. As for the sophomores, juniors, and seniors, a majority of these student-athletes are from the Northeast states (10%), the Mid-Atlantic states (53%) and the Southern states (37%). Of the sixty-five male football student-athletes on the roster, 62% are black and 38% are white males. The player positions are as follows:

Table 3.1

Player Position Chart

Position	**Description**
Wide Receiver	A wide receivers job is to get open and catch passes from the quarterback. One of the main skills of a wide receiver is his ability to run fast and catch the football.
Quarterback	The quarterback receives the ball from the center and runs the play. Moreover, the quarterback might run with the ball, hand it off to a running back, or throw a pass to a receiver. A good quarterback is one that is good at passing, is able to see the field, reads the defense, and makes decisions concerning the play quickly.
Tight End	A team might have several tight ends in a game at any given time. A tight end plays both an offensive lineman and receiver because they help block like an offensive

	lineman but they also go out to catch passes.
Running Back	The main job of the running back is to carry the ball on the field but they also need to block the opposing teams running backs during pass plays. Running backs can also be receivers and catch passes during a game.
Kicker/Punter	The punter kicks the ball from one end of the field to the opposing team. A kicker's main purpose is to kick the ball in between the uprights to score the extra point at the end of a touchdown.
Defensive Back	A defensive back is a player who covers the people that the quarterback throws the ball to such as a wide receiver or a tight end. On occasion, they will make tackles the running back.
Linebacker	The linebackers are the second line of defense. They are usually the main tacklers on the defense and they find the holes and fill them when rushers from the other team try to get through to catch the ball.
Defensive Lineman	Defensive linemen are meant to mess up the other teams offensive linemen's plans and goals for the play. They want to make sure that the other team does not make it down the field to the end zone.
Offensive Lineman	The offensive lineman either blocks a specific player or area on the field. Offensive linemen are the backbone of the offense because it is their job to make a play happen.

All sixty-five male football student-athletes were asked to participate in the questionnaire, focus groups, and interview. Since this research had never been done before I felt it was important to not single anyone out and make sure that I was able to

hear from as many students as possible. The benefit of this was to hear from everyone and anyone who wished to be heard. Each of these individuals were given a consent form to sign during a team meeting at the start of June 2012. Students were informed there would no repercussions for choosing not to continue or take part, at any point, in the research study.

Research Design

In my dissertation study, I used three different research tools (see Figure 1), which were built on the themes found in the pilot study. I did purposeful random sample for credibility to show an entire representative group (i.e., football student-athletes). Also, it was a small random sample compared to a quantitative study, which would have a much larger random sample. This random sample "aimed to reduce suspicion about why certain individuals were being selected but it does not allow or statistical generalizations but rather to make this study credible and worth repeating in another setting" (p. 179). As in other qualitative work, I began with a plan but remained prepared to adapt and revise as needed

In addition, the varying approaches of gathering qualitative data offered different perspectives and thoughts from numerous football student-athletes. I then systematically coded and analyzed the data using qualitative content analysis procedures (Patton, 2002).

Data Sources

Questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to describe the characteristics of the football student-athletes that took part in the research study and to understand their perceptions of literacy in general terms (Ho, O'Farrell, Hong, & You, 2006). First, through the use of questionnaires, the student-athletes' various perceptions

of literacy (i.e. How do you define literacy? Does literacy play a role in football?) were learned. Likewise, the questionnaire included basic background information (i.e. race, culture, year, major, player position, etc.) about the individual. Questionnaires offer an efficient way to collect data in a qualitative study. Additionally, the student-athletes had the option of leaving the questionnaire anonymous so that they did not feel as though their answers would be recognizable to the researcher and will not be individually scrutinized or judged. However, many of them included their jersey numbers or initials in order to be identified throughout the study. Lastly, since questionnaires are a self-reporting method this tool offered unique information in the voices of the student-athletes and gave an overview of what, as a group they thought and acknowledged as part of literacy (Ho, O'Farrell, Hong, & You, 2006).

The use of questionnaires offered a quick and easy way to assess a larger group of students and presented a brief and general overview of what the students' thoughts were and their backgrounds. However, it must be stated that a limitation of this type of method is that the participants might feel that they need to respond to the questions in a manner that they perceive as socially acceptable or desirable rather than expressing what they truly think and believe (Ho, O'Farrell, Hong, & You, 2006). Nonetheless, questionnaires coupled with other qualitative tools offered an overview of the student-athletes' perceptions of literacy.

The questionnaires consisted of fifteen questions (11 multiple choice 4 short answer questions) about their backgrounds as well as literacy and the role it plays in the student-athletes' lives (see appendix VI). Additionally, the questionnaire was based on the original pilot study questionnaire but took into account the themes that emerged from

the data (e.g., communication, gender) in order to further and thoroughly explore them. Since the purpose of this research study was to gain a greater understanding of football student-athletes and their perceptions of literacy and what it meant for them as college students, the use of questionnaires presented the opportunity to understand a greater population of individuals. Forty-four football student-athletes took part in the questionnaire. The questionnaire took between 15 to 20 minutes.

Focus Groups. The purpose of the focus groups was to encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic of literacy within various groups (i.e. sophomores, juniors, seniors) of students (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Specifically, focus groups "are designed to use group dynamics to yield insights that might be accessible without the kind of interaction found in a group" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 114). For example, the group dynamic can bring about various opinions, thoughts, and perspectives on literacy and what it means for these student-athletes on and off the field. Additionally, the interaction that took place between teammates during the group discussion format presented the participants with the possible comfort of fellow peers (unlike the personal interview one-on-one situation) and the opportunity to express and discuss various perspectives on literacy. In particular, focus groups no longer make the researcher the center of the conversation, thereby offering several dynamics that produce interesting data.

The focus groups offered a distinctive angle to the proposed research study that did not exist in the pilot study. A limitation to this type of method is that sometimes the group might defer to the opinions of those who are more vocal and outspoken leading the group to a superficial consensus. Furthermore, some students might "close up" and not want to speak in front of their peers. Yet, by involving more students, creating engaging

activities, and providing students the opportunity to speak about their perceptions of literacy on and off the field, gives way to more voices and views. Finally, the focus groups present a way to move beyond the personal interaction of an interviewer and the interviewee through the relationships of a group, making some information more accessible through the group environment, which can produce varying ideas, perspectives, and topics that might not come about through the questionnaire or the interview.

All sixty-five players were asked to participate in three groups based on their year in school (sophomores, juniors, seniors) even if some had chosen not to take part in the questionnaire. A total of nine sophomores, five juniors, and eight seniors participated in their respective focus group session.

As the moderator, I began with a board that I had affixed a graphic showing the different conceptual spaces that the participants encounter while in college (see appendix VII). I then asked the students to write down on post-it-notes, what words came to mind for each space. The focus group offered these students the chance to talk about these spaces from a variety of perspectives and in different terms. Next, I asked questions that accompany the activity (e.g., Do any of the words overlap? Which ones? Do the spaces overlap?). Furthermore, this visual representation sparked conversations and information that did not come about as part of the questionnaires and it also allowed for the participants to be active both physically and verbally. After the initial activity was completed, the focus groups watched two videos (see appendix VIII) in which two past college football student-athletes spoke about the game of football and interacted with the media. The two video clips were from the *Gruden Quarterback Camp,* where the host,

Jon Gruden, had both Robert Griffin III (RGIII), a black male quarterback who attended Baylor University and won the Heisman Trophy[3] and Andrew Luck (Luck), a white male quarterback who attended Stanford and was runner-up for the Heisman Trophy, on to discuss their college teams and their quarterback smarts. Both RGIII and Luck were about to graduate from college, had declared for the 2012 National Football League (NFL) Draft, and were vying for the number one draft pick[4]. The players appeared on the show at two separate times but Gruden did not have them do or talk about the same things while on the show. The purpose of these videos was to initiate conversation about stereotypes, literacy, football, and communication. The videos were accompanied by several questions (e.g., Do these players play into those stereotypes? How well do they communicate? Are these players literate or illiterate?) to begin the conversation. The final part of the focus group centered on gender and literacy. I started with two pictures of current student-athletes (one male, one female- see appendix VIII) and asked probing questions (e.g., Do boys and girls see reading differently? Are girls or boys more literate?) to initiate the conversation and to explore how these individuals viewed gender and literacy.

For the focus group session, I pushed together the tables in the larger room to create one big table, which everyone sat around, making it easier to hear and see one another. Lastly, the focus group lasted between 1 to 1 ½ hours depending on the group's engagement, interaction, and discussions that took place. I chose to have the focus

[3] The Heisman Trophy: An award given the to the best college football player each year. The award is made after a secret ballot in which past winners, sportscasters, sports writers, and analysts vote for their favorite player.
[4] Robert Griffin III went 2nd in the NFL Draft to the Washington Redskins and Andrew Luck went first to the Indianapolis Colts.

groups take place before the interviews because I wanted the students who participated in the focus group first to have the option to participate in the interview.

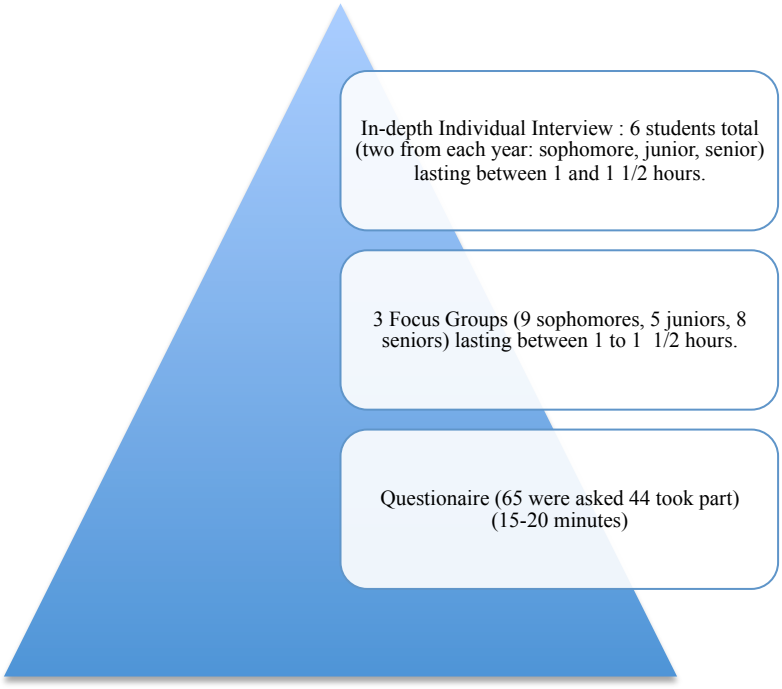
Interviews. Interviewing as a mode of inquiry is situated within social contexts and within broader sociocultural concerns, which allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the participants' knowledge and perspective of literacy their own words, understanding, and experiences. By using a qualitative interview process (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) the various accounts and aspects of the student-athletes' lives that have shaped their point of views on literacy will become more evident and clear; thereby, offering a better understanding of the issues that surround college football student-athletes, literacy, academia, and the world in which they live.

The interview was semi-structured, with the same core open-ended questions but with the freedom to ask follow-up questions that build on the individual's responses and interaction with the interviewer (Brenner, 2006). There are forty main questions (see appendix IX), leaving the opportunity to explore various conversations with the participant. One of the strengths of using open-ended interview questions and the interview format was that it gave the option to extend and clarify the participant's responses through further personalized and specific questions. The interview questions followed the same themes as the questionnaire and the focus groups but delved into the student-athlete's personal story, background and the role it plays in his life, and his perceptions of literacy when it related to school, athletics, and literacy/ In particular, the interview provided the opportunity to explore literacy in all aspects of these students' lives (e.g., elementary school, college, football), expanding the research and opening up new directions for the future.

There was an initial interview with the possibility of a follow-up interview. The original interviews were in-depth lasting between 1 to 1 ½ hours but due to time constraints and practice schedules a full follow-up interview was not possible, only 5-10 minutes to ask for clarifications were possible. The same students from the focus groups were encouraged to take part in the interviews; however, students who did not participate in the focus groups were welcome. Only two students from each focus group elected to participate (2 sophomores, 2 juniors, 2 seniors). I did not use data from the focus groups for the interviews per se, but I did reference the focus group in the interviews as reminders, and if there were answers that the students had that I wanted to explore in the interview setting. I do not think that participating in this focus group impacted the individual interviews instead I think it enhanced it because the students were able to refer to instances that happened in the focus groups or use examples from it. Also, the interviews were made more comfortable since the individual had participated in the group experience before an individual one.

Figure 3.1:[5]

[5] Graves, D.H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work.* Exeter, N.H. Heinemann Educational Books.



I collected all of my data between June and the beginning of July of 2012. My data collection ended in conjunction with the end of the first summer session of the university calendar, since most students would not be able to participate in the study since the upper classman were not required to be on campus after that point in the summer.

Data Analysis

Before I discuss my data analysis, I present Table 3.2, which shows how my data sources and analyses connect to my research questions.

Table 3.2

Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analyses

Research Questions	**Data Source**	**Analysis**
RQ 1: How do male college football student-athletes perceive literacy, both in the classroom and on the field, based on various social experiences (i.e. school, sports)?	Questionnaire Focus Groups	Open and focused coding to view perceptions of literacy. Triangulation of data to see the connection between data sources to understand the student-athletes literacy based on experiences.

RQ 2: How do college football student-athletes see literacy as it pertains to the various aspects of their lives (e.g., football, classroom)?	Questionnaire Focus Groups	Open and focused coding on interview data in reference to literacy. Open coding to seek themes of literacy and one's life with a shift to focused coding as categories emerge Sort events and interactions that showed differences and similarities between the focus group sessions. Identify various aspects of their lives that show literacy use.
RQ 3: How do football student-athletes see themselves and their multiple literacies, on and off the field?	Questionnaire Focus Groups	Open and focused coding to view the players and their literacies on and off the field. Identify various aspects of their lives that they see using literacy. Triangulation of data to see the connection between data sources to understand the student-athletes perceptions of their multiple literacies.
RQ 4: How do football student- athletes characterize and deal with the expectations of literacy held by coaches, themselves, college instructors, and university classrooms?	Individual Interviews	Open coding to seek themes of literacy expectations , with a shift to focused coding as categories emerge. Open and focused coding on interview data in reference to expectations Sort events and interactions that showed differences and similarities between the interviewees. Identify experiences and

		stories that illustrate the expectations that are held for these individuals.

At the start, I coded and thematized data, which included the transcripts from the focus group and interviews, with opening coding to identify themes related to the different literacies that the football student-athletes encounter. Often while coding, "Key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data" became "categories of focus" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 75). To support my ongoing analysis, I wrote memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 20007) to connect my data to my research questions, highlighting events, interactions between participants, participant responses, and questionnaire data in connection to their perceptions of literacy and what that means for them as college students. According to Glaser (1978), memos are the "theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationship as they strike the analyst while coding" (p. 83), which offered me the chance to continuously view what I was finding, reading, and analyzing throughout.

Analytic Framework

As I coded and returned to literacy transcription data over the course of several months, repeatedly coding with more focused codes, various forms of literacy and its connection began to emerge within the data. I sought to conceptualize certain literacies in order to deepen my analysis. I include the analytic framework (for sophomores, juniors, seniors, and interviews) as Tables 3.3- 3.6.

Table 3.3

Focus Group Analytic Framework (Sophomores Only)

Theme	Description	Example from Focus Group	Code
Literacy and Gender	The football student-athletes differed in their questionnaire answers when it came to what extent gender affects literacy. During the conversations concerning reading and educational preferences, the participants perceived males and females contrarily (Barrs, 2000), with some individuals stating that they were stereotyping or making assumptions. More specifically, the participants' placed emphasis on gender text preferences (e.g., males non-fiction, female non-fiction/ educational), their own reading choices, and gender's impact on literacy.	**Researcher:** What types of books would Skylar Diggins read? **Mike:** *Lord of the Rings*, her school books. [LG. F. FIC]	Literacy and Gender (LG) a. Female (F) i. Education (e.g., textbooks) (ED) ii. Fiction (FIC) iii. Internet/Websites (IW) iv. Non-Fiction (NF) b. Male (M) i. Education (e.g., textbooks) (ED) ii. Fiction (FIC) iii. Internet/Website (IW) iv. Non-Fiction (NF) c. Stereotypes of Gender and Literacy (SGL) i. Female Stereotypes (FS) 1. Reading (RD) 2. Literacy (LIT) 3. Education (ED) ii. Male Stereotypes (MS) 1. Reading (RD) 2. Literacy (LI) 3. Education (ED)
Literacy and School	The participants' defined literacy and understood how it plays a role in their college education both on the questionnaire and in the focus group sessions. In the focus groups, the football student-athletes	**ND:** Being able to comprehend what the teacher has to say and what the books are saying. (LS.DL.C) **Researcher:** Okay, so comprehension on different levels, what else? **Mike:**	Literacy and School (LS) a. Defining Literacy (DL) i. Communication (C) ii. Reading (R) iii. Writing (W) iv. Analysis (AN) v. Comprehension (COM) b. Qualities needed in Education (QE) i. Attitude (A) ii. Values (V) c. Importance of Literacy in

	did not reject school literacy (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004), rather they accepted it and spoke about its importance in their college education and lives. These individuals are aware of literacy, as it pertains to college and their future, and are knowledgeable about the literacy skills needed to succeed in the classroom.	Being able to read. [LS.DL.R]	School (ILS) i. College (COL) 1. Activities and Skills associated with Literacy (AS) 2. Long term (LT)
Literacy and Football	The participants' questionnaire answers to if literacy plays a role in football varied. In the focus groups, the participants used the "discourse of football" in several literacy events to speak about the sport and their experiences in it (Mahiri, 1991). For the purposes of this paper, "football discourse," is defined as the language terms, qualities, social identities, and communication used in football (Gee, 1989; Mahiri, 1991). A literacy event is	**Researcher:** Does literacy play a part in football? **Mike:** Writing the plays. [LF. DF. FLT. FTW] **ND:** In football it's not only reading your playbook but also reading the players during the plays. [LF.DF. FLT. FTW]	Literacy and Football (LF) a. Discourse of Football (DF) i. Football Language Terms (FLT) 1. Football Terminology and Words (FTW) ii. Qualities Associated with Football (QF) 1. Attitudes (QFA) 2. Values (QFV) iii. Social Identities (SI) iv. Communication (COM) 1. Conversations about football (CF) b. Literacy Event with football (LE) i. Oral Exchange between one or more persons (OE) 1. Explicit Connection to Literacy (EC) 2. Implicit Connection to Literacy(IC) ii. Comprehension and/or Analysis of a text (CA)

	where the comprehension and/ or analysis of a text or oral exchange takes place and an implicit or explicit connection to literacy is made (Heath, 1982; Mahiri, 1991). More importantly the participant's combined literacy events, and the discourse of football to discuss their awareness and understanding of the role literacy plays in the sport of football.		1. Explicit Connection to Literacy (EC) 2. Implicit Connection to Literacy (IC)
Literate Perceptions of Race	This theme is based on the football student-athletes' perceptions of race in the questionnaire concerning the affect race has on literacy and the conversations in which focus group participants did or did not directly discuss stereotypes that exist in the sport. For this paper, I define stereotypes as "over-exaggerated truths" that society often attributes to an entire group (e.g., race, religion, gender, sport) (Fries-Britt &	**KB:** I mean I say race has a big deal for sports and for education because if you see… Like if you at college and you see a person like KJ walking around, it's automatically that stigma that he's big, he's black so he got to be a football player or he got to be sports player. He wouldn't… He wouldn't just be here, even though he is athlete, but still they don't. . "Oh, he's just a regular student." First thing he's going to hear is, "You play football, right?" [LR. SF.P.PR.D]	Literate Perceptions of Race (LR) a. Awareness of Stereotypes in Football (SF) i. Positions (P) 1. Race (PR) a. Direct (D) b. Indirect (I) ii. Players (PL) 1. Literacy (PLL) a. Based on Race (BR) 2. Race (PLR) a. Direct (D) b. Indirect (I)

	Griffin, 2007, p. 516). The student-athletes addressed race in their short answer questions about literacy and when they spoke about football, specifically players and player positions. Yet, only some were direct in their speaking about race and stereotypes (Fries-Britt, 2000). Moreover, very few students critiqued the sport's stereotypes (McIntyre, 2002) showing how comfortable or uncomfortable they are with them.		

Table 3.4

Focus Group Analytic Framework (Juniors Only)

Theme	Description	Example from Focus Group	Code
Literacy and Gender	The football student-athletes differed in their questionnaire answers when it came to what extent gender affects literacy. During the conversations concerning reading and educational preferences, the participants	**Dom:** She probably reads like real books . . . like *The Hobbit.* [LG. F. FIC]	Literacy and Gender (LG) a. Female (F) i. Education (e.g., textbooks) (ED) ii. Fiction (FIC) iii. Internet/Websites (IW) iv. Non-Fiction (NF) b. Male (M) i. Education (e.g., textbooks) (ED) ii. Fiction (FIC) iii. Internet/Website (IW) iv. Non-Fiction (NF) c. Stereotypes of Gender and Literacy (SGL)

	perceived males and females contrarily (Barrs, 2000), with some individuals stating that they were stereotyping or making assumptions. More specifically, the participants' placed emphasis on gender text preferences (e.g., males non-fiction, female non-fiction/ educational), their own reading choices, and gender's impact on literacy.		i. Female Stereotypes (FS) 1. Reading (RD) 2. Literacy (LIT) 3. Education (ED) ii. Male Stereotypes (MS) 1. Reading (RD) 2. Literacy (LI) 3. Education (ED)
Literacy and School	The participants' defined literacy and understood how it plays a role in their college education both on the questionnaire and in the focus group sessions. In the focus groups, the football student-athletes did not reject school literacy (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004), rather they accepted it and spoke about its importance in their college education and lives. These individuals are aware of literacy, as it pertains to college and their future, and are	**Researcher:** How do you define literacy? **Mackey:** Literacy to me is being able to read, write, talk, and hold a conversation. [LS. DL. R.W.COM]	Literacy and School (LS) a. Defining Literacy (DL) i. Communication (C) ii. Reading (R) iii. Writing (W) iv. Analysis (AN) v. Comprehension (COM) b. Qualities needed in Education (QE) i. Attitude (A) ii. Values (V) c. Importance of Literacy in School (ILS) i. College (COL) 1. Activities and Skills associated with Literacy (AS) 2. Long term (LT)

	knowledgeable about the literacy skills needed to succeed in the classroom.		
Literacy and Football	The participants' questionnaire answers to if literacy plays a role in football varied. In the focus groups, the participants used the "discourse of football" in several literacy events to speak about the sport and their experiences in it (Mahiri, 1991). For the purposes of this paper, "football discourse," is defined as the language terms, qualities, social identities, and communication used in football (Gee, 1989; Mahiri, 1991). A literacy event is where the comprehension and/ or analysis of a text or oral	**Max:** Because in sports, when you're… you have to study. Like sometimes you may have to study your opponent and it's not always just Xs and Os, sometimes it's actually words and like you have to know what certain things mean in football obviously. [LF. DF. FLT. FTW]	Literacy and Football (LF) a. Discourse of Football (DF) i. Football Language Terms (FLT) 1. Football Terminology and Words (FTW) ii. Qualities Associated with Football (QF) 1. Attitudes (QFA) 2. Values (QFV) iii. Social Identities (SI) iv. Communication (COM) 2. Conversations about football (CF) b. Literacy Event with football (LE) i. Oral Exchange between one or more persons (OE) 3. Explicit Connection to Literacy (EC) 4. Implicit Connection to Literacy(IC) ii. Comprehension and/or Analysis of a text (CA) 3. Explicit Connection to Literacy (EC) 4. Implicit Connection to Literacy (IC)

	exchange takes place and an implicit or explicit connection to literacy is made (Heath, 1982; Mahiri, 1991). More importantly the participant's combined literacy events, and the discourse of football to discuss their awareness and understanding of the role literacy plays in the sport of football.		
Literate Perceptions of Race	This theme is based on the football student-athletes' perceptions of race in the questionnaire concerning the affect race has on literacy and the conversations in which focus group participants did or did not directly discuss stereotypes that exist in the sport. For this paper, I define stereotypes as "over-exaggerated truths" that society often attributes to an entire group (e.g., race, religion, gender, sport) (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 516). The student-athletes addressed race in their short answer	**Jose:** Because I think a lot of it has to do with how much pressure has been placed on them [the two quarterbacks] from the media and the comparisons made to people who come before them. So it's not something that's new, I think it's the same stereotypes that's been going on for a long time, it just happens every generation. [LR. SF.P.PR.D]	Literate Perceptions of Race (LR) b. Awareness of Stereotypes in Football (SF) i. Positions (P) 1. Race (PR) a. Direct (D) b. Indirect (I) ii. Players (PL) 1. Literacy (PLL) a. Based on Race (BR) 2. Race (PLR) a. Direct (D) b. Indirect (I)

	questions about literacy and when they spoke about football, specifically players and player positions. Yet, only some were direct in their speaking about race and stereotypes (Fries-Britt, 2000). Moreover, very few students critiqued the sport's stereotypes (McIntyre, 2002) showing how comfortable or uncomfortable they are with them.		

Table 3.5

Focus Group Analytic Framework (Seniors Only)

Theme	Description	Example from Focus Group	Code
Literacy and Gender	The football student-athletes differed in their questionnaire answers when it came to what extent gender affects literacy. During the conversations concerning reading and educational preferences, the participants perceived males and females contrarily (Barrs, 2000), with some individuals stating that they were stereotyping or making assumptions.	**Wendell:** Romance and like the fairy tales. [LG. F. FIC] **Calvin:** Like what is happening in their life right now. [LG. F. FIC]	Literacy and Gender (LG) a. Female (F) i. Education (e.g., textbooks) (ED) ii. Fiction (FIC) iii. Internet/Websites (IW) iv. Non-Fiction (NF) b. Male (M) i. Education (e.g., textbooks) (ED) ii. Fiction (FIC) iii. Internet/Website(IW) iv. Non-Fiction (NF) c. Stereotypes of Gender and Literacy (SGL) i. Female Stereotypes (FS)

	More specifically, the participants' placed emphasis on gender text preferences (e.g., males non-fiction, female non-fiction/ educational), their own reading choices, and gender's impact on literacy.		1. Reading (RD) 2. Literacy (LIT) 3. Education (ED) ii. Male Stereotypes (MS) 1. Reading (RD) 2. Literacy (LI) 3. Education (ED)
Literacy and School	The participants' defined literacy and understood how it plays a role in their college education both on the questionnaire and in the focus group sessions. In the focus groups, the football student-athletes did not reject school literacy (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004), rather they accepted it and spoke about its importance in their college education and lives. These individuals are aware of literacy, as it pertains to college and their future, and are knowledgeable about the literacy skills needed to succeed in the classroom.	**Jackson:** How well someone can read and understand the material. [LS. DL. R. COM]	Literacy and School (LS) a. Defining Literacy (DL) i. Communication (C) ii. Reading (R) iii. Writing (W) iv. Analysis (AN) v. Comprehension (COM) d. Qualities needed in Education (QE) i. Attitude (A) ii. Values (V) e. Importance of Literacy in School (ILS) i. College (COL) 1. Activities and Skills associated with Literacy (AS) 2. Long term (LT)
Literacy and Football	The participants' questionnaire answers to if literacy plays a role in football varied. In the focus groups, the participants used the	**Wendell:** I put preparation because people don't really… People just watch it, you know what I mean, and just watching it you can't really appreciate the	Literacy and Football (LF) a. Discourse of Football (DF) i. Football Language Terms (FLT) 1. Football Terminology and

	"discourse of football" in several literacy events to speak about the sport and their experiences in it (Mahiri, 1991). For the purposes of this paper, "football discourse," is defined as the language terms, qualities, social identities, and communication used in football (Gee, 1989; Mahiri, 1991). A literacy event is where the comprehension and/ or analysis of a text or oral exchange takes place and an implicit or explicit connection to literacy is made (Heath, 1982; Mahiri, 1991). More importantly the participant's combined literacy events, and the discourse of football to discuss their awareness and understanding of the role literacy plays in the sport of football.	preparation. Like we practice all week, people come out on Saturday and they just… barking at the mouth . . . we had Calvin throwing 600 balls, getting pulled about eight times, you know what I mean? Like people can't appreciate the preparation of sports. Although they might watch it, you know … [LF. DF. FLT. FTW]	Words (FTW) ii. Qualities Associated with Football (QF) 1. Attitudes (QFA) 2. Values (QFV) iii. Social Identities (SI) iv. Communication (COM) 1. Conversations about football (CF) b. Literacy Event with football (LE) i. Oral Exchange between one or more persons (OE) 1. Explicit Connection to Literacy (EC) 2. Implicit Connection to Literacy (IC) ii. Comprehension and/or Analysis of a text (CA) 1. Explicit Connection to Literacy (EC) 2. Implicit Connection to Literacy (IC)

Literate Perceptions of Race	This theme is based on the football student-athletes' perceptions of race in the questionnaire concerning the affect race has on literacy and the conversations in which focus group participants did or did not directly discuss stereotypes that exist in the sport. For this paper, I define stereotypes as "over-exaggerated truths" that society often attributes to an entire group (e.g., race, religion, gender, sport) (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 516). The student-athletes addressed race in their short answer questions about literacy and when they spoke about football, specifically players and player positions. Yet, only some were direct in their speaking about race and stereotypes (Fries-Britt, 2000). Moreover, very few students critiqued the sport's stereotypes (McIntyre, 2002) showing how comfortable or uncomfortable they are with them.	**Ken:** Of course he uses all his athletic abilities and the stereotype for black quarterbacks is that most of them are like freak athletes all the way around but yeah, if he didn't run a 40, didn't showcase his speed at all, like didn't put that on display for the NFL other than in game situations then to me he wouldn't be like going into that stereotype, he would be going against it [the stereotype of the black quarterback]. [LR. SF. P. PR. D]	Literate Perceptions of Race (LR) a. Awareness of Stereotypes in Football (SF) i. Positions (P) 1. Race (PR) a. Direct (D) b. Indirect (I) ii. Players (PL) 1. Literacy (PLL) a. Based on Race (BR) 2. Race (PLR) a. Direct (D) b. Indirect (I)

Table 3.6

Interview Analytic Framework (For All)

Theme	Description	Example from Interview	Code
Literacy Expectations	Based on the interview data, the football student-athletes described and explained how they perceived the expectations of professor and coaches (Benson, 2000), in the college setting. The football student-athletes' discussed the literacy expectations of their coaches and their professors, as they pertained to both the classroom and the football field. Specifically, the participants placed emphasis on two separate sets of expectations from coaches, school and football, and only one set of expectations from professors, school. The participants' perceptions of the expectations they encounter and how they deal with them brings a new dimension to these student-athlete's conceptualizations of literacy and what it means for their literacy.	**KB:** Because they go to your neighborhood, they know where you come from and they know if you weren't excelling in high school, like you should have been. They probably won't expect you to do that well. I don't think they have high expectations. I believe they want you to succeed, at least here, but around the country I don't think that is the case. A lot of times, these coaches make sure you just get your grades, in order for you to play. [LE. CE. Sl. C]	Literacy Expectations (LE) a. Coaches Expectations of Literacy (CE) i. General Literacy Expectations (GL) ii. Football Literacy Expectations (FL) 1. On the field (F) iii. School Literacy Expectations (SL) 1. In college (C) b. Professors Expectations of Literacy (PE) i. School Literacy Expectations (SL) 1. In the classroom (C) 2. In general (G)

I used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to figure out categories that were repeatedly being refined until themes emerged. I used a content analysis and inductive

analysis to discover categories that lead to the emergence of themes. Next, I began by reading through all my notes, or focus groups and interviews and made comments in the margin in order to understand the different parts of my data. Every focus group and interview was coded and recoded to makes sure that I was following the constant comparison method. An initial examination of the interviews and focus groups led to classification scheme made up of general categories within which were additional subcategories. Every piece of data was coded and recoded as many times needed to make sure that there was validity to the codes and the coding ability of the researcher. I confirmed the qualitative analysis by "testing and affirming the authenticity and appropriateness of the inductive content analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 454) and a second party checked to make sure they were able to apply the codes to the data. Moreover, I used content analysis as "the process of identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns for the data" (Patton, 2002, p. 381).

I chose to use Dedoose, which is an online qualitative data program (similar to NVivo) that allowed me to view everything that was coded a certain way all together in order to look across the interview and focus group data. By using this program, I was able to continuously code and change my codes based on the data that I saw and was presented with from the study. Furthermore, this program allowed for me to view the various codes and the data that was connected to each one of them or that is connected to multiple codes and data. I read the data several times to make sure that it was completely indexed. When the data was classified, I used the computerized program to do a majority of the data processing.

Analysis was a major part of my initial writing and I worked to make sure I was articulate in my interpretations and my finding were clear, in order to show why certain examples were chosen to show the male football student-athletes conceptualizations of literacy in the various aspects of their lives.

Member-Checking

Once my drafts had begun to stabilize and my revisions became more focused, I began the process of member-checking. In Brenner (2006), member-checking is the process of confirming the interpretations and meanings with the participants' perceptions. With my football student-athletes participants, I engaged in member-checking by allowing the focus group and interviewees to have copies of the transcripts that I had done before the analyses had been written. In addition, through member-checking, I shared the interview and focus group transcripts as well as the outcomes of the analysis with the football student-athlete participants. Upon the completion of the analysis and chapter drafts, I gave a copy to my interviewees and focus group participants again so they could review it and see if I have made mistakes or if they wanted something to change. Only one student responded but none of the other players made any objections or comments, thus, I continued. Two of the interviewees were excited to read their transcripts (Andrew and Arnold) and felt that it had been done perfectly. However, I had planned to present the information to all forty-four participants in the form of a Powerpoint presentation before the dissertation was due but because of their schedules and mine this was not feasible. Therefore, the presentation will take place either before my defense or immediately following it before the semester and the spring semester ends.

Outline for Chapters 4-6

Each of the subsequent data chapters are organized based on the same headings and sub-headings. Below, I have provided an outline (Table ??) to make it easier to follow each chapter.

Table 3.7

1. Introduction
2. Getting to know the class
    2.1. Overview
        2.1.1. Focus Group
3. Themes
    3.1. Literacy and Gender
        3.1.1. The effect of gender on literacy
        3.1.2. Gender and reading
    3.2. Literacy and School
        3.2.1. Perception of literacy, gender, and school
        3.2.2. Qualities needed to succeed in education
    3.3. Literacy and Football
        3.3.1. Talking on the field: Literacy in football
        3.3.2. Discourse of football
        3.3.3. Just like analyzing the plays
    3.4. Literate Perceptions of Race
        3.4.1. The screen: Race as a factor

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore male college football student-athletes perceptions of literacy. In particular, this study investigated how sociocultural influences, sport, school, and literacy intersect and what that meant for college football student-athletes as college students. In undertaking this study, I sought to make an initial attempt to address the gap in the existing research: (1) explore the perceptions of literacy by football student-athletes and what that means for them on and off the field (2) investigate how college football student-athletes' perceive literacy based on the various experience in their lives and (3) understand how football student-athletes' characterize

and deal with the expectations of literacy held by coaches, themselves, college instructors, and university classrooms.

The results from the pilot study showed that there was a connection between literacy and football. Yet, the football student-athletes viewed literacy, as being an aspect of school and football but the two did not intersect, which prompted the need to further explore these student-athletes' perceptions and what that meant for them as college students. Consequently, based on the pilot study findings, additional analysis using a larger sample of football student-athletes is needed to explore the perceptions of these student-athletes and their success at the university level.

This study was modified based on the limitations of the pilot study. Additionally, the modifications provided more opportunities for student-athletes to participate and various outlets for them to speak about their perceptions of literacy and what that meant for them in school, on the football field, and in life. As a result, my dissertation study provided the information and starting point for further research to explore and examine literacy from student-athletes not just football student-athletes.

Chapter IV: Meet the Sophomores

Introduction

In this chapter, we meet the sophomore football student-athletes.[6] All of the participants had recently completed their first year of classes and were considered sophomores based on the number of credits they had accrued (35-59 credits). I have based the organization of this chapter and the subsequent chapters on the connections between the themes identified in Chapter 3.

In this chapter, I address the following research questions: 1) How do male college football student-athletes perceive literacy, both in the classroom and on the field, based on various social experiences (i.e. school, sports)? 2) How do college football student-athletes see literacy as it pertains to the various aspects of their lives (e.g., football, classroom)? 3) How do football student-athletes see themselves and their multiple literacies, on and off the field? I begin with a look at all of the sophomore student-athletes as a group (e.g., by qualifying demographics like major, race, and so on) and then discuss more specifically the individuals who took part in the focus group. Then, I focus on the sophomore focus group, sharing quotes from both the questionnaire and the focus group session for each of the themes I found in the qualitative data I collected. These themes were introduced in the analytic frameworks in Chapter 3. Next, I continue onto the sophomore interviewees, who shed light on the literacy expectations of professors and coaches. Lastly, I provide a summary of the findings of this chapter.

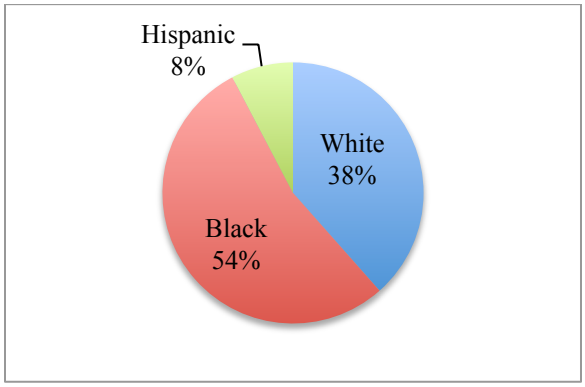
Getting to Know the Sophomores

Overview

[6] Throughout the paper, I refer to football student-athletes interchangeably as participants and student-athletes.

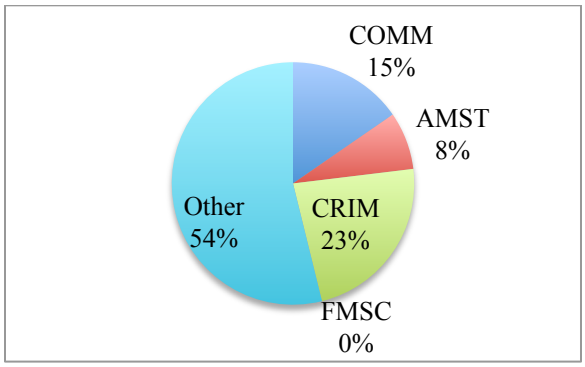
Fourteen sophomores responded to the questionnaire, nine chose to participate in the focus group, and two agreed to the individual interviews. Overall, the sophomores were a diverse group with respect to their races, majors, hometowns, the types of school they had attended, and the positions they played on the field. Each individual self-identified his race as part of the questionnaire, 54% identified as black, 38% identified as white and 8% identified as biracial.

Figure 4.1: Sophomore identified Race



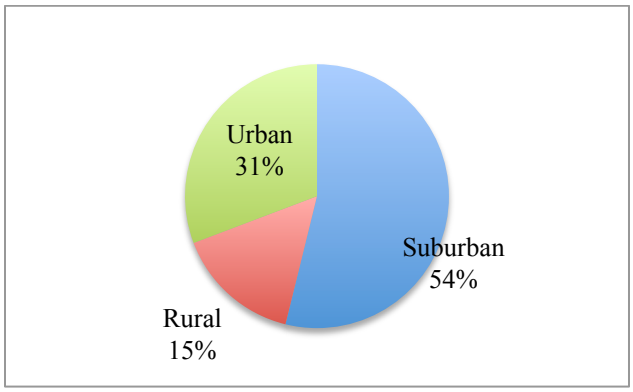
As this study was done toward the beginning of their sophomore year, 54% of them had not decided on a major. 23% were Criminology majors, 15% Communication majors, and 8% American Studies majors.

Figure 4.2: Sophomore majors



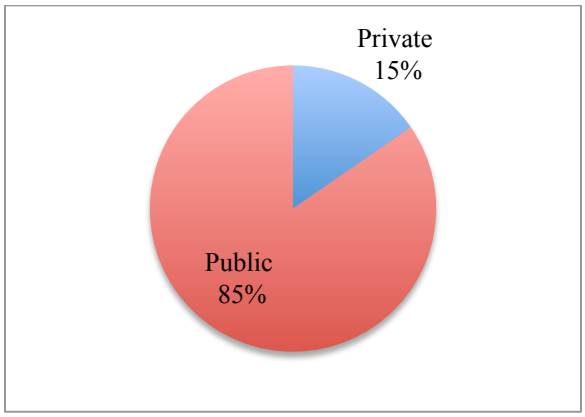
When asked where they had grown up, 54% responded that they had grown up in a suburban area, 31% in urban areas, and only 15% in rural areas.

Figure 4.3: Sophomore: Where did you grow up?



A majority of the sophomore football student-athletes (85%) attended public high schools and only 15% attended private high schools.

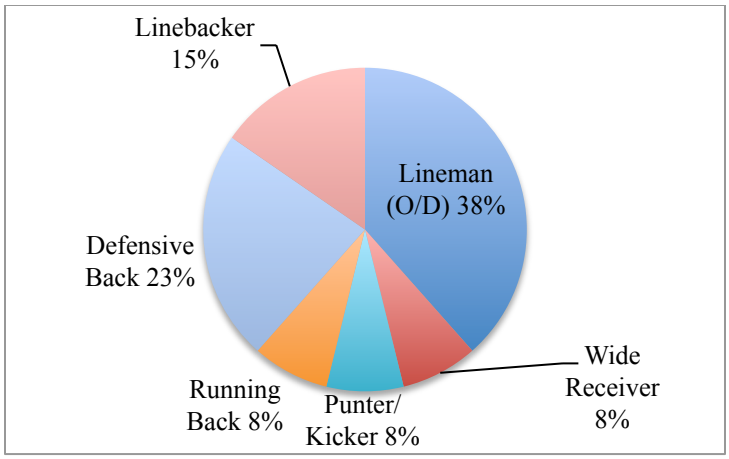
Figure 4.4: Sophomore High School Demographics



Lastly, the positions that the sophomores reported that they played ranged from 38% linemen, 23% defensive backs, 15% linebackers, 8% running backs, 8% wide receivers, and the remaining 8% punters and/or kickers.[7]

Figure 4.5: Sophomore Player Positions

[7] Please see Chapter 3 for a more detailed description of player positions.



The focus group. As stated earlier, the focus group participants were chosen because they had all indicated interest in participating on their questionnaire. Nine student-athletes took part in this racially diverse session. Ezekiel, ND, and Swanson[8] self-identified as white (3), Bronson, Mike, KB, JK and Ulysses identified as black (5) and Andrew identified as biracial (1). Each player had played at least one game in his college career and none of the participants was a walk-on: each one had been recruited on a full or partial scholarship to play at the university. The sophomore football student-athletes played a variety of positions on the field.

Table 4.1

Sophomore Focus Group Player Position

Name	Position
Bronson	Running Back
ND	Kicker/Punter
Ulysses	Defensive Back
Ezekiel	Lineman

[8] All names have been changed in order to ensure anonymity.

Swanson	Lineman
Mike	Defensive Back
KB	Lineman
Andrew	Lineman
JK	Linebacker

The focus group took place at 4:00 p.m. on a Tuesday afternoon at the end of June. All but two of the participants took part in the entire focus group session. Ezekiel and JK each had class and walked in 10 and 15 minutes late respectively. The desks were all pushed together make one big rectangular table. I was seated on the south side of the room, with Bronson, Swanson, and Ulysses to my right. Andrew, ND, JK, and KB were seated to my left, and Mike and Evan sat directly across from me. Since it was summer, the participants were dressed in shorts and t-shirts, most bearing some connection to football. This was the one day on which the building's air conditioning broke down, making the room we were in excessively warm. However, the room temperature did not compromise the focus group environment.

Themes

This section of the chapter is focused on the themes that emerged from the focus group data. I begin with the sophomore football student-athletes and their perceptions of literacy based on gender. Next, I look at how the sophomore football students-athletes defined and discussed literacy as it pertained to school. Next, I examine the sophomore student-athletes' use of football discourse off the football field. Lastly, I consider the

sophomore football student-athletes' who directly or indirectly addressed race in conversations about stereotypes in football.

Literacy and Gender

It is no secret that boys may not engage as much with school-based reading and literacy practices, particularly in high school and college (Brozo, 2006; Tatum, 2008). Additionally, males are often underserved in higher education environments (Gouws, 2008). Combs and her colleagues (2010) found that only 38.76 % of boys were deemed "college ready" in reading compared to 51% of their female counterparts. Moreover, we know from previous research that boys see literacy as gendered in the K-12 setting (Gouws, 2008). The sophomore football student-athletes are no different: they too see females and males differently in literacy and reading. The participants see girls as better readers and better in school, and these perceptions shape their perception of literacy.

The literacy and gender perceptions of the sophomore football student-athletes became evident in their responses to questionnaire and focus group questions. On the questionnaire, the sophomore football student-athletes indicated their perspectives on the extent to which gender affects literacy. The sophomore focus group's discussion of the reading and educational preferences of each gender revealed that participants perceived males and females differently in this context. Particularly, the sophomores emphasized a) gender text preferences (i.e., males read non-fiction, females read non-fiction or educational texts), b) their own reading choices, and c) the effect of gender on literacy.

The effect of gender on literacy. In the questionnaire, the football student-athletes were asked to what extent they thought gender affected literacy. There was no previous oral discussion or reference of this question. The sophomore student-athletes

indicated their choices on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

Table 4.2

Sophomore Questionnaire Responses: I Think Gender Affects Literacy

Name	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	(46%)	(7%)	(8%)	(31%)	(8%)
Bronson			X		
Jared				X	
ND				X	
Ulysses	X				
Ezekiel				X	
Swanson				X	
Mike	X				
Ray	X				
Martin	X				
Adam		X			
KB	X				
Andrew					X
JK	X				

Less than half (46%) of the sophomore football student-athletes chose a 1 (strongly disagree) on the effect of gender on literacy. Ulysses, one of the participants who did make this choice, wrote, "It doesn't matter what your gender is, if you want to strengthen

your literacy you will." Ulysses made it clear that he did not think gender affected literacy because it was dependent on the individual. Similarly, KB wrote, "gender is nothing more than the roles we play in a society based on the gender binary erected for us feminine/masculine." KB directly stated that society affected how people viewed the genders as different; therefore, it was not gender but society that affected literacy. Mike noted, "Everybody has a chance to be literate. " JK agreed with this view, writing, "I think any person has the ability to be literate." Only 7% chose a 2 (somewhat disagree) on their questionnaire, and none of the focus group participants was one of those individuals. Only 8% chose 3 (neutral), and Bronson was among them. He wrote that he was neutral because "Some [people] feel the need to express themselves in a certain way, if at all due to gender stereotypes and how they think they should." Bronson asserted the idea that gender stereotypes played a role in how people expressed themselves and how others saw them. A total of 31% chose a 4 (somewhat agree), and ND, Swanson, and Ezekiel were among those. ND penned, "At a young age, guys are steered more towards maths' and sciences and away from English and literacy," demonstrating his perspective that it was the school environment that "steered" males away from certain subjects, such as English. Ezekiel noted, "I think women are more inclined to be literate," showing his view of women as better at school. Also, Swanson viewed gender as having an effect on literacy in writing: "I always think of girls having better grammar in their papers." Lastly, 8% chose 5 (strongly agree). Andrew wrote, "Men are going to be more illiterate than women. They have to be masculine which have to talk with confidence and powerful tone which sometimes falls off the path of illiterate." From his perspective, gender affected the way one spoke, suggesting society's view of males was based on behavior

and how powerful they appeared, which translated to their literacy. The sophomore football student-athletes expressed their perceptions that society and its views had more of an effect on one's literacy than one's actual gender.

Gender and reading. As part of the focus groups, the sophomore football student-athletes discussed literacy and gender in several different contexts. Some of the sophomore participants framed their discussion, during the focus group, in terms of their perceptions of women and education. Mike asserted, "In general, I think females are especially smart," after which Ezekiel blurted out, "Not all females," and Mike retorted, "A lot of them, though." Mike's assertion that females are smart did not include the caveat that he was stereotyping. when in fact he may have been stereotyping without meaning to do so. Ezekiel's interjection compelled Mike to qualify his statement, showing that some of the football players were aware of stereotyping while others were not.

The sophomore focus group conversation moved from a general discussion of the effect of gender on literacy to a more specific discussion of what kinds of material a male or female would read. During the focus group session, the football student-athletes looked at two pictures: one of a female athlete, Skylar Diggins, who plays basketball for Notre Dame, and the other of a male athlete, former Alabama football player Trent Richardson.[9] The objective of the activity was to have the participants look at these athletes as general representations of their gender. At times in the conversation the sophomore student-athletes focused on the specific athletes and stereotyped them, and at other times they viewed the two athletes as representations of their gender. To begin, I

[9] See Chapter 3 for more detail.

asked what males might read and a majority of the student-athletes' answers suggested nonfictional texts:

Mike:

Athletic motivational books.

Swanson:

ESPN the magazine

Ulysses:

Playboy

Ezekiel:

Chicken Noodle Soup for the Soul

Swanson:

The Giving Tree (laughing)

The participants were focused on Trent Richardson, as a football player and as a man. Mike began with a reference to sports-related nonfictional texts; Swanson did the same. However, Ulysses chose a male-oriented magazine, which is nonfiction but not specifically related to sports. Ezekiel's second response was more of a joke, and Swanson laughed as he responded,, suggesting that he was not being serious and could very well have been stereotyping. However, when one of the players, Ezekiel, suggested that Trent might not read at all, his fellow participants interjected:

Ezekiel:

Trent doesn't read.

Swanson:

Trent doesn't really need it. I mean he doesn't really have to. He is going to the league.

Mike:

You are steretoypin' right now.

Ulysses:

That was a joke. He reads his contract. (smiling)

Ezekiel's words sparked a short exchange that included a clarification. After Ezekiel said "Trent doesn't read," Swanson further supported this notion by sharing his thoughts on the perceived importance of literacy for professional athletes. Yet, this particular exchange demonstrated that the sophomore student-athletes were aware of the stereotypes that are associated with male football student-athletes (i.e., illiterate, dumb jocks) and did not shy away from using them in the conversation. Moreover, they were unable to separate Trent the football student-athlete from Trent the male student. Yet, when they discussed Skylar, the sophomore participants viewed her as a female first and a female student-athlete second.

Interestingly, the sophomore student-athletes did not joke when they discussed books that a female would read. The book choices varied, but many of the players chose fiction and educational books for Skylar, in sharp contrast to those they ascribed to Trent.

KB:

Cosmopolitan.

Ezekiel:

Harry Potter.

ND:

Twilight.

Swanson:

Romantic books.

Mike:

Lord of the Rings.

Ezekiel:

Her schoolbooks.

All of the choices that the student-athletes made were fiction, except for *Cosmopolitan,* a magazine that is geared toward women. Ezekiel, ND, Swanson, and Mike all chose books that were extremely popular or had been so over the previous few years. Ezekiel spoke up again with "Her school books," which was very different from his earlier comment about Trent. The sophomore student-athletes perceived females as reading fiction and educational texts, a perception of the reading choices of females that some researchers have found to be common (2000). In addition, the differences between the sophomores' reading choices for the two athletes suggest that they inadvertently stereotyped the reading preferences of Skylar and Trent based on their respective genders.

With respect to their own reading preferences, participants referred to what they liked to read or what they had to read. In both cases the choices were again gender-oriented. As for books, Ulysses wrote that he read, "what I am required to," and Ezekiel indicated that he only read books that were required for school, such as "textbooks." Additionally, KB wrote that he read "books [about] success, people, psychology," while Swanson chose "History books mainly," and Bronson reported being a fan of books about "sports, [and] important people." However, Andrew and JK both responded that they did

not read books of any type. Despite the statements of some of the sophomore focus group participants that they did not read, 54% of them asserted in their questionnaire that they read nonfiction texts either for pleasure or for school.

In today's Internet and social media age, many individuals like to read websites or are active on websites such as Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook, either following other people or posting.. ND reported viewing mlb.com, whereas Swanson favored college humor websites, and Andrew preferred espn.com. The rest of the focus group participants said they read websites but did not offer up any specific preferences. I asked the players if they followed people on Twitter, and again the answers given ranged from not having a Twitter account to following famous people. ND said he followed "a lot of people," on Twitter but did not provide any specifics. JK put down that he only followed athletes and friends, whereas his fellow teammates, Bronson, Mike, Andrew, and Ulysses only reported following close friends and teammates. However, Ezekiel and Swanson denied participating in Twitter. In general, these football student-athletes read websites that interested them and that had something to do with sports, and had accounts on Twitter (77%) but only followed specific people.

The sophomores viewed females as readers of fiction and educational books, and males as readers of texts of interest to them (e.g., sports websites). Additionally, the sophomore football student-athletes varied in their views of the effect of gender on literacy, with more than 50% of them either alluding to or directly stating the idea that society had a greater impact on one's literacy than gender. The sophomore football student-athletes further explored literacy when the conversation shifted to academia.

Literacy and School

We already know from prior research that football student-athletes are not doing well and many are not graduating from college (National Collegiate Athletic Association Research Staff, 2010). The participants' responses with respect to literacy and school discussed in this section show that sophomore football student-athletes' conceptualization of literacy as it pertains to education is important to understanding their literacy knowledge and skills and how they use them on and off the field. It becomes apparent in the questionnaire and focus group data that sophomore football student-athletes are aware of what literacy is in the context of college and the qualities and skills one needs to be successful. Moreover, the sophomore participants continue to speak about gender as it relates to the college choices of girls and boys and to how hard girls and boys work in school. During the focus group session, the sophomore football student-athletes embraced literacy and spoke about its importance in their college education and in their current and future lives. These individuals are aware of literacy as it pertains to college and their future, and are knowledgeable about the literacy skills needed to succeed in the classroom.

Perceptions of literacy, gender, and school. I did not define literacy on the questionnaire or in the focus group because one aim of the study was to see how the student-athletes defined it themselves. I asked them to define literacy in their own words both on the questionnaire and during the focus group. In these definitions, many of them describe literacy as being primarily school-based. On the questionnaire, Bronson wrote, "How you talk, or pronunciate your words. How clearly you speak." He emphasized how an individual speaks and what that means for their literacy. ND responded, "The ability to read and understand language." Along those same lines, Ulysses wrote, "Being

able to read and understand what you are reading." It is evident that he saw understanding and comprehending of what you read as an important part of literacy. Next, Ezekiel noted, "Being able to read," and Swanson wrote, "Quality of grammar and sentence structure towards a written or spoken thoughts." Ezekiel focused on reading, but Swanson asserted that grammar in written and spoken thoughts was what made a person literate. Mike responded, "Being able to read or write," combining all of his teammates' perspectives. JK wrote, "Reading and writing." KB wrote, "Having the ability to read, analyze, and apply," encompassing reading and analysis and taking it one step forward with the application of one's knowledge. Lastly, Andrew noted, "Literacy is how well you can speak to someone and how good you can talk in the normal living," aligning his perspective with Swanson's. In the end, the sophomore football student-athletes centered their definitions in the context of school-based literacy on reading and writing, with Swanson and Andrew's support for communication and KB's addition of analyzing and application rounding out the perspective of school-based literacy.

During the focus group session, I asked the sophomore student-athletes how they would define literacy in their own words. Ezekiel began, "I just thought being literate means that you're able to read." His answer in that situation was similar to his questionnaire response. Bronson added, "How you communicate" to Ezekiel's definition. Both Ezekiel and Bronson consider literacy as it is defined in education. As the participants continued, Ulysses added that "writing" is an aspect of literacy. However, KB went further with his perception of literacy, saying, "I believe by every book you're reading it's like an argument, so you read something you try to understand, and you decide what is true about it and what isn't true." Thus, the sophomore football

student-athletes mentioned four defining components of literacy: reading, communication, comprehension, and analysis.

Lastly, the sophomore student-athletes thought that literacy was dependent on where an individual (had) attended school and the effects of society's gender expectations. I asked the participants if one's literacy was contingent upon one's gender. Mike and Ezekiel both responded:

Mike:

No, it does not matter.

Researcher:

Why?

Mike:

They're both successful competing athletes. [Trent and Skylar]

Ezekiel:

What affects their literacy in my eyes is that she goes to Notre Dame and he goes to Alabama.

Mike argued that since both Trent and Skylar were successful athletes, they were both literate, and their being male or female did not affect his perspective. However, Ezekiel disagreed, asserting that it was not the athletes' gender that shaped his view, but rather the universities that Skylar and Trent had attended. He implied that the perception of a school's educational value applied and extended to the student, even if he or she were a student-athlete. KB continued the conversation and chose to talk about females and their literacy in school and in the real world.

KB:

I feel like for education too… Like females, they'll work like extra hard in school just…

Ezekiel:

Yeah.

KB:

Instead of pursuing to be a doctor they'll pursue to be like a nurse, you feel what I'm saying? I feel like they're pushed into a small little role than men would be.

Researcher:

Based on their gender?

KB:

Yeah, based on their gender.

KB argued that women wanted to work more in school than men. But he said that despite working harder than their male counterparts, women were "pushed into a small little role," demonstrating KB's perception of society and how females are viewed in the work force. KB's words further asserted the role that gender played in literacy and one's education. Ezekiel extended KB's comments:

Ezekiel:

Struggle for equality.

Researcher:

Why? Struggle for equality why?

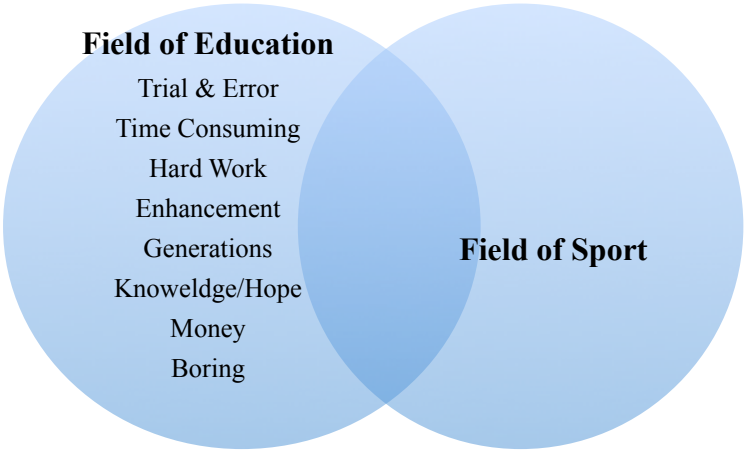
Ezekiel:

> With women, women I think they struggle for equality and it's super evident in anything, you know, they just get treated more poorly and with less respect, I think. In the business world, in the sport world.

Ezekiel focused on the idea that women have struggled for equality in everything from business to sports. He also indicated his opinion that women are "treated more poorly and with less respect." Ezekiel's perspective, coupled with those of his teammates, shows that the sophomore student-athletes defined literacy as they saw it in school, but also recognized the impact that gender had on literacy as it pertained to school, despite their earlier assertions. The student-athletes broadened their perspectives on literacy in their discussion of the qualities essential to success in college.

Qualities needed to succeed in education. As part of the focus group session, I asked the student-athletes to write down words that they associated with school, and then place them in the space of education on the Venn diagram I created. We then discussed the reasons for their word choices. During this activity, the sophomore student-athletes spoke about the qualities, attitudes, and values needed to be successful in school, specifically at the college level.

Figure 4.6: Sophomores: Words for education



For example, Mike chose "trial and error" because, as he explained, an individual eventually figured out what they needed to do even if it was not right the first time. He added that education is "the key to generations in the future," which showed that he was aware of the importance of education. Bronson wrote "time consuming," because education is "something that takes time." Ezekiel added that school was "hard work." Swanson contributed "boring." Bronson, Ezekiel and Swanson all touched on the negative aspects and the psychological drive needed in the college education experience. Ulysses suggested "money," because college "costs money and you have to go." ND contributed "enhancement," because "education enhances your skills and knowledge and stuff." KB asserted, "Knowledge. Hope." Andrew stated "generations," because "you will need an education for the future and generations to come." ND, KB, and Mike were aware of the importance of education to their futures and saw it as a necessity. Bronson, Ezekiel, and Swanson added the psychological aspects of education, and Ulysses the financial perspective. Additionally, not only were the student-athletes aware of the value and difficulties one experiences as part of education, but they also understood the role that literacy played in their own college education.

One of the short-answer items on the questionnaire asked the sophomore participants "What role does literacy play in your college education?" This question prompted the student-athletes to focus on not only the specific question but also on the long-term necessity of literacy. Each of the players expressed knowledge of what it meant to be literate in college and what that meant for them. For example, Swanson wrote, "Papers are very important to how teachers view you," demonstrating that, in his opinion, teachers' perceptions were based on the writing a student did for class.

Furthermore, Ezekiel wrote, "If you couldn't read there is absolutely no way I could be successful." It was a simple answer but one that showed his recognition of the important role of literacy in his life now and in the future. KB declared that college was about learning from reading and "mostly everything we learn comes from a book written by a great mind." He not only touched on the reading but also the learning and the analysis that are part of the college experience and college literacy; furthermore, his answer showed the value he saw in reading what was assigned to him in college. Additionally, Ulysses noted, "I have to read for my classes and I also have to read to understand what is going on." Similarly, JK wrote, "It plays a big part because being literate pertains to graduating college," and Bronson claimed, "It plays a huge role. How you express or present yourself is key when it comes to social networking and building your future." JK's and Bronson's comments demonstrated that they understood that literacy would affect their future from graduating to networking to building a future. The sophomores were aware of the effect that literacy would have on their current college careers and the skills and knowledge that would lead them into the next part of their life. Moreover, these sophomore student-athletes showed that they would not be or did not want to be part of the 30% of football student-athletes who play at the Division I level and do not graduate from college (Lapchick, 2010). In the end, the sophomore football student-athletes saw the connection between academics and literacy in the greater sense of the world and its importance both now and in the future.

Literacy and Football

As seen in the earlier themes, the sophomore football student-athletes are literate. The sophomore participants showed their knowledge of literacy in academia but they also

extend their literacy knowledge and skills while employing their football discourse and engaging in literate events. "Football discourse," is defined as the language terms, qualities, social identities, and communication used in football (Gee, 1989; Mahiri, 1991). A "literacy event" is where the comprehension and/ or analysis of a text or oral exchange takes place and an implicit or explicit connection to literacy is made (Heath, 1982; Mahiri, 1991). Thus, the theme of "Literacy and Football" builds upon the previous themes by showing the literacy skills and knowledge that the sophomores had when speaking about football, specifically the plays, literacy in football, and football players. Since this theme is centered on football, and the sport of football is male oriented, the football student-athletes did not speak about gender or the impact it had on literacy in connection with the sport. The participants discussed their understanding of the role literacy plays in football, through their use of the discourse of football in literate events.

Talking on the field: Literacy in football. In the sport of football, the term "talking on the field" refers to the plays and actions that take place on the football field. These actions are "talking" or showing the knowledge, skills, and ability a player has on the field to make an impact in the game. In addition, these actions include being able to communicate on and off the field, read the plays, execute the plays, and anticipate the other team's moves, which, as the sophomores explained, were all part of being literate in football.

The participants were invited to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statement "I think literacy plays a role in football" on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 4.3

Sophomore Questionnaire Responses: I Think Literacy Plays A Role In Football.

Name	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**Somewhat Disagree (2)**	**Neutral (3)**	**Somewhat agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**
	(8%)	(15%)	(23%)	(39%)	(15%)
Bronson				X	
Jared			X		
ND		X			
Ulysses				X	
Ezekiel					X
Swanson	X				
Mike			X		
Ray			X		
Martin				X	
Adam				X	
KB		X			
Andrew					X
JK				X	

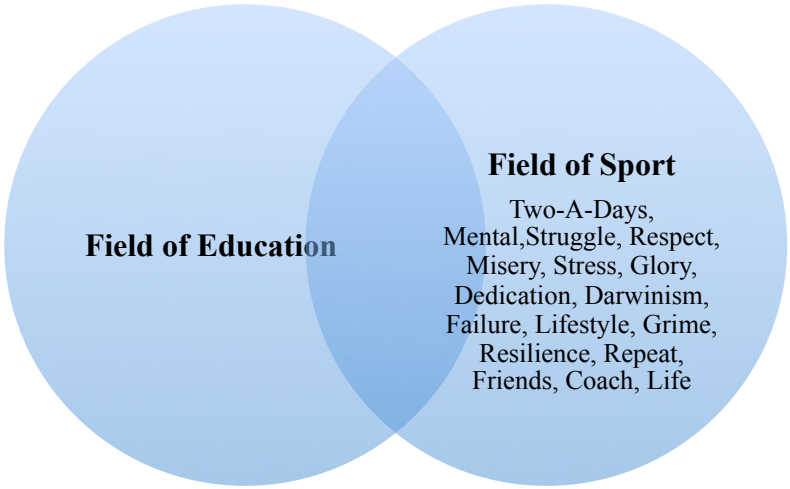
Only 8% of the sophomore football student-athletes chose 1 (strongly disagree) on the questionnaire. Swanson, who was one of these, wrote, "You don't have to be able to form sentences to be able to play football," stressing that communication did not have nearly as big a role in football as in the classroom. A total of 15% of the sophomores

chose 2 (somewhat disagree) when it came to the role of literacy in football. ND noted, "Players have to be able to read the playbooks and understand football terminology," which, despite his "somewhat disagree" answer, appeared to him not to require extensive literacy skills. KB wrote, "There are many players who have made it to the league that are not completely literate," which raised the question of what I meant to be completely literate from his perspective. Despite disagreeing with the generalized statement, both ND and KB viewed literacy and football as being connected. 23% of the sophomores chose 3 (neutral), but none of the focus group participants had this as an answer. The highest percentage (39%) chose 4 (somewhat agree) on the scale. Ulysses wrote, "You need to learn how to read to understand the plays." This answer was comparable to ND's answers, despite the two participants' having picked disparate levels of agreement. As for Bronson, he wrote that "How you talk and express yourself on the field displays a certain toughness and attitude," implying that communication and persona on the field displayed one's level of literacy. Ulysses noted, "You need to learn how to read and understand the plays." JK was straightforward in his response: "Football players have to be literate on and off the field." His answer showed the level of importance he ascribed to literacy in all aspects of life. Lastly, a mere 15% had chosen a 5 (strongly agree) that literacy played a role in football. In his answer, Ezekiel wrote, "You have to be able to read, at least a little bit, in order to play," aligning with Ulysses and ND, whereas Andrew asserted, "People think a lot of players are illiterate and just because we play we can't speak, one of the stereotypes that comes along with being a player." Andrew referred to the stereotype that football players lack literacy because of how they speak or how others perceive them, and his choice of a 5 showed that he did not agree with that stereotype and

believed that literacy played a major role in football. The sophomore student-athletes gave various answers to the role that literacy plays in football but the majority (54%) of the participants agreed that it was a factor in the sport. When the sophomore student-athletes used the discourse of football in their focus group conversations, it became clearer that they indeed considered literacy to be a factor in football.

Discourse of football. The football student-athletes freely used their football discourse during the focus group session. As I explained previously explained, in the focus group activity the sophomore student-athletes were asked to choose words that they associated with the space of sport.

Figure 4.7: Sophomores: words for sport



The sophomore participants easily asserted these words into the conversation. From an outside perspective, these words appear simple and can be applied to various settings. Nonetheless, these words show not only the participants' perspectives on football but also their use of the discourse associated with football. The sophomore student-athletes did not pick words such as football, playing, or field. They chose words that described the actions and mental challenges of playing football. For example, words such as "two-a-days," hobby," "resilience," and "lifestyle" conjure up thoughts of physical practices and

a way of life. Yet "Darwinism," is more about physical aspect of surviving, or as KB and Ezekiel said, "only the sharp survive." Ezekiel elaborated, "Because if you're going to… I think that if you're going to play sport… Well, especially at the collegiate level you've got to be dedicated to it. You can't just do it like oh, I'm going to come and party and stuff. "On the other hand, words such as "mental," "struggle," "respect," "stress," "misery," and "failure," showed the psychological aspect of the sport. These words offered simplistic versions of multiple views of football but are inherently associated with the larger discourse of the sport. But it was the participants' explanation for why they had chosen those words that showed the extent of their grasp, knowledge and use of football discourse.

In explaining the reasons for their choice of the words mentioned above, the sophomore football student-athletes showed their academic skills (that is, analysis, providing support, etc.) beyond the use of football discourse. The sophomore asserted their rationale for their word choices:

Ezekiel:

I put dedication.

Researcher:

Why?

Ezekiel:

Because if you're going to . . . I think that if you're going to play a sport . . . Well, especially at the collegiate level you've got to be dedicated to it. You can't just do it like oh, I'm going to come and party and stuff.

KB:

There's a big mental aspect of sport, just whatever sport you play, whether it be golf or whether it be rugby, it's all mental. Any sport you play is mental I think.

Andrew:

Coach, because you can't play the game without a coach. You follow their lead and you learn from them.

Swanson:

Two-a-Days, because that is all about practicing

ND:

Life, because you train all your life for this.

Mike:

Friends. You gain relationships.

Bronson:

All of these words are supposed to be required to play the sport.

Ezekiel's explanation is straightforward. When he said, "I think that if you're going to play a sport . . . Well, especially at the collegiate level you've got to be dedicated to it," he distinguished between the various levels of the sport of football. According to him, if you are going to be competitive and play at the college level, you have to be dedicated to the sport; however, Ezekiel, like all the players, has been mentored into this use of football discourse over the years of play and have learned through interactions with coaches, peers, and the football community in order to be part of the sport. Therefore, his use of discourse and his perspective of what was required at the college level were based on the environment in which he had participated in for many years (Mahiri, 1991). KB discussed the mental aspect of football and the need, regardless of the specific sport, to

focus on the mental part of athletics. Andrew asserted that without a coach, one did not know or learn about the sport, so coaches were essential to football. In addition, his use of "Coach" showed where he had gained his knowledge and from whom he had learned about the sport of football. Bronson summed up his teammates' choice of words when he indicated that all of the words were "required" to play the sport, indirectly recognizing the importance of learning the discourse of football in order to participate in football. Furthermore, the words that were chosen were part of the language, and to some extent of the mentality, of the sport. Ezekiel continued his explanation of his words that football discourse was connected to one's life and lifestyle:

Ezekiel:

I picked lifestyle too because football is different than a lot of other… It's different than any sport in the fact that it doesn't end for us.

Researcher:

It doesn't end.

Ezekiel:

Pros. I mean high school ends but here at the collegiate level it doesn't end. . . . It's something you live by. I mean you know as a football player you are a football player, you live with football players, you eat with football players . . . talking about if you, it's just like it's just always there. When you're home you're like oh hey, it's the football guy that plays for DBU.

Researcher:

So you take on what, a new identity? Is that what you would say? When you become a collegiate athlete you take on a new identity?

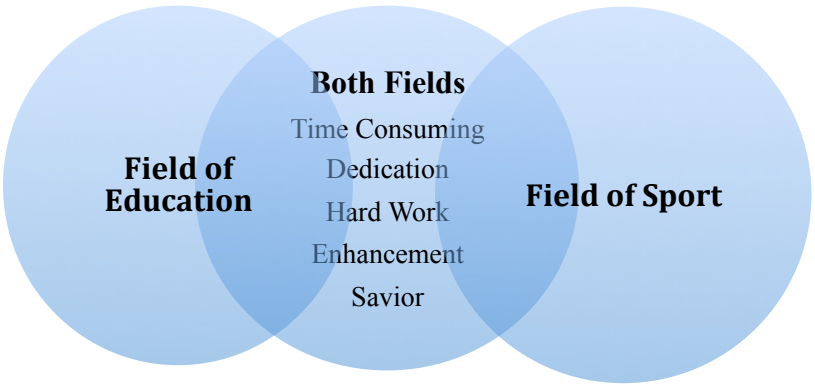
Ezekiel:

Yeah, absolutely.

It appeared that part of being a football student-athlete was accepting and being part of a group that continually defined a player's identity. Moreover, participation in the sport for a male is often connected to language and behavior in social situations (Mahiri, 1991). Thus, despite not using specific words that were directly associated with football but using words and phrases that are part of the larger discourse of the sport, he confirmed his literacy and his place in the sport of football. For example, his rationale that the sport never ends and that college football players take on a new identity demonstrated that his own football identity was stronger than his literate identity. Although he has developed the latter, he has become successful (or at least is viewed as successful) in sports rather than in literacy, which was purported by the former student-athletes in Mahiri and Van Rheenen's (2010) study.

The last part of the Venn diagram activity was for the sophomores to choose words that they associated with both school and education and give a rationale for their selections.

Figure 4.8: Sophomores' words that overlap for education and sport



The sophomore participants focused on the qualities and traits that make an individual successful on and off the field. Swanson stated that he chose "time consuming," because "both things take a lot of time and you have to learn time management to do it all." JK contributed "dedication," since "In both you have to be dedicated in order to do well." Bronson noted, "hard work," because football and school both take hard work to be successful. KB added "enhancement because they both improve your life." Lastly, Mike commented, "savior." He stated, "You may be a football player you know, and maybe not be able to pay for school in the future but you're on scholarship or something," which for him was the link between both aspects of a football student-athlete's life since both offered opportunity to improve ones life (Edwards, McMillion, & Turner, 2010). The sophomore student-athletes further discussed literacy and football as the focus group continued.

The sophomore focus group participants examined literacy in football in more depth during the focus group session. The sophomore football student-athletes used their

football discourse throughout conversations in the focus group session, creating several literacy events; also, the participants both implicitly and explicitly discussed literacy's role in the sport.

Researcher:

Does literacy play a part in football?

Mike:

Writing the plays.

ND:

In football it's not only reading your playbook but also reading the players during the plays.

Bronson:

Being able to communicate with the players and the plays.

JK:

[reading] Body language.

Ulysses:

Understanding like the plays.

KB:

Yeah, it's like reading the plays and being able to understand the concepts and know what you're doing.

The sophomore participants displayed their knowledge of the sport and the role literacy had in it through literate exchanges, which showed their use of football discourse. Mike's response, "writing the plays," referred to coaches designing the football plays that are executed on the football field. In ND's response, he used two key phrases in the

sport, “reading the players” and “reading your playbook,” to discuss literacy on the football field. ND’s response was similar to his earlier definition of literacy that included reading and understanding language, which could include the language and discourse used in his playbook. Bronson commented that being literate in football was about communicating, which was exactly how he saw literacy when he defined it earlier. On the other hand, JK spoke about reading other players’ body language, an often-used football term describing a skill needed on the field to anticipate the moves of one’s opponents. Moreover, this aligned with his literacy definition of reading, which was “attain knowledge by reading and understanding.” Finally, Ulysses and KB discussed literacy in football in terms of understanding and knowing aspects of the game when it came to the overall concepts and individual plays. The sophomore participants were able to use their football discourse in which they had to analyze and support their views. In addition, the sophomores used their football discourse to discuss the role literacy plays in football, which often aligned with their earlier literacy definitions that originally seemed based in the school environment. Several other literacy events took place in the focus group discussion of the video excerpts.

Just like analyzing the plays. During season, a few times a week, the football student-athletes watch videos of game footage and analyze it for different purposes (such as improvement or studying opponents). Instead, I had the students analyze two video clips from the *Gruden Quarterback Camp,* where the host, Jon Gruden, had both Robert Griffin III (RGII), a black male quarterback who attended Baylor University and won the

Heisman Trophy[10] and Andrew Luck (Luck), a white male quarterback who attended Stanford and was runner-up for the Heisman Trophy, as guests to discuss their college teams and their quarterback smarts. The participants in the sophomore focus groups analyzed the video excerpts and answered questions pertaining to how these two individuals on the video were perceived, an exercise similar to analyzing plays. The various literacy events that occurred while the student-athletes discussed the videos further exhibited their literacy in the use and knowledge of the discourse of football. Additionally, the sophomore football student-athletes explicitly addressed literacy, meaning they left nothing to interpretation and fully revealed their thoughts and opinions about literacy, when they examined the literacy of the two quarterbacks in the video excerpts. The conversation between Mike, KB, and JK demonstrated their analytical skills and their ability to be specific about their perceptions based on their previous knowledge and what they saw in the video. The exchange began between Mike and KB:

Mike:

He didn't really ask him [RG III] anything, he just said…

KB:

He's, "You've got some fast black receivers, don't you?" You know?

Mike:

He just said that the receivers are fast and RG was like, "Yeah." He didn't really give him credit.

KB:

[10] The Heisman Trophy: An award given the to the best college football player each year. The award is made after a secret ballot in which past winners, sportscasters, sports writers, and analysts vote for their favorite player.

Knowing that the press is going to be hoping for that. You would think that Jon's going to be open and he just made it seem like all those guys are fast. Like are there no fast players on Stanford's team?

Mike:

Probably not.

JK:

Not really unless you count the wide receivers.

Mike:

Stanford last year dominated.

KB:

Yeah, he [Gruden] didn't give him [RGIII] credit for it [his skills]; you know what I'm saying?

Mike stated that the host did not really ask RGIII anything, he simply threw out a rhetorical question and RGIII responded with a simple answer. However, KB pointed out that RGIII was not given the credit that he deserved as a quarterback. Furthermore, both Mike and JK, who do not directly disagree with KB, have an answer to his question.

Moreover**,** the sophomore student-athletes focused on their prior knowledge of the players to speak about Luck's and RGIII's education and to speak about the comparison the media (i.e., a text) and the general public made between the two. The sophomore focus group participants evaluated how the media used a specific angle for both RGIII and Andrew Luck to show their intelligence:

Mike:

You know . . . they've always used the whole quarterback at Stanford thing with Andrew Luck but never used… Because nobody ever knew about how far RGIII was 'til later on, they're like, "You know, you're a 4.0 student," duh, duh, duh. But they always used to, you know, "Andrew Luck's a smart guy," you know what I'm saying? "Look how he reads on the field and this has to do with how smart he is," and especially at Stanford they've always used that for a while now. Since even back then last year when he was rated the number one quarterback for the draft . .

ND:

I mean when you go to a university such as Stanford, I mean it's easy to make comparisons of what it means to be successful

Ezekiel:

Yeah, that's what Mike's saying. Some people wouldn't . . . I mean obviously they'll be able to say, "Yeah you know, he's at university," but they use Andrew Luck's in Stanford more than they give RGIII credit knowing that he's a 4.0 student three years.

Ulysses:

Yeah, they're both bright people, really nice, good humble people.

In the above conversation, the sophomore student-athletes showed again that they could analyze a text (the media) and give specific examples, using their football discourse, to support their perceptions. However, in this discussion, Mike, ND, Ezekiel, and Ulysses were not explicit in their discussion of literacy; rather, they implied the connection between the two quarterbacks and literacy. Mike argued that the usual conversation about Luck was based on the college he attended and his ability to "read the field," but

RGIII was never given the same credit, despite both his academic and athletic accomplishments. Mike was indirectly addressing the literacy of both players based on their grade point average and the school choice. However, ND argued it was not that one player was smarter than another; rather, he suggested (though he did not say explicitly) that the school one attended was a determining factor in one's literacy or intelligence. Ulysses made an implicit connection to literacy, not because he did not say each individual was literate, but because he equated literacy with being bright: he saw the two as interchangeable. Despite the implicit nature of the comments of ND, Ulysses, Mike, and Ezekiel about literacy, these student athletes were aware of the role that literacy played in football and education. Furthermore, it was evident from the above conversation that these student athletes were able to cite specific examples to support their claims, an important skill in the college classroom. They thus demonstrated their own literacy skills and not just their knowledge of literacy.

Literate Perceptions of Race

This theme builds upon the previous three and furthers the discussion of the perceptions of literacy that these individuals have based on literacy, race, and stereotypes. This theme is based on the sophomore football student-athletes' perceptions of race, both in their responses to the questionnaire items concerning the effect of race on literacy and the conversations in which focus group participants did or did not directly discuss stereotypes that exist in the sport.[11] The sophomore participants used their literacy and the discourse of football to discuss the stereotypes that they felt were present in the sport.

[11] For this paper, I define stereotypes as "over-exaggerated truths" that society often attributes to an entire group (e.g., race, religion, gender, sport) (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 516).

Gender did not play a role here; race is more important in the football environment. The student-athletes addressed race both in their short-answer questions about literacy and when they spoke about football, specifically players and player positions. It is evident that the sophomore football student-athletes can speak about their literacy knowledge in connection to football, specifically how race plays a role in it. Yet only some spoke directly about race and stereotypes (Fries-Britt, 2000), meaning they addressed race as the reason for the stereotype. Also, very few students criticized the sport's stereotypes (McIntyre, 2002), revealing how uncomfortable some of them were with the stereotypes they discussed.

The screen: Race as a factor. On the football field, a screen is set-up to fool the defense into thinking that the quarterback will throw a long-pass when in fact he plans on throwing a short one. A screen pass can be effective but also risky. Just as the sophomore football student-athletes are aware of what a screen is and the purpose of it on the field, so too are they aware of race and the stereotypes that exist in the sport of football. The sophomore football student athletes discussed their awareness of race as it pertained to literacy and football.

As part of the questionnaire, the sophomore student-athletes were asked to identify their race. The questionnaire also asked sophomores to indicate to what degree (for example, strongly disagree, neutral) they agreed with the statement "I think race affects literacy."

Table 4.4

Sophomore Questionnaire Responses: I Think Race Affects Literacy

Name	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	(31%)	(8%)	(31%)	(23%)	(8%)
Bronson			X		
Jared			X		
ND				X	
Ulysses	X				
Ezekiel				X	
Swanson			X		
Mike			X		
Ray	X				
Martin	X				
Adam		X			
KB				X	
Andrew					X
JK	X				

31% of the sophomore student-athletes chose a 1 (strongly disagree) on the scale. JK, who is black, wrote, "I believe race has nothing to do with intelligence or ability." Ulysses, who is black, aligned with JK when he noted, "It doesn't matter what your race is, if you want to strengthen your literacy, you will." Only 8% chose 2 (somewhat disagree) and none of the focus group participants chose this answer. Three of the focus group participants and a total of 31% of the sophomore student-athletes chose 3 (neutral).

Bronson, who is black, wrote, "Some feel the need to communicate or talk a certain way based on the reputation of their race and the racial norm." Swanson, who is white, wrote, "I think it is more the environment you live in than race," and Mike, who is black, rounded out this group, noting, "Because there are a lot of stereotypes." Bronson indirectly brought up stereotypes, while Mike directly stated that the reason he was neutral was because the statement might be true or it might not be because of stereotypes. However, Swanson felt that race did not play as big a role as one's environment. Only 8% of the participants chose 4 (somewhat agree) and three of the focus group participants, ND, who is white, Ezekiel, who is white, KB, who is black, were among those individuals. ND wrote, "Some races may not stress schoolwork and literacy as much as others," and Ezekiel responded, "Race has an effect on money and money has an effect on the quality of education." Ezekiel believed that everything depended on money and indirectly pointed out that because some races do not have money then their education is threatened. This point differed from that of ND, who, like Swanson, thought that one's environment affected one's literacy, but he said it indirectly, not singling out any individual or race. KB wrote, "For the simple fact of empirical statistical evidence that some races are at a disadvantage when it comes to means and the schools they attend are usually worse, which can affect literacy." KB indicated that in his opinion there was statistical evidence that the schools that people of some races attend are worse, and that this affects literacy. Even though KB did not directly cite statistics, blacks and Latinos are twice as likely as white students to attend a school in an urban area with a substantial majority of poor students (Rich, 2012), confirming KB's response to the question. Andrew (who is biracial) was the only one to choose 5 (strongly agree). He purported,

"When you grow up from students are taught by society how to be literate and if a society is poor, such as African American can be illiterate due to their lack of literacy around them." Andrew addressed race directly as an issue in literacy but noted that society was influential as well, a view, which was similar to his teammates' perspectives. The questionnaire answers of the focus group participants showed that the student-athletes' views on whether race affects literacy were mixed. However, they later discussed race and stereotypes in connection with literacy.

Awareness of the coverage: Race in football. Part of the game of football is providing coverage and knowing the coverage other players need to prevent the opposing team from gaining any yardage on the field. Awareness of the coverage comes from learning to understand and conceptualize the game based on one's role on the field and within the game as a whole. Much like being aware of the coverage on the field, the sophomore football student-athletes are aware of the role that race plays in the sport of football, particularly as it pertains to player positions. As earlier explained, the football student-athletes watched two video clips from the ESPN television show *Gruden's Quarterback Camp*, where the host, Jon Gruden, interviewed two quarterbacks, Andrew Luck and Robert Griffin III, before they entered the NFL Draft in 2012. After watching the two video clips from *Gruden's Quarterback Camp,* the participants spoke about the two quarterbacks, specifically their position and the racial stereotypes that are connected to that position. In addition, the focus group participants used their football discourse to examine the stereotypes that they assert exist and that they encounter in the sport. To begin, I asked if race plays a role in football. The football student-athletes answered:

Andrew:

And I feel like in sports you see a lot more of us.

Researcher:

Would you like to be more explicit with us?

Andrew:

I can't say black because I am both so I can't be like black or white.

Ezekiel:

Pick your side (jokingly)

KB:

I mean I say race has a big deal for sports and for education because if you see . . . Like if you at college and you see a person like JK walking around, it's automatically that stigma that he's big, he's black so he got to be a football player or he got to be sports player. He wouldn't… He wouldn't just be here, even though he is athlete, but still they don't . . ."Oh, he's just a regular student." First thing he's going to hear is, "You play football, right?"

Andrew spoke about how one might see more of "us" in sports. He used "us," but did not want to define himself as either black or white; rather he wanted to use his biracial background in order not to make an explicit race assertion. Andrew also addressed race as playing a role in football, but did not directly state whether this might be a stereotype or a reality. KB, who is black, directly spoke about both education and sports and how race was "a big deal." Also, he confronted and indirectly criticized the stereotype on campus that just because an individual is big and black they would have to be an athlete, there is no way they would be a "regular" (i.e., a non-athlete) student. He combined the often-discussed stereotypes of football and the perceptions held on many college

campuses to show how these two stereotypes overlap. KB directly addressed the stereotype and what it meant for black males to walk around on his campus. In speaking about race, both KB and Andrew examined directly and indirectly the stereotypes that are part of the sport of football. The conversation continued when the quarterback position was discussed in more detail.

Race and the quarterback position Throughout the focus group, the discussion about race and/or stereotypes often revolved around player positions. For the sophomores, the position that they analyzed the most was quarterback, since the video excerpts we watched featured two college quarterbacks. We considered some general stereotypes about this position and Mike stated, "Black quarterbacks are athletic and white quarterbacks are smart." Soon after, I asked if RGIII or Luck played into the stereotypes that have been created for the quarterback position and Ezekiel asserted, "Yeah . . . Like super high football IQ guy [Luck] and RGIII's going to be you know the next Michael Vick or Cam Newton." Ezekiel quickly stressed that Luck was very intelligent, a stereotype associated with the white quarterback, and RGIII was being compared to other currently playing black quarterbacks, who are stereotyped as fast and not intelligent. Therefore, he believed that both quarterbacks exemplified stereotypes associated with their position and race. Research shows that these stereotypes permeate the sport, the media, and the views that coaches have of their quarterbacks and the other positions on the field (Mercurio & Filak, 2010). Yet he did not criticize the stereotype or the comparison of players to one another based on race. Instead he simply described the stereotypes of others and did not offer a rebuttal to what others believed. Mike, JK, and KB talked about black quarterbacks and the stereotypes associated with those individuals.

Bronson:

I mean yeah they do because a stereotype of a black quarterback is he's automatically fast.

KB:

Athletic.

JK:

He's [RGIII] fast but he's more, you know, intelligent on the field too. That's why we started seeing a lot more rise of black quarterbacks around.

Bronson began with a direct connection between the two quarterbacks we were discussing and one of the stereotypes of black quarterbacks that they are fast. Then, KB added that the stereotype was also that black quarterbacks are "athletic." Lastly, JK added another component to the exchange, he restated that RGIII fits the stereotype because he is fast but he also is intelligent, which is a stereotype that is often associated in the media and on the field with the white quarterback. As a result, JK indirectly stressed that the stereotype of the black quarterback was no longer as pervasive and indirectly criticized it and its accuracy when applied to RGIII and other black quarterbacks. He did this by mentioning that many of the quarterbacks, like RGIII, were not only perceived of as fast but seen as intelligent too, a perception, which was changing the way we viewed and possibly stereotyped the black quarterback. Moreover, JK's critique showed that he was aware of the racial hierarchy of football. This awareness demonstrated how he viewed the role race played in the perceptions of players, possibly because of his own race. McIntyre (2002) found that this perspective (race's role in societal perceptions) was difficult for white individuals to recognize, given that they were

usually the ones who benefited from the racial hierarchy. However, despite his assertion, recent research shows that the stereotypes associated with the black and white quarterback still appear in media discussions of these individuals and their strengths and weaknesses on the field (Woodward, 2002).

The discussion persisted with a few more of the focus group participants contributing to the analysis of the video and the discussion of whether the quarterbacks that we watched played into the stereotypes that are associated with white and black quarterbacks.

Ezekiel:

Yeah, there is a kind of stigma attached to the quarterbacks, whether they are black or white.

Researcher:

What is the stigma?

Mike:

Black quarterbacks are athletic. (and points to Ezekiel)

Ezekiel:

White quarterbacks are smart.

KB:

For example, what was the black quarterback on our team's name?

Ezekiel:

Troy.

KB:

Everyone through Troy was fast . . .

All:

No!

KB:

No, I mean in the stands**.**

This dialogue between the student-athletes began with their directly addressing the racial stereotypes of quarterbacks again. For example, Ezekiel, who is white, asserted that there was a stigma attached to black or white quarterbacks. Mike, who was black, stated that black quarterbacks are more athletic and Ezekiel gave the opposite stereotype that the white quarterbacks are smart. Additionally, KB's example of a former teammate who was black and a quarterback brought up the perceptions of others, particularly those in the stands watching the game. The end part of this conversation was more telling because the entire group gave a resounding "no" to KB's assertion. However, he quickly stressed that it was fans who thought this, not he himself. Based on their reaction, the football student-athletes did not agree. KB did not agree, but did nothing more to dismantle the stereotype or criticize it besides pointing the preverbal finger at those who he thought did believe the stereotype, such as fans and others who did not play the sport.

The football student-athletes do not stereotype the player positions; rather, they discuss and explain, indirectly or directly, the stereotypes of race that they encounter in football. However, only a few times do the participants criticize or try to debunk the stereotypes that they believe permeate the sport. From this behavior, it can be concluded that these individuals are comfortable or at least resigned to these stereotypes, despite deeming them incorrect. The participants' race did not directly correlate with their perceptions of race, showing that they were able to discuss the stereotypes that are

present in football indiscriminately. In the end, the football student-athletes were able to recognize the stereotypes and discuss them as they pertained to the sport, despite their own opinions.

The next portion of this chapter presents the interviewees. The sophomore focus group themes gave an overview of the conceptualizations of literacy in the educational and sports related aspects of their lives. In addition, the sophomore student-athletes' conceptualizations demonstrate how and why these have been formed and play a role in the expectations that these individuals encounter on and off the field. The interviewees offer insight into the literacy expectations of coaches and professors for the football student-athletes. These interviewees give perspective on what these expectations mean for them both on and off the field and how they handle them.

Introducing the Interviewees

Andrew and KB discussed the various expectations they encountered both on and off the field. In particular, Andrew and KB centered their attention on the literacy expectations of their professors in the classroom and their coaches' literacy expectations in the classroom and on the field. Thus, in this section of the chapter, I address my fourth research question, "How do football student-athletes characterize and deal with the expectations of literacy held by coaches, themselves, college instructors, and university classrooms?" through the data provided by the interviews with Andrew and KB.

Each of the two sections below begins with a brief overview of the interviewee. . Then I comment briefly on Andrew's perception of literacy in school and on the field. Next, I move into Andrew's perceptions of the literacy expectations his professors and coaches, on and off the field and how he handles them. I provide excerpts from Andrew's

interview that showed his opinions, providing a more detailed view of his conceptualization of literacy. Then, I summarize Andrew's perspectives. Next, I speak briefly about KB's perception of literacy in school and on the field. Then, I move onto KB's perceptions of the literacy expectations his professors and coaches' hold, and how he handles them. I provide excerpts from KB's interview that show his views in order to give a richer and more detailed understanding of his conceptualization of literacy. Lastly, I summarize KB's perspectives.

Andrew

Andrew identified as biracial because his mother is white and his father is black. He wore his hair short, was average height (6'0), and always wore a smile. He attended a public high school and grew up in a suburban area. His parents were divorced and he had a good relationship with both of them. At the time the study took place, he was undecided as to his major. Andrew had broken eight bones over the course of his life, all while playing sports. Andrew played linebacker and stated he really liked the position he played because, "I get to like hit people." He described his position:

> I guess it is more of a force. I take sacrifices for the rest of the defense. I take on blocks, you know . . . I basically force the ball carrier to the offense to run the ball, force them back inside, so the rest of the team can either make a tackle or make a big play.

Andrew also asserted that one of things he really enjoyed about his position was that he was always involved in "some sort of collision." In high school, he began as cornerback, but he eventually got too big, so his coach changed his position. At the start of the interview, Andrew was nervous that he would give a wrong answer despite my repeatedly

telling him there were no wrong answers. However, as the interview went on, he became more comfortable and had little trouble voicing his opinion on the questions I asked.

Andrew's Perception of Literacy

As part of the interview, I asked a few questions similar to those I had asked on the questionnaire and in the focus group. Some of Andrew's answers were slightly different from his focus group answers, but the biggest change was that the answers were his opinions and he had no one to confer or agree with. One of the first questions I asked was, "What does being literate mean to you?" He responded, "I think being literate is basically how well someone uses their words and how they put them together." This answer was similar to those he had given on his questionnaire and in the focus group. He focused on oral and written communication, and the impact they had on a person's literacy. As we continued the interview, I asked, "What are the benefits of being literate in college?" He responded as follows:

Andrew:

Well the most one would be a job. I mean a job, and if you are literate and you can talk to people, and you can communicate well, it is going to get you far cause that's what a lot of companies are looking for.

Researcher:

Okay. What aspects of college do you need to be literate for?

Andrew:

Um, everything! Um, just everything. You can just have friends based on how literate you are. If you meet people, if you meet professors, and I mean if you . . . how should I say this, like you can meet people . . . Well, uh (laugh) I am trying

how to say it, I guess if you see people and there are some people who don't think you are literate, who think you are dumb and won't socialize with you and they have put themselves on a different

. . . playing field, and that's about the football thing too, we are put on that pedestal that others think they are smarter than us because we are here for football and they are more literate then we are.

Andrew's answer to the first question showed he was aware of the importance college literacy had for his future. He asserted if "you can talk to people, and you can communicate well . . . that's what a lot of companies are looking for," demonstrating his perception of the benefits of college. Andrew's choice of words, which was a mix of football metaphors and the connection he made to school, showed his perceptions of how others viewed the football student-athletes. Furthermore, Andrew's perception that it was normal for football student-athletes to be "put on a that pedestal," of being above school was a negative one, since fellow classmates "think they are smarter than us." This showed that the pedestal came with stereotypes and did not imply intelligence on his campus. Additionally, his last statement implied that he was aware that many of the players on his team came to the university to play the sport, but that he did not believe that they were not smart enough to be there; that was how others, not he, perceived them. Andrew's perspective might also be seen as opposite to what football student-athletes are supposed to think, since it is assumed that they want to be put "on that pedestal," because they are at the university to play football. Moreover, this perspective was legitimate because oftentimes professors hold this perspective that football student-athletes as not intelligent enough and are above school and the classes that they take (Benson, 2000;

Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007). However, when it came time to discuss the role that literacy plays in football, he brought up the importance of literacy on the field.

During the focus group session, Andrew had been quiet because he "was tired that day." Therefore, I was curious about how he would respond to the question, "What role does literacy play in football?" His reply was centered on communication and he alluded to his above answers. Andrew stated,

Andrew:

Knowing the plays, and like maybe knowing where to be. Communicating.

Researcher:

Who are you communicating with?

Andrew:

How the players communicate with each other. Andy's like if you have a good connection/ communication with another person it is easy or easier to talk. If you aren't literate, like, or if you aren't literate to what this person thinks, I just don't think it's going to be . . . I don't know . . . it's just not going to be a good mix.

He commented that "knowing the plays," and "knowing where to be," are key aspects of being literate in football. His use of football discourse to speak about communication as a key aspect of literacy in football, was reminiscent of his original definition of literacy, "how well you can speak to someone and how good you can talk in the normal living." Thus, one might infer that he meant that he saw the same skills in both places but did not connect the two environments. Also, his last argument that if you are not literate to what another person thinks, it is not a "good mix," which one might suppose means that issues on the football field might occur (e.g., not knowing where the play is supposed to be

made, or not being able to follow the other player's positions). Overall, Andrew viewed literacy in college as something that would affect his life in the future, that others had a specific kind of perception of because he was a football player, and that communication was the key to literacy on the field. Andrew's understandings of literacy led him to see the literacy expectations relevant to him at the college level.

Andrew's Multiple Expectations of Literacy

Student-athletes often feel that they are constantly under pressure from coaches, professors, and themselves; moreover, they may feel that most of their time is planned out because of their multiple practice and school schedules. As part of the interview, I specifically explored the general and literacy expectations that Andrew encounters in college. First, we spoke about the general expectations from professors.

Literacy expectations of Andrew's professors. Andrew shared that professor expectations are dependent on the individual class and professor and cannot be generalized. He remarked that he had seen professors react in many ways toward football student-athletes:

> From my experience, I have actually seen it both ways, I have seen it as some college professors are very into it, they have, they like us, they want to be a part of it. They feel like they should help us out a lot and they should maybe um give us extra help, you know. And then I met some that don't, some that will, you know, who think that we as football players think that we can get whatever we want, so they make it harder on us. And I have, or had, two professors that did both.

Andrew voiced several opinions in this quote. Based on his experience professors saw football players in two ways. He first gave the example that "professors are very into it, they have, they like us, they want to be a part of it." Essentially, some professors wanted to be part of the college football experience and they liked or respected what the football players did for the college on and off the field. He goes on about how some of the above professors want to help or give him extra help. I asked him to clarify (because of possible NCAA violations) that he meant that the professor offered support if needed and did not do the work for him. However, he then went on to another type of professor, "who think that we as football players think that we can get whatever we want, so they make it harder on us." In his experience, some professors had a negative view of players because they assumed that the football student-athlete were helped and privileged while other students, who might or might not deserve those things, were not. In addition, he dealt with the multiple perspectives that professors had of him despite not knowing him as an individual but only as a football player.

His assessment was further supported when I asked specifically what the literacy expectations of his professors were. Andrew indicated that he often felt that professors did not expect much from him because he played football:

> The expectations of our [football student-athletes'] professors are much lower than the rest of the students. Professors aren't going to expect us to be smarter than the girls in the front row or anyone in the class or whoever doesn't play football over football players any day and also if you are black they are also going to think your expectations are really low.

Andrew commented that the expectations that professors have of football student-athletes are "lower than the rest of the students," or "anyone in the class or whoever doesn't play football," with the caveat that "if you are black they are going to think your expectations are really low," which was quite telling. He began with comparing the expectations that professors held for girls or anyone who did not play football were higher than the ones set for him and his teammates. His perspective is validated by research that shows professors view football student-athletes as having lower academic motivation and less intelligence (Simons et al., 2007). Moreover, he went on to clarify that if the individual was a football player or specifically a black football player, the expectations were even lower. He continued,

> It [expectations] is based on, you know, you know, you're black you're not good enough, they are going to look at you as being, you know, I guess as being illiterate.
>
> **Researcher:**
>
> So what you are saying is that the expectations are based on your skin color rather than who you are?
>
> **Andrew:**
>
> Also, if you are at college, and you aren't here for a sport, and you are black, they expect that he/she has done their work to get here so it is different. Us [football players], they would be like, "They are just here for football," they are going to look at us differently.

He asserted that professors had lower standards and expectations for football players, specifically black football players, but for black students who do not play football, the

professors assumed that they had "done their work to get here so it is different." Therefore, Andrew implied that being a black football player puts one at a disadvantage in the eyes of professors because he did not do the work to get there, he just played football to get there. His statement was contradictory to some extent; he earlier stated that professors saw football players in various ways. However, it appears that with respect to expectations professors' views would change and black football players would no longer be held to the same expectations as other students. Andrew did not see this as a challenge requiring him to prove his literacy competence or worth in the classroom, unlike many of the high-achieving black students in Fries-Britt's (2000) research study, who were seen as not being worthy of the scholarships they received and the undergraduate math and science programs they were admitted into. He did not appear to be concerned about the perspectives of his professors or to feel a need to prove them wrong, although he is aware of the lower general and literacy expectations for black football players.

Andrew did not indicate how he dealt with the expectations of professors, except that he was aware of them and that it depended on the professor. This perception of how others viewed him must have had some effect on him and how he felt about himself and his work, but I did not probe, and Andrew did not discuss any such thoughts. On the other hand, Andrew said more about how he dealt with his coaches' literacy expectations, on and off the field.

The literacy expectations of Andrew's coaches. At the start of this portion of the interview, I had just asked Andrew about his professors' various expectations of him. As we talked, I encouraged Andrew to explain more about the difference, if there was

one, between the expectations on the field and the ones that coaches had for the classroom. Andrew said:

> Well, every player here has been recruited so the expectation is that you are going to play. Off the field they expect to be having fun and they don't expect us to be doing schoolwork.
>
> **Researcher:**
>
> You don't think they expect you to be doing schoolwork?
>
> **Andrew:**
>
> They feel as if we should but they don't feel that we are going to.

He explained, "Every player here has been recruited so the expectation is that you are going to play." So, since most of the players have been recruited then the coaches hope that each individual will play at some point on the field. Conversely, he expressed that coaches' "expect [us] to be having fun and they don't expect us to be doing schoolwork." When I ask my follow-up question, Andrew articulated that coaches "feel as if we should but they don't feel that we are going to." In Andrew's opinion, his coaches' expectations were different on the field and in the classroom. It appeared that the expectations for the field are higher than those in the classroom, a view that is supported by research that found coaches were more concerned with students' staying eligible than with their actually doing well (Benson, 2000). Yet, when it came to literacy expectations, Andrew's perspective was different.

When asked what the expectations of coaches were with respect to literacy Andrew had an interesting first perspective. He stated, "I don't think they care about how literate you are as long as you can play they don't really care. However, I do think

coaches, will judge you off it, and will have expectations off it." His response is intriguing because his perspective appeared to be similar to that of his professors. Andrew indicated that coaches did not care how literate a player is; yet, he asserted that if a player was not as literate as the coach presumed, then he would "judge" the player and base his expectations on that. From Andrew's perspective, a coach initially might not care about a player's literacy, as long as he played well, but if the player did not meet those expectations or the coach perceived the player in a specific way, then the coach's expectations might change. His coaches, much like his professors, only cared about whether he did well in a specific context -- on the field or in their classes; moreover, both judged him by his literacy, whether it was on the field or in the classroom. Therefore, he did not notice that the two perspectives are the same, perhaps because of how comfortable he feels in each environment.

Additionally, I asked whether there were any conflicts between being literate on the field and in the classroom. Andrew's response showed that literacy was important in both aspects of his life but also that he was aware of how to deal with the resulting expectations. Andrew said:

> Well, when, we are on the field. You have this reputation of learning the literacy of the team, the vitality. You are going to talk differently; you are going to be different around them. . . . The literacy is going to be different because of the culture you have with all the guys and the coaches. Um, just because you are around it everyday and you know all that. You are going to take the time [to learn it]. Eventually, it is going to transfer to when you are in the classroom. I guess the way others see you won't be illiterate.

Andrew's answer touched on several aspects: literacy, literacy expectations, and how he dealt with all of these. He spoke about the football field and how one must learn the "literacy of the team," and understand that "You are going to talk differently; you are going to be different around them," suggesting that literacy on the field was based on the team and you are expected to learn and participate in that literacy environment. He added, "The literacy is going to be different because of the culture you have with all the guys and the coaches." Andrew indicated that his football literacy was different from other aspects of his literacy because of the "culture" each team has. Thus he showed his awareness and understanding of how to deal with this environment and the expectations within it. He was aware that literacy in football and literacy in education were both part of his life, but he did not necessarily see connection. He only saw that literacy had importance in both environments. Moreover, he continued speaking about how these literacy skills can "transfer to when you are in the classroom," which further showed that he perceived a connection between the classroom and football, despite his perception of the literacy expectations of both professors and coaches. He concluded that if one can transfer these skills then "you won't be illiterate," and will be able to deal with the expectations of literacy in various aspects of one's life. Consequently, he was not only aware of the expectations but he understood, to some extent, how to handle them in both parts of his life. In the end, Andrew did not shy away from these expectations and understood the importance of his own literacy for his future.

KB

KB is from the southern part of the country and shared that he had had to adjust to the cold weather, the people, and the faster paced lifestyle. He had a full beard, wore his

hair long but still close to his head, and identified as black. In his questionnaire, he indicated that he grew up in an urban area and went to a public high school. KB is a Communication major and declared the major during his first semester of college. The interesting fact that he revealed was that "unlike the stereotypes, I can swim." This comment showed that he did not shy away from mentioning a stereotype that is associated with African Americans and relished the fact that he defied it. On the field, he played defensive end. He liked his "position because it involves contact. I have always been a contact player. I never really liked running too much. I just like to hit. That is how I have always been." He went on to say that his role on the field was to contain the quarterback (i.e., to keep him in his place and try to make sure he cannot throw the ball), to run the line of scrimmage and to stop the other team from running the ball past him. In his freshman year, he did well in school and, as he later confessed, learned about himself and how much he enjoyed reading. In KB's individual interview he asserted:

> I believe I started reading for real when I came to college. Because that is where I learned the importance of reading. I don't know, it was something that just clicked for me. "Okay, all of this time. All learning has ever been is being able to read and be able to comprehend and analyze everything." All it has ever been.

KB did not read before college. As he stated, college had been "where I learned the importance of reading," and he said that was where it "just clicked for me." College, specifically reading in college, had influenced him both as an individual and a learner. This experience and self-actualization can be seen in his discussion of literacy and the expectations of his coaches and professors.

KB's Perception of Literacy

As mentioned earlier, I asked some similar questions in the questionnaire, focus group and individual interview. KB spoke often during the focus group, so I was not concerned that he would not share his opinions. Yet, I was more curious about whether his answers might change or evolve because he was on his own in the individual interview. I began by asking him what literacy meant to him. He responded, "to me being literate is having the ability to read, but to be able to understand what you read, analyze what you're reading and then being able to apply it to your everyday life." This aligned with his answers in the previous parts of the study where he spoke about reading, comprehending and analyzing as part of his definition of literacy. I then asked if his definition went across different fields (e.g., sport, life, communications), his response "yes," and an example followed. He responded:

> Like football, for example. Being literate when it comes to the plays, you have got to be able to read the plays, first of all, so you know what play it is. Um, you got to be able to know what situations the play would be used and then you gotta be able to execute, you got to be able to apply it. So that comes in play with the comprehension, analyses and application.

KB's definition of literacy in football was the same as his general definition of literacy. When he said, "you have got to be able to read the plays," he echoed his focus group teammates' comments that part of being literate on the field was reading the plays and knowing what you need to do. He continued, "you got to be able to know what situations the play would be used and then you gotta be able to execute, you got to be able to apply it. So that comes in play with the comprehension, analyses and application." KB

mentioned all the aspects of literacy (that is, comprehension, analyses, application) he discussed in his earlier definition. Furthermore, by doing so he showed that he not only understood literacy but saw how it applied to multiple aspects of his life and its importance on and off the field. His perception of literacy was further elaborated during his discussion of the expectations of his coaches and his professors.

KB's Multiple Expectations of Literacy

Just as I did in Andrew's individual interview, I explored the expectations that KB encounters in college. KB discussed the expectations of his professors and coaches as well as his own, and how he managed them. He did not complain about these expectations; rather, he embraced them and appeared to enjoy the challenges that he might meet. First, we spoke about the general expectations from professors.

Literacy expectations of KB's professors. KB discussed the expectations that his professors had for him in the classroom. His answers aligned with Andrew's in that he discussed different aspects and perspectives of professors' behaviors rather than presenting a one-sided perspective. However, his personal experiences varied from Andrew's, giving KB another perspective on the expectations his professors hold for him as a student. He indicated:

> I believe they expect a lot. . . I think because I am a college student and they see what I am capable of, like I said about my first paper, they expect me to give my best each time and um, go above average. I shouldn't be on that line of average. I should always been above average in what I do. I think that is what they expect from me.

In his perspective, the expectations that his professors have are the same for everyone and do not differ for him despite the fact he plays football. He believed that once his professors read his first paper, "they expect me to give my best each time and um, go above average. . . . I should always been above average in what I do." KB emphasized that his professors expect him to be above average because of his academic capabilities. He appeared to relish and handle these expectations because he was aware of his own competences in the classroom. Furthermore, he did not perceive himself as being unable to live up to the expectations that have been set for him in the classroom, contrary to the research that shows football student-athletes are usually resigned to their fate or the stigma that is attached to them in the classroom (Simons et al., 2007). KB offers a new attitude and a confidence with respect to expectations in the college setting that is frequently only seen on the football field.

KB did not feel that the literacy expectations held by his professors were any different for him than for another student. Again, he focused on the writing expectations that arise after he submits his first paper. However, this time he briefly mentioned the professors' views before they read his first paper. He claimed,

> I have never run into no bias professor or nothing but you know what I am saying. As long as, until they read my first paper, I don't think they expect very much but after my first paper then they start, the expectations of my writing start to come up. And they expect a lot out of me, once I write my first paper.

KB offered a glimpse into the literacy expectations that might be in place before his first paper has been read, implying that there have been instances in which professors' literacy expectations have been low before they are aware of his writing skills. The perception of

his literacy by his professors was not very high until "after my first paper then they start, the expectations of my writing start to come up." Thus, he believed that the expectations of his professors were raised once they have read something from him or seen his work. The conversation continued when I asked "Are literacy expectations, at the college level, based on your race?"

KB:

Nah, I believe professors, if you are in college they expect you to perform.

Researcher:

So it doesn't matter who you are?

KB:

No, it doesn't matter. And nine times out of ten, it is most likely because they really don't know who you are. I mean your in a big class setting, you are in a big class, they don't know you, you are just a name on a piece of paper.

Researcher:

What about in a smaller class?

KB:

I mean the same. I still think since you're a college kid the expectations are the same.

KB reiterated his earlier point that "if you are in college they [professors] expect you to perform." He further asserted, "No, it doesn't matter. And nine times out of ten, it is most likely because they really don't know who you are. I mean you're in a big class setting . . . they don't know you, you are just a name on a piece of paper." His first reaction was to say it did not matter, but his supporting statement offered a hint that it might be a factor.

But, in his opinion more often than not it was because the professor did not know who the students were as individuals at the start of the semester. Additionally, when I ask if this was the case in smaller classes, he went back to his original point that it did not matter because as long as you are "college kid the expectations are the same." KB did not believe that his professors had different expectations for him, and once they got to know him or his writing, he perceived the expectations as raised. Despite his past assertions that professors have lower expectations of him till they read his paper, he did not want to make the literacy expectations about race since he is confident in his abilities in the classroom setting, just as he is on the field. He was not pressured by these expectations and did not argue with them either, which is intriguing in itself since so many individuals would do so. In the end, KB is sure of himself and his place in the college classroom.

Literacy expectations of KB's coaches. As the interview continued, we moved on to the expectations that his coaches have for him, on and off the field. As we talked, I asked KB to explain more about the difference, if there is one, between the expectations on the field and the ones that coaches have for the classroom. He responded, "I mean, our coaches expect us to excel both on and off the field. They expect us to get grades for the class and produce on the field." His answer differed from Andrew's, because KB believed that the standards are the same in the classroom and on the field. In his perspective, the coaches "expect us to get grades for the class and produce on the field." Yet, when I asked him about the expectations on the field he said, "More so than school they expect us to understand our playbook." Thus, even though he contended that the coaches wanted the players to do well in school and on the field, he thought it was more important to them that the players understand and learn the playbook.

KB further supported his points by showing his knowledge of the NCAA and NAACP and their role in the expectations that are in place. Also, he spoke about how the expectations of his coaches were based on things such as the rules in place to make sure the college football players are not exploited:

> You have to be able to balance both school and um, both school and football. Before the NCAA, no I mean the NAACP came around and enacted the law where you have to have a 2.0 to play sports, black athletes were being taken advantage of, they were coming in and not receiving an education, they were just playing football and being exploited. Being able to get all the way to the NFL, without even knowing how to read, which is unbelievable. But now, we have laws that keep us from going there. You have to have a certain SAT score, you have to have a certain grade point average, to get to this point. So, I mean there are a lot of great athletes that would have made it but would have been great NFL players but never made it because they didn't have the grades or the SAT scores. So nothing is given to us athletes, we actually have to earn it. You know what I am saying? People fighting everyday to just be eligible to play.

KB's assertion was that coaches' expectations today are much higher than years ago. Before laws and standards were put in place, "black athletes were being taken advantage of, they were coming in and not receiving an education, they were just playing football and being exploited." Whereas today, "You have to have a certain SAT score, you have to have a certain grade point average, to get to this point. . . . So nothing is given to us athletes, we actually have to earn it." By giving these examples, he was able to show his knowledge of the standards and how they have become higher and more cognizant of the

treatment of student-athletes from the practice hour rules (20 hours maximum), to the regulations on receiving extra benefits (no gifts over $250), to the minimum grade point average and credit pass rate (2.0 and 9 credits per semester) that have been put in place (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2012). Thus, coaches are more likely to hold the players they recruit to a higher standard in the classroom. Also, he stressed, "People [are] fighting everyday to just be eligible to play." In his opinion, there were players who constantly had to work to make sure they were eligible to play football, making the point that the standards were higher and more difficult than they had been years ago. However, this comment did not appear to apply to him, implying that that he did not have to fight to stay eligible. Yet, KB felt that the literacy expectations of coaches were different from the expectations they hold for their players on the field.

The discussion moved from the expectations of coaches in the classroom to the literacy expectations for players. KB began with the literacy expectations of his coaches. He asserted that coaches' literacy expectations are often not based on an individual's race or economic status but are based on where the player grew up. He contended,

> Yeah, I believe coaches' expectations are a little less . . . Because, not just cause you are black or your economic status . . . . Because they go to your neighborhood, they know where you come from and they know if you weren't excelling in high school, like you should have been. They probably won't expect you to do that well. I don't think they have high expectations. I believe they want you to succeed, at least here, but around the country I don't think that is the case. A lot of times, these coaches make sure you just get your grades, in order for you to play.

KB explained that when coaches recruit players their expectations are based on knowing the neighborhood, the high school, and the grades of a student. He added that since they know this information, "They probably won't expect you to do that well. I don't think they have high expectations." This was different from his earlier comments that the standards had increased for players over the past years. However, he did say, "I believe they want you to succeed, at least here, but around the country I don't think that is the case. A lot of times, these coaches make sure you just get your grades, in order for you to play." So, he believed that at his university the coaches did want the players to succeed in the classroom, but that at other schools that was not the case, and often the coaches are more focused on the student-athlete's eligibility to play rather than their education, a common theme among players (Benson, 2000). Thus, the expectations that he discussed are general to college football but also specific to his university and his experiences. We did not directly address how he dealt with these expectations, but his comments hinted that his university was more supportive than others, that the expectations were not overwhelming, and that he was able to manage them.

KB was conscious of both the literacy expectations that his professors have of him in the classroom and the literacy expectations that his coaches have of him both in the classroom and on the field. Moreover, he did not see much of a difference between the expectations that his professors had for him compared to those they had for his fellow students. However, he contended that his coaches wanted him to succeed both in the classroom and on the field. KB was able to handle these various expectations and situations; specifically, he felt that there might be initial judgments from professors and

coaches, but that once they saw his class work and got to know him, their expectations would be set higher.

Chapter V: Meet the Juniors

Introduction

This chapter takes a closer look at the junior football student-athletes.[12] All of the participants had accrued the credits needed (at least 60) to attain status as juniors. In this chapter I address the following research questions: 1) How do male college football student-athletes perceive literacy, both in the classroom and on the field, based on various social experiences (i.e. school, sports)? 2) How do college football student-athletes see literacy as it pertains to the various aspects of their lives (e.g., football, classroom)? 3) How do football student-athletes see themselves and their multiple literacies, on and off the field? Additionally, I organized this chapter in the same manner as Chapter 4. I begin with a look at the junior student-athletes as a whole (i.e. by qualifying demographics like major, race, etc.) and then more specifically the individuals who took part in the focus group. Then, I concentrate on the junior focus group, sharing quotes from both the questionnaire and the focus group session in the order of the themes. Chapter 3 introduced the themes in the analytic framework based on the qualitative data I collected. Next, I move on to the junior interviewees who offer perspectives on the literacy expectations of both professors and coaches. Lastly, I provide a summary of the findings of this chapter.

Getting to Know the Juniors

Overview

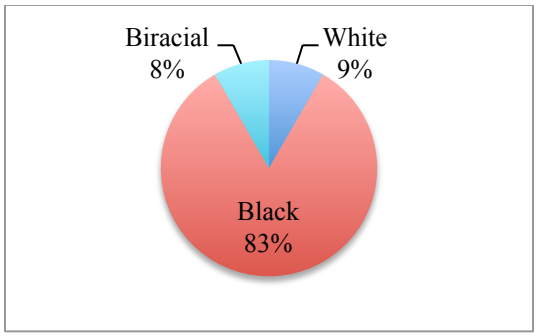
It is important to recognize the junior football student-athletes as a whole before concentrating on the focus group participants. In total, 13 juniors took part in the questionnaire, making the junior class the smallest of the focus groups in this study.

[12] All names have been changed to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Recent coaching changes prompted 25% of this class over the past two years to leave to play football at other Division I or IA schools.

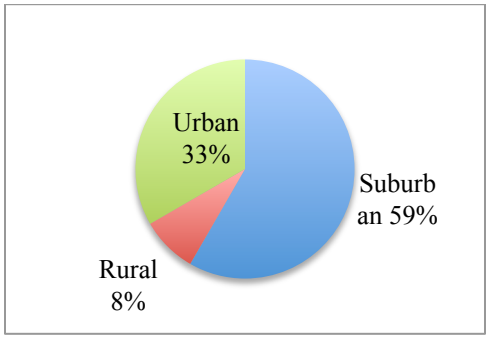
The questionnaire asked the junior student-athletes to identify with a racial group: 83% selected black, 9% chose biracial, and 8% indicated white.

*Figure 5.1: J*uniors identified Race



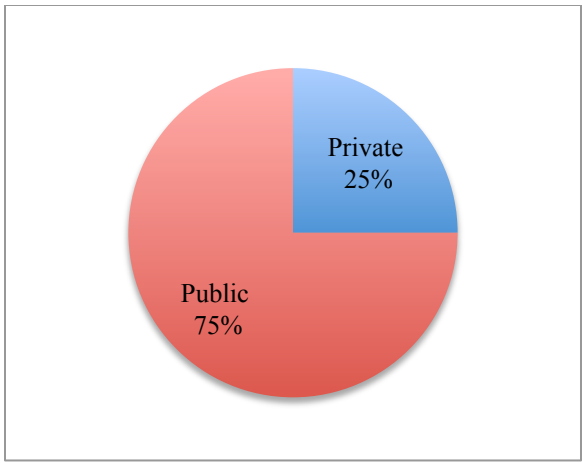
More than half, 59%, checked that they grew up in a suburban area, whereas only 33% indicated an urban area and the remaining 8%, a rural area.

Figure 5.2 : Junior: Where did I grow up?



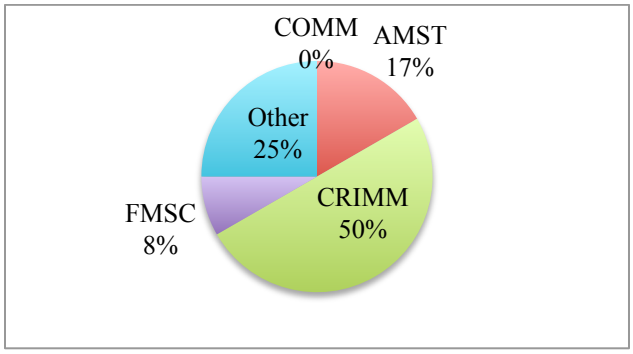
A majority of the juniors, 75%, attended a public school and only 25% attended a private school.

Figure 5.3: Junior High School demographics



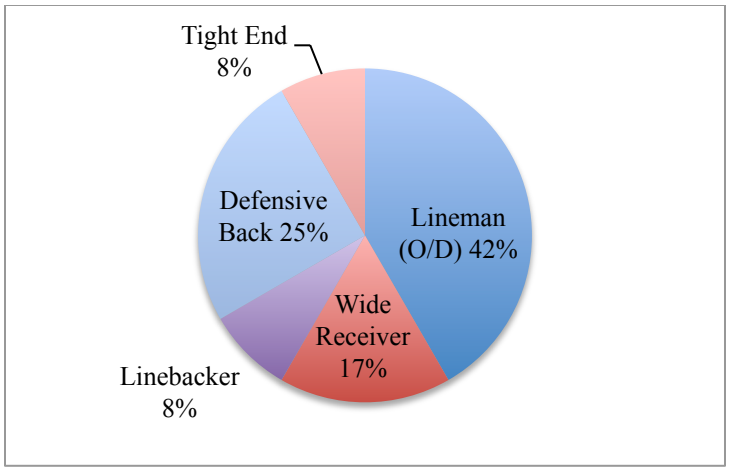
The largest major for the junior class was Criminology (50%), followed by American Studies (25%), other (i.e., Philosophy, Sociology, and Kinesiology), (17%), and Family Science (8%) rounded out the group.

Figure 5.4: Junior majors



Lastly, the junior football student-athletes played the position of lineman (39%), defensive back (24%), linebacker (23%), and wide receiver (15%) respectively.

Figure 5.5: Sophomore player position



Despite the junior class being the smallest, their perceptions offered a great deal of insight into their conceptualizations of literacy.

The focus group. The junior student-athletes had been at the university for three years and played football for at least two years. The university had recruited them to play, and all of the students in the focus group had full or partial- scholarship. A total of five individuals (Dom, Jose, Max, Mackey, and Arnold) agreed to take part in the focus group and all self-identified as black on their questionnaires.

Table 5.1

Senior focus group positions

Name	**Position**
Dom	Lineman
Arnold	Lineman
Jose	Defensive Back
Max	Defensive Back
Mackey	Linebacker

The focus group took place at 4:00 p.m. on a Thursday afternoon at the end of June. All of the participants took part in the entire focus group session. Again, the desks were pushed together to provide a larger table for all the participants to sit around. I sat directly across from the Venn diagram poster (the northwest side of the desks) with Arnold to my right and Dom to my left. Across from me sat Jose and Mackey, and across from Arnold sat Max. Since it was summer, the participants wore t-shirts, sweatpants, and sweatshirts (the building gets cold), most bearing some connection to the university and football. I provided a plethora of snacks for the participants since a majority of them had attended a practice prior or were coming from class and had no time to grab food.

Themes

This portion of the chapter describes the themes I found in the focus group interviews. I begin with the junior football student-athletes and their gendered perceptions of literacy. Then, I move on to how the junior football student-athletes defined and embraced literacy as it related to school. Next, I discuss the junior student-athletes' use of football discourse in literacy events that concern the football field. Last, I consider the junior football student-athletes' perceptions of race and their direct or indirect discussion of the stereotypes that exist in the sport.

Literacy and Gender

The junior football student-athletes' responses to the questionnaire and focus group questions betray their literacy and gender perceptions. In the questionnaire, the junior football student-athletes varied in their understandings of the extent to which gender affected literacy. Also, during the junior focus group conversations concerning reading and educational preferences, the participants explained that they saw males and

females differently (Barrs, 2000), with some who stated they recognized their own stereotyping and/or assumptions in their responses. More specifically, the junior football student-athletes placed emphases on a) gender-oriented text preferences (i.e., males read non-fiction, female read non-fiction/educational), b) gender's impact on literacy, and c) their own reading choices.

Gender's effect on literacy. On the questionnaire, the junior football-student athletes wrote either their initials or their numbers to provide a means of tracking their responses throughout the entire study. The questionnaire data pertaining to the junior participants to the statement, to what extent gender matters when it comes to literacy, ranged from a 1 (strongly disagree) to a 5 (strongly agree).

Table 5.2

Junior Questionnaire Responses: I Think Gender Affects Literacy

Name	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**Somewhat Disagree (2)**	**Neutral (3)**	**Somewhat agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**
	(33%)	(17%)	(25%)	(25%)	(0%)
Dom			X		
Jose			X		
Jonathan		X			
Lawrence		X			
Max				X	
Terrell	X				
Ivan				X	
Mackey	X				

Norm			X		
Arnold	X				
Carl	X				
Nick				X	

In response to the questionnaire, 33% of the juniors chose 1 (strongly disagree) on the scale for the effect that gender has on literacy. Both Mackey and Arnold picked 1. Mackey wrote, "Even though there are stereotypes about gender literacy, it all depends on the person and their effort," and Arnold penned, "It is all about will and determination." Therefore, both asserted that literacy depends on the person, his or her will, and the individual's desire to work hard and succeed, rather than their gender. Only 17% of the football student-athletes chose 2 (somewhat disagree) but no explicit written answers were given. A total of 25% of the participants chose 3 (neutral) on the scale, including Jose. Jose wrote, "I feel as though literacy is based solely on one's educational background," which provided the perspective that education, not gender, has the greatest impact on literacy. Lastly, 25% of the participants chose a 4 (somewhat agree) when it came to the effect gender has on literacy. Max elucidated his reason for this response and noted, "Because some genders have limited opportunity than others." His answer showed that he viewed opportunity based on gender and did not view education and socioeconomic status as factors. Based on the questionnaire answers for the junior football student-athletes, 50% reported that gender did not have a great impact on literacy. However, the perspectives associated with a belief that gender affected or did not affect literacy were clearer when the junior student-athletes spoke in the focus group.

Gender and reading. As part of the focus groups, the junior football student-athletes spoke about literacy and gender in several ways. The focus group conversation began with a discussion of what a male or female, non-athlete, would read. As stated in Chapter 3, one of the activities in the focus group was looking at two pictures, one of a female athlete, Skylar Diggins, and one of a male athlete, Trent Richardson. The objective of the activity was to have the participants look at these athletes as general representations of his or her gender. During the activity, the junior football student-athletes viewed Skylar and Trent as representations of their genders but at other times could not separate their gender from being a student-athlete. Jose and Arnold discussed that they were stereotyping, because either they did not know who these individuals were or had preconceived notions based on what they had heard or seen in the media.

Researcher:

What would Trent read?

Dom:

Sports Illustrated.

Arnold:

I say whatever they want. Are you telling me to assume what they would read?

Researcher:

I'm asking you to take a guess.

Jose:

I am definitely going to stereotype, fan mail, and otherwise he does not have to read.

Mackey:

A workout card (everyone erupts in laughter).

Researcher:

You mean for Trent?

Mackey:

Yes.

Researcher:

Yeah? Okay.

Arnold

I can't . . . I don't know, I don't think I know enough about them to make a guess about the books they read.

Researcher:

It doesn't have to be books; it can be about reading in general.

Jose:

I would go with Dom, sports magazines.

Arnold:

Text messages.

Max:

Twitter.

Dom began with *Sports Illustrated,* a magazine marketed to men. Arnold's question sparked Jose's assertion he was "definitely going to stereotype," and stated that Trent reads fan mail but otherwise chose to read nothing else. His actions implied that he either was uncomfortable with the activity or did not want to be viewed negatively by his peers; therefore, he absolved himself from being called out for stereotyping by preempting and

stating it himself. On the other hand, Mackey joked that Trent would read "a workout card." A workout card has nothing more than a listing of how much weight a player should lift with a specific exercise, along with the required number of repetitions of a specific weight. Therefore, when Mackey stated Trent could not read more than a workout card, he further perpetuated the stereotype or assumption that football players do not have strong enough reading and academic skills to succeed in the college setting (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007). Unlike Jose, who feared stereotyping, Mackey knowingly asserted his comment and embraced the laughter. Arnold emphasized that he did not want to make assumptions about what the two individuals read, contending, "I don't think I know enough about them to make a guess about the books they read." He was uncomfortable guessing what Trent or Skylar might read, which implied he did not want to be seen as someone who stereotyped other student-athletes. Jose continued the conversation and stated that he agreed with Dom that Trent would read *Sports Illustrated* or other sports magazines. Arnold continued with "text messages" and Max asserted, "Twitter," both social media outlets rarely connected with reading preferences. The junior student-athletes knew of Trent Richardson, what he did on the field, and the stereotypes that surrounded him, so they made it evident in their conversation that they had a difficult time being unbiased. Furthermore, aside from the junior football student-athletes stereotyping and joking, they focused on non-fiction texts and non-academic reading material in connection with males. However, when they discussed Skylar, the junior participants viewed her from two different perspectives.

The conversation that surrounded Skylar concentrated on her as a female and as a female student-athlete. I asked the football student-athletes to tell me what they thought Skylar would read. The conversation ensued,

Jose:

She'd probably actually read like real books.

Mackey:

Books . . . novels for sure.

Dom:

She probably actually reads.

Max:

Novels.

Arnold:

I don't know.

Mackey:

She's probably going for her doctorate.

Jose:

I think, about the Sky thing, I think she probably reads a little bit more as far as like whatever her major might be. I think that she would be more serious about her education. I'm completely stereotyping right now.

Jose contended that Skylar probably read real books to which Mackey specified, "Novels for sure." Dom supported them with his comment that "she probably actually reads" and Max joined in with "Novels." Several research studies on males and their reading preferences have documented and researched the perception that females read fiction

more often than males (Barrs, 2000; Kehler & Greig, 2005). The players above agreed that not only did Skylar read for pleasure, she also read for school. Mackey asserted Skylar was "probably going for her doctorate," which showed that he believed that she focuses on her classwork and academics. Jose further contended that Skylar probably read things that pertained to her major, in contrast to his earlier perception that Trent did not really have to read; by stating an assumption that Skylar is more serious about her education than Trent, Jose asserted that females in general, and female student-athletes more specifically, value their education more than their male counterparts. However, he followed his perspective with the caveat, "I'm completely stereotyping right now," which again absolved him from possibly being wrong, sexist, or ignorant of stereotyping. Jose showed his awareness of how his words might make him appear to others. All of the participants indirectly asserted that Skylar would read her assigned readings for school, and novels, for pleasure, which aligned with the perception that females not only read more than males but that their choices are usually fiction and school based (Barr, 2000). Thus, despite not giving specific titles or examples, the junior football players viewed females as more likely to read for school and for pleasure, versus males who only read what they must. Nevertheless, when the junior football student-athlete participants wrote down their own reading preferences on the questionnaire, 73% indicated that they enjoy reading non-fiction texts or topics that interest them.

The questionnaire question, "Do you read books?" elicited intriguing answers from the junior participants. Only 27% wrote that they do not read books, including Max and Dom. However, the remaining 73% provided several examples of what types of books they enjoy reading. Jose wrote that if he chooses to read, he prefers books that

involve "African Americans and history." According to the questionnaire, Mackey read his "course books" and nothing else. Arnold wrote he appreciated "anything that is related to sports" when he chose to read. Interestingly, Jose, Mackey, and Arnold chose books that were often non-fiction, which again supported the research that males tend to read non-fiction texts rather than fiction (Kehler & Greig, 2005). The junior participants also shared their reading preferences as they pertained to the digital world of website and social media outlets. The questionnaire asked the junior football student-athletes if and what type of websites they enjoyed reading. Both Dom and Jose checked that they do not read websites. However, Max wrote he read ESPN.com and Mackey noted he read "tweets." On his questionnaire, Arnold reported that he read ESPN.com, Facebook, Twitter, and Worldsearchhiphop.com, the source for all things related to the hip hop culture scene. Lastly, I asked the participants to write their answers to, "Do you follow anyone on Twitter?" In his questionnaire, Jose marked he had a Twitter account but did not specify following anyone in particular. Dom put an "x" in "no," and asserted that he does not follow anyone on Twitter. Max wrote that on Twitter he only follows "family and teammates." Arnold acknowledged that on Twitter he follows his "family and friends." Also, Mackey wrote that on Twitter he follows, "teammates, friends, and family." While their perception of females' web-based reading choices were not part of the study at this time, it did seem clear that these students found particular choices in web reading widely acceptable for males. In addition, those who participated (67%) in Twitter only follow close friends, teammates, and family. Thus, the junior football student-athletes reported reading websites that interested them and had something to do

with sports, again aligned with the research that boys often read non-fiction and topics that interest them (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004).

The juniors' assertions of their own use of stereotypes illustrated their awareness of stereotyping in general and their resistance to being seen as individuals who operate within or participate in creating these stereotypes associated with gender and reading. Yet, at the same time they inadvertently stereotyped gender text choices and gender's impact on literacy. The results from the junior focus group and questionnaire explained the perceptions the junior football student-athletes hold of literacy in connection to gender and how they viewed females and males as readers.

Literacy and School

This theme further explores literacy and gender, giving more insight into the junior football student-athletes' conceptualization of literacy as it pertains to education and gender. To begin, the participants continued to speak about gender as it relates to which college a female versus a male attended and how females work harder than males in school. Additionally, the junior student-athletes defined literacy and the traits needed to succeed in the college setting. Throughout the study, the junior football student-athletes' comments reflect their awareness of literacy in the context of college and the qualities and skills required to succeed currently and in the future.

Perceptions of literacy, gender, and school. The questionnaire asked the junior football student-athletes to define literacy. The junior focus groups' literacy definitions centered on reading, writing, and communicating. Many of them, based on their definitions, understood literacy as being primarily school-based. Max wrote, "How well you learn to read and write and how well you do those." He included reading and writing

and to what extent an individual did those things effectively. In Dom's definition, "the ability to be able to read and write properly," he too included reading and writing and the particular abilities involved in them. Arnold's definition was consistent with those of his teammates because he asserted literacy is "being able to read and write." Mackey added, "Literacy to me is being able to read, write, talk, and hold a conversation." His definition encompassed reading and writing, but he added speaking but also holding a conversation. Lastly, Jose wrote down, "the ability to comprehend information and apply it to whatever you are doing." He included more complex notions of critical thinking, including comprehension and the ability to apply information in multiple settings. Despite their various ways of defining literacy, the junior focus group participants agreed that reading and writing define literacy, with Mackey, Max, and Jose including communication and comprehension in their definitions.

Lastly, the junior football student-athletes asserted that one's literacy depends on where an individual attended school, and the participants depicted females as working harder in school. When we discussed Skylar Diggins, the junior focus group concentrated on her identity as a female athlete, her education, and the school that she attended, as indicators of her literacy. Jose began the conversation between the junior focus group and claimed Skylar would be more serious about her education, in comparison to Trent Richardson, because she is a female student-athlete. He stated,

Jose:

Yeah, I would assume that she would be a lot more serious about her education than he would because he [Trent] understands that he's probably making millions and millions of dollars while she, like we talked about earlier, the WNBA

(Women's National Basketball Association) doesn't pay like that so she's going to need something to fall back on to support herself, I would assume.

Mackey:

At the same time she's still an athlete too.

Arnold:

Um-hmm.

Researcher:

What does that mean?

Mackey

She could be chilling.

Arnold:

Very true.

Mackey:

Well, sometimes you think like girls, girls who play sports, they take the education more serious than guys. Well, she's in Notre Dame so that is a very prestigious school.

Jose compared Skylar and Trent and each one's emphasis on education and sport. He discussed the amount of money Trent would make when he became a professional athlete versus Skylar, and argued she would work harder in school because her degree represented "something to fall back on to support herself," since professional women's sports are not valued as much as men based on attendance and television viewership (Niven, 2005). Still, he repeated he was "assuming," which showed that he, Jose, did not necessarily agree with these statements or again wished to free himself from appearing to

make inadvertent stereotypical comments. On the other hand, Mackey played devil's advocate and gave another perspective. He stated, "she's still an athlete," and "She could be chillin," indirectly asserting the notion that Skylar, despite being female, could be the stereotypical athlete and be biding her time till she declared herself for the Women's National Basketball Association. Yet, Mackey did go on to support Jose's earlier statement because he argued, "girls who play sports they take the education more serious than guys." Despite his former statement, he too believed that female athletes were more likely to care about their education than their male athlete counterparts. In addition he stated, "Well, she's in Notre Dame so that is a very prestigious school." He used Skylar's school as a marker of value in determining her literacy and her desire to do well in school.

As the discussion continued, Mackey, Jose, and Dom furthered their conversation about the lack of viable professional sports careers for females, which impacted how seriously female student-athletes took their college education.

Mackey:

Like a girl who plays basketball, like if she does go to the WNBA, she won't make as much money as a guy going to the NBA. So like they'll have to take their education more seriously than a guy.

Jose:

I think sometimes . . . of course not all the time but sometimes it creates kind of like an awkwardness between the genders because kind of like what Mackey said; a girl can be very good at her sport and be very athletic and be the face of the school, but then it's like it'll be the end of the road for them because once they

leave college they don't get that same exposure. And sometimes I think that might create envy because they see, you know, guys who maybe they even had a better college career than but they go on and do bigger things and they don't feel like . . .

Researcher:

Because they have those opportunities?

Dom:

Yeah, they feel like it's unfair so they might ease away from sports and start putting their focus in other directions.

Max:

Yeah, I definitely think there's like . . . between the two genders there's definitely limited opportunity. I mean you can just see by like, you can look at the attendance at male sporting events and the attendance at women's sporting events, it's just like what it is. Like people are just not that interested, like in girls' sports, they're like . . . like most of the time . . . It's just like what it is.

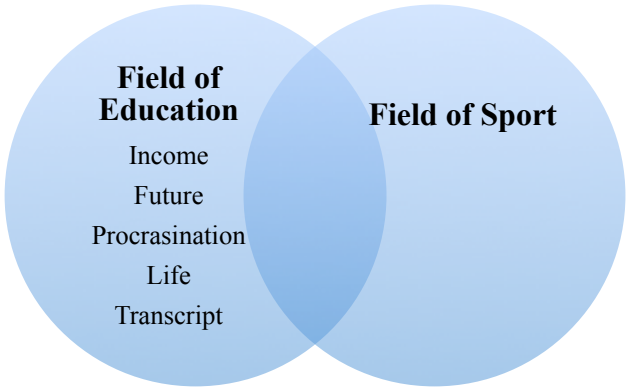
Mackey explained that females who play sports like basketball and go on to professional basketball careers "won't make as much money as a guy going to the NBA." So, in his opinion female athletes "have to take their education more seriously than a guy." Essentially, females do not have the same professional sports and financial opportunities (e.g., various professional sports, money) as their male counterparts. Mackey was correct: for example, the WNBA paid its star players 47% less than their male counterparts (Wertheim, Kennedy, & Deitsch, 2002). Therefore, females would care more about their education, since their sport will not make them enough money to

support themselves in the future. His statements supported his and Jose's previous points. Jose agreed with Mackey and added that a female can be "very good at her sport and be very athletic and be the face of the school, but then it's like it'll be the end of the road for them." In his comments, he demonstrated that the college environment would value women but the professional sports world does not. Additionally, he argued that sometimes during college women with better college careers than their male counterparts might not receive the same recognition, which he believed "sometimes . . . might create envy." In his perspective, this envy created a divide between male and female athletes. It was also obvious that his perspective was very male-centered, but he did not suggest that female athletes have any less athletic talent, but that these differences create a divide between the sexes and sometimes push women to focus more on their education. Dom stated that female athletes might see the situation as "unfair so they might ease away from sports and start putting their focus in other directions." Once a female athlete recognizes her disadvantage, she begins to focus on other things, including her education and earning a degree in order to have a career outside of professional athletics. Max explained that despite other factors, women's sports get less value and respect, giving the example of the lack of attendance at women's sporting events. He finished his comment by repeating, "it's just like what it is," in which he alluded to a system that cannot be changed at this point. Max implied that this was the way things were and that it would not change; thereby he suggested that this is a societal issue and accepted it as the norm. Consequently, the junior focus group students believe that females, specifically female athletes, while they may possess the same intelligence as male athletes, focus more on their education, resulting in stronger literacy skills, because of limited professional

sporting opportunities in comparison to their male counterparts. However, the football student-athletes were aware of the qualities and traits, no matter the gender, that are needed to be successful in education.

Qualities needed to succeed in education. As explained in Chapter 3, in one of the focus group activities, I had the student-athletes write down words they associated with school and place them in the "Field of Education," circle portion of the Venn diagram I created.

Figure 5.6: Juniors: Words for education



During this activity, the participants brought up the qualities, attitudes, and values needed to succeed at the college level and beyond. For example, Mackey explained, "I put income because you're told from a young age that you've got to go to college to have a good job." Mackey asserted his future success requires an education, specifically the money that he would make with a good job. Arnold added, "I picked future, kind of like what Mackey was saying because education can determine the future. In our society, so they tell us." Arnold chose future for the same reasons Mackey did, but he stated society formed this perception of education, which suggested he might doubt its accuracy. Next Max asserted, "I picked procrastination because that's all I did in [high] school,

procrastinate." Instead of focusing on college, Max brought up his high school career, an obvious reference to its impact on his current education. Dom described a domino effect when it came to education: "If you want to live a good life you've got to have an education . . . because so many people without education, without education don't have good jobs or can't support their family." He viewed education as something that would lead him to a good job and the ability to support a family, which he could not achieve without an education. Jose noted, "I picked transcript because that's important. I guess something that schools look at and jobs and stuff." Just as his teammates did, he too saw education as something that would impact his future. The juniors recognized the importance of education to their futures but also they saw it is a necessity. Furthermore, the junior participants viewed education, and the properties that made it up—reading, writing, and comprehension—as major factors in their futures. Therefore, the junior football student-athletes understood the importance of education for one's future and recognized the literacy-based qualities and traits they needed to succeed.

In their questionnaire short answers to "How does literacy play a part in your college education?" the juniors centered their written responses on literacy's constancy in their education and its impact on their future. Arnold wrote that in college, "I read and write in every thing and every day." Arnold used his literacy skills on a daily basis, not just in the classroom but also in all aspects of college. Likewise, Mackey composed, "Literacy is what college is about so to me it plays a huge part." Literacy, in Mackey's words, is the basis of a college education, which implied college depends on 'literacy.'" Max wrote, "Just how to learn some things based on different material," thus he illustrated his perspective that literacy covered all disciplines and aspects of his college

education. Dom noted, "It gives you the opportunity to expand your knowledge and education," indicating that without literacy students couldn't expect to expand their knowledge or their education. Jose penned, "Literacy helps me apply what I learn to everyday life." He saw literacy as something that was a part of his life; literacy allowed him to take his knowledge from various aspects of his life and relate it to all parts of his life. In the end, all of the participants viewed literacy as a major factor in education but also saw its importance to one's college education.

The juniors defined literacy and understood how it played a role in their college education both in their questionnaire answers and focus group sessions. The participants recognized literacy as it pertained to college and their future, and understood the literacy skills necessary to succeed in the college classroom. Yet, the junior football student-athletes' perspectives on literacy, when it came to both education and sports, demonstrated that they saw an indirect connection between academic literacy and football literacy. More notably, the voices and the views that the junior student-athletes shared showed not only their perceptions of literacy in school and the impact it had on their life but also that they are literate despite what graduation rates show (Lapchick, 2010). Additionally, this theme and the examples above demonstrated that the junior student-athletes were literate when it came to school and conceptualized literacy as it pertained to academics.

Literacy and Football

As seen in the earlier themes, the junior football student-athletes are literate. The juniors conceptualized literacy in the classroom but in the context of this theme, they extended their conception of literacy knowledge and skills by using their football

discourse[13] and engaging in literacy events.[14] More significantly, the junior football student-athletes combined literacy events with the discourse of football to speak about their awareness and understanding of the role literacy plays in football. The sport of football is male-dominated and the junior football student-athletes do not speak about gender in the context of their own sport. Thus, this theme builds upon the previous themes by showcasing the literacy skills and knowledge of the juniors when speaking about football, specifically in connection to the plays, football literacy, and players.

Talking on the field: Literacy in football. "Talking on the field," refers to the plays and actions that take place on the football field**.** These actions refer to how the player/players show their skills, abilities, and knowledge of football, through tackles, passes, and blocks. Moreover, along with these physical actions, the ability to communicate and understand, both mental aspects, are a part of it. Thus, "talking on the field," includes the physical and mental actions that make an individual literate on the football field, according to the junior football student-athletes.

The questionnaire asked the football student-athletes what role, if any, literacy played in football. The participants were asked to choose on the spectrum from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 5.3

Junior Questionnaire Responses: I Think Literacy Plays A Role In Football.

[13] "Football discourse" is defined as the language terms, qualities, social identities, and communication used in football (Gee, 1989; Mahiri, 1991).

[14] A "literacy event" is where the comprehension and/ or analysis of a text or oral exchange takes place and an implicit or explicit connection to literacy is made (Heath, 1982; Mahiri, 1991).

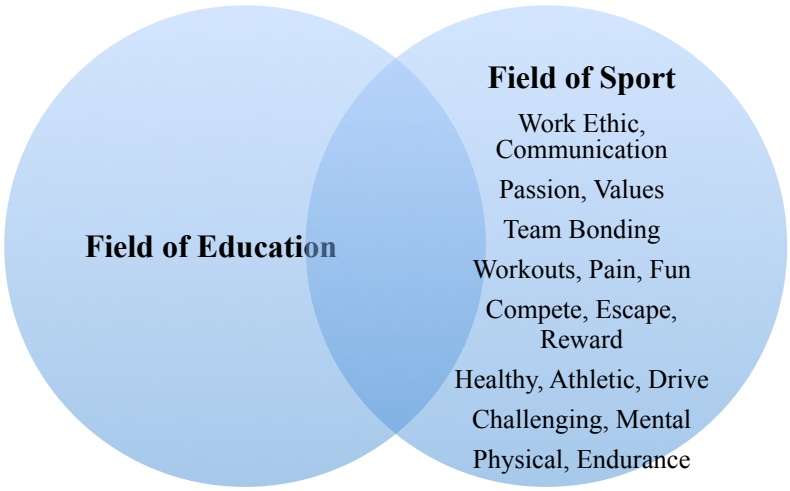
Name	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	(8%)	(17%)	(60%)	(8%)	(17%)
Dom			X		
Jose					X
Jonathan			X		
Lawrence			X		
Max		X			
Terrell			X		
Ivan				X	
Mackey			X		
Norm			X		
Arnold	X				
Carl					X
Nick		X			

Only 8% of the junior student-athletes chose 1 (strongly disagree) on the scale when it came to literacy playing a role in football. Arnold insisted that literacy did not play a role in football. He wrote, "I know plenty of great players that are not literate." From his experience and knowledge, literacy had a minimal role in football. Seventeen percent (17%) of the junior student-athletes chose 2 (somewhat disagree) on the scale, including Max. He asserted, "Because you don't need literacy to listen and call plays but you need to read the plays." Max viewed literacy as it pertained to a portion of the sport but not to

its entirety. A majority of the juniors, 60%, answered a 3 (neutral) on the scale of whether they agreed that literacy played a role in football. Mackey noted, "You don't have to be the smartest person in the world to play football but it does help." Mackey equated being smart to being literate and expressed that literacy had an impact on football. However, 17% of the participants picked 4 (somewhat agree). Jose responded, "You have to be able to comprehend what is going on during the game," which asserted the impact literacy has on football. In his perspective, comprehension was the major influence literacy had on football, specifically during the game. The remaining 8% chose 5 (strongly agree), but no written explanations were provided. Therefore, the juniors perceived literacy in football ranging from not having any connection to comprehension of the game to it being intimately connected to it. Nonetheless, when the student-athletes were asked in the focus group, many of them spoke about literacy's role in football and the answers offered an in-depth view of their perspectives.

Discourse of football. For this part of the chapter, I explore rationales for the choice of words focus group participants had for football as well as football and education. In addition, this section also examines the use of the discourse of football in the explanations and conversations that take place.

Figure 5.7: Juniors: Words for sport



The junior student-athletes had no problems asserting and giving reasons for their choice of words throughout the conversation. From an outside perspective, these words appear simplistic and can apply to multiple settings. Nevertheless, these words show the participants' perspective on football and its related discourse. The juniors did not pick words like football, sport, coaches, or team. They chose words that described the actions and mental challenges of playing football. For example, words like "athletic," "challenging," "compete," "workouts," "endurance," "healthy," and "pain" describe the physical aspect of the sport. On the other hand, "work ethic," "passion," "values," "team bonding," "escape," "fun," and "drive," depict the psychological aspect of the sport. Yet, "communication" was a skill acquired through the sport, and "reward" was something earned for success, possibly one that comes from acquiring and surviving the mental and physical aspects of the sport. The words conjure up thoughts of physical practices and characteristics in connection with the sport. Additionally, these words are simplified versions of multiple views of football, but all are inherently associated with the larger discourse of football.

When the junior focus group participants explained their reasons for the word choices listed above, they showed their academic skills beyond the use of football discourse. Dom, Mackey, Arnold, Max, and Jose shared their reasoning:

Dom:

Just because like you've got have the drive to endure like through pain and through like the tough part. Like physically and mentally you have to be capable of doing certain things . . . . Athletic, you've got to have some type of athletic ability, so . . .

Mackey:

I put team bonding, stuff like that because like when you're part of a team or part of a sport you tend to bond with the people that you're around because you guys are around each other a lot. And I put workouts and pain because you've got to put in the work to be good at that sport.

Arnold:

And then I put passion because when you do a sport you should have passion, you should love it and when you love it things just go right. You love it you work harder than others, that's why I put work, what you've got to do to just be successful.

Max:

Work ethic, because I mean you need a good work ethic to be good at any sport. I mean some people are natural athletes, but like you still need work ethic to be great at it, so that's very important. Communication, I feel like in all team sports you've got to be able to communicate with each other to be effective.

Jose:

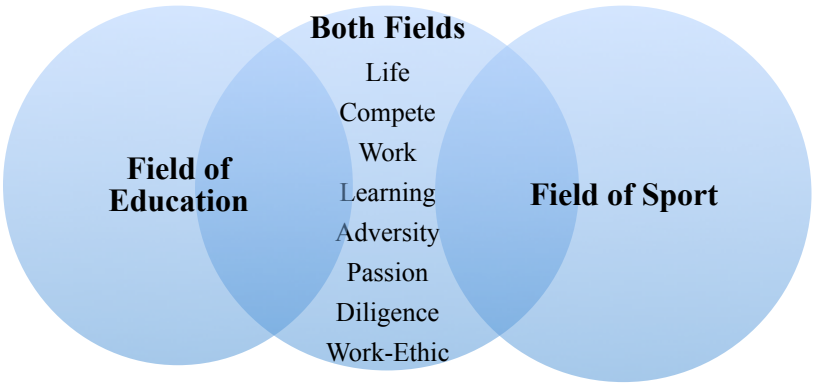
> Well, I put life, I think life and sports go hand-in-hand because they teach you a lot of life lessons, teach you how to deal with adversity and stuff like that, working with other people. I put . . . what else did I say I put? Values. Like I say, you can learn a lot from sports that's not even necessarily you're the best player, but learn how to play certain roles and contribute.

Dom explained one must have the "drive to endure like through pain and through like the tough part," both physically and mentally when it comes to football. He used specific terms such as "drive," and "endure" but also he discussed "pain . . . through like the tough part," affirming his participation through his description of the sport. Additionally, the physical demands of football have become so great that the NCAA, individual universities, and athletic trainers have had to create mandates and rules to ensure the physical safety of players throughout their college careers (Sander, 2011). Dom not only used the words but also painted a picture of the environment in which he participates. Next, Mackey asserted "team bonding" because "you tend to bond with the people that you're around." Team bonding was not a football-specific term but it was an important aspect of team dynamics and the discourse that is often heard in team sports, such as football. Moreover, his other choices, "workouts," and "pain," and his reasoning that "you've got to do to just be successful," conjured up images of athletes working out and practicing to make sure they succeed on the field. These words can be seen as showing his belonging in the sport and seen as an accomplishment of being part of the sport of football. Arnold stated, "passion, because when you do a sport you should have passion," and "you work harder than others." Football players and coaches use the word "passion"

often, especially in discussing a quality that a player must have to become great. Max, just as he did earlier, chose "work ethic," and explained, "you need a good work ethic to be good at any sport," which showed that his words are universal for any sport that one participates. Conversely, his other word choice "communication," connected to his team and his coaches and showed his use of football discourse. He asserted, "You've got to be able to communicate with each other to be effective." Max's choice of words demonstrated his literacy in football through his use of football discourse to show his positions as a player and participate in football. In addition, Jose purported, "life and sports go hand-in-hand because they teach you a lot of life lessons, teach you how to deal with adversity and stuff like that, working with other people." He did not use his football discourse to explain his choice of words but, importantly, he saw football teaching life lessons and skills that he and others needed in the future. His perspective aligned with current research that shows that sports can provide an environment to attain literacy skills (Mahiri, 1991).

I asked the juniors to choose words that they associated with both school and education as part of the same activity described above. The lively, in-depth conversation supplied words that came to the juniors' minds for both circles. The junior participants focused on the qualities and traits that make an individual successful on and off the field.

Figure 5.8: Juniors: Words that overlap for education and sport



Dom started the conversation with his choice of the word life:

> If you want to live a good life you've got to have an education. Just like if you love the sports you play, you can make it like . . . If you want to do that for like a job or you want that to be like . . . part of your life."

He chose life because he associated it with both education and football for him. He explained, "you want to live a good life you've got to have an education," and also you can make football, "like a job or . . . part of your life." He felt both his education and his sport impacted his life; whether his education would help him make a living or football became his life, he expected to need an education—an expectation rarely associated with football student-athletes. Arnold chose "compete" and "work," and asserted,

> I chose compete because at a certain level you have to compete, you have to have good grades to stay in school. And then work because obviously with work, you've got to work to be successful in both.

His word choices show his perspective that in order to play a sport you need grades and literacy skills to stay in college and "you've got to work to be successful in both." From his standpoint, an individual has to make sure that they work hard both on and off the field in order to succeed in either environment. As for Jose, he concentrated on learning and adversity and the importance of those qualities in all aspects of his life:

> I think I put learning because obviously that goes in both. You've got your the game, that's your sports and obviously you've got to have a good education and learning things. And I put adversity because that can go both ways. Obviously if you're in a losing situation or it might be something off, outside of your sport that you're going through that's adversity and the same thing with you'd be struggling in a class or something.

Jose explained that learning is an important part of both football and education, which showed how he saw these two aspects of his life connecting. He argued that "adversity" played a role in both football and education because if "you're in a losing situation," or if you are "struggling in a class or something," you need to be able to move beyond those difficult points and learn from them. His word choice and rationales offer a connection between sports and education, not only the qualities and traits but how they directly and indirectly impact one another. Mackey thought along the same lines as his teammates. He asserted,

> I put work and passion; in the classroom you've got to do work to get a good grade or to get your degree. Same thing on the field, you want to play you've got to put in work. And then passion: you've got to have passion for what you're

> doing, so you've got passion for your sport and you've got passion for you to graduate and get your degree.

Similarly to Arnold, Mackey chose "work" as something that takes place in both places. He explained, "you've got to do work to get a good grade or to get your degree," and if you want to play "you've got to put in work." He also mentioned passion because an individual has to have "passion" to play well and earn an education. In both cases, the value that certain qualities and traits have in the classroom and on the field, bring these two aspects of his life together. Max concluded this portion of the conversation with,

> I said diligence and just work ethic. Because I mean you have to have both, like even though some people might be gifted you have to have work ethic. Like some people are smart but you still have to, like what do you call it, apply yourself and actually do some type of studying and just practice and stuff, so.

Max's word choices showed that he too understood the qualities and traits he needs to succeed both on and off the field. He stated that without work ethic and diligence, no matter one's natural ability, an individual still needs to "apply yourself and actually do some type of studying and just practice." In his perspective, everyone has to study and practice in order to improve because no one can just get by on their natural ability. Thus, he believed a student-athlete in the college setting required those two characteristics to succeed. Additionally, the junior football student-athletes' questionnaire answers reflected their awareness of qualities, values, and attitudes needed to attain success in college, they understood the role that literacy plays in their own college education. These junior student-athletes receive mentoring into the sport and the community environment of the sport. They learn the words, phrases, and language associated with the sport

through constant interaction with their peers and adults, such as coaches. The junior football student-athletes learned the discourse of football not from being taught but from being part of the football milieu, being interactive, having football discourse modeled to them by people such as coaches, and from observing those in power, all of which lent to learning the discourse of their individual sport (Mahiri & Van Rheenen, 2010). Additionally, the junior student-athletes' have stronger, more prominent football identities than literate identities due to the football environment in which they participate and the people (e.g., coaches, teammates) with whom they spent the majority of their time with, both on and off the field. These discussions demonstrated the junior participants' literacy knowledge; moreover, literacy events in which they discussed literacy also showed their literacy knowledge and skills.

The junior football student-athletes used their football discourse throughout other conversations in the focus group session creating several literacy events; furthermore, the participants either implicitly or explicitly discussed literacy's role in the sport. Likewise, the participants examined and discussed literacy in football in more depth during the focus group session. Max began the conversation with his perspective that there is more to football than others might think.

Max:

Because in sports, when you're . . . you have to study. Like sometimes you may have to study your opponent and it's not always just X's and O's, sometimes it's actually words and like you have to know what certain things mean, obviously.

Mackey:

The same. You've got to at least know how to read your playbook, be able to understand what's going on around you.

Arnold:

Like Matt . . . no, like Max said, though, like it's not just X's and O's in all sports, you've got to . . . you know, you've got to be in that position, you've got to . . . you've got to read words. You've got to read what's on like the board. You've got a play, you've got to read that off your card in your mind.

Jose:

Because you can't be good at something without understanding it so if you want to excel either in education or sports you have to be better and have to know what you're doing.

Max argued that football is more than X's and O's (the standard markers for defensive and offensive players in playbooks). He asserted, "Like sometimes you may have to study your opponent . . . sometimes it's actually words and like you have to know what certain things mean." He implicitly addressed literacy in his comments through his use of football discourse by noting that players have to study their opponents, know the discourse of the sport, and know what certain aspects of the sport mean in order to play. Mackey confirmed Max's point when he commented that playing football requires you to "know how to read your playbook, be able to understand what's going on around you." He argued that players have to "read" as part of the sport and comprehend the action around them on the field, implicitly discussing literacy in football through the use of football discourse. Arnold chimed in and added that "like it's not just X's and O's in all

sports, you've got to . . . you know . . . you've got to be in that position, you've got to . . . you've got to read words." He too believed playing football involves reading football and contended that literacy in the sport requires understanding certain words. Additionally, Jose stated, "you can't be good at something without understanding it, so if you want to excel . . . you have to be better and have to know what you're doing." His says excelling in a sport requires understanding it, a literacy component he discussed earlier. He too spoke implicitly about literacy in football through words similar to those he used earlier when defining literacy in school and through his use of football discourse. The juniors showed their ability to analyze a "text," in this case the playbook and football, and their literacy knowledge through their discussion of football's implicit connection to literacy. Despite not all agreeing in response to the questionnaires as to whether literacy plays a role in football, each of the individuals in the focus group stress that literacy does play at least an indirect role in football, whether it be in reading the plays, knowing one's position, and/or understanding the sport.

Just like analyzing the plays. In addition, the junior participants analyzed the video excerpts from *Gruden's Football Camp*[15] and I asked them various questions that pertained to their perception of the video's two quarterbacks. After watching the two video clips, the student-athletes used their football discourse to speak about them. The several literacy events that occurred while the student-athletes discussed the videos showed their football discourse and literacy. Additionally, the junior football student-athletes explicitly addressed literacy, meaning they spoke about literacy and the importance it held, specifically when they examined the literacy of the two quarterbacks.

[15] Refer back to Chapter 3 for more detail.

Moreover, the conversation started with Mackey and Jose, who discussed the quarterbacks as literate individuals and their abilities at that position.

Mackey:

Well I mean for one, they're quarterbacks so they have to know exactly what's going on at all times, they have to be able to read defenses, to be able to speak because they're technically the leader of the team.

Jose:

I think both of them showed that they're literate because, well for the Andrew Luck interview, he had somebody play who was able to go up on the board and draw and explain what's going on. And as far as the same thing with RGIII, ask them what was going on the field and RGIII diagnosed it and said why they did what they were doing.

Mackey used his football discourse, literacy skills, and knowledge to discuss the quarterbacks in the video. He asserted that both quarterbacks "have to be able to read defenses, to be able to speak because they're technically the leader of the team." His use of "reading the defenses," "able to speak," and "leader of the team," showed his use of the discourse of football to analyze the video, creating a literacy event. Yet, the use of these terms in connection with another player comprises the full literacy event. Jose continued the discussion and asserted the literacy abilities of both RG III and Andrew Luck. He stated that Luck showed his literacy when he "was able to go up on the board and draw and explain what's going on." He followed with support for RGIII's literacy and explained, "the same thing with RGIII, [Gruden] ask them what was going on the field and RGIII diagnosed it and said why they did what they were doing." Jose used

"diagnosed," as a key term in his explanation. By using this word, he pointed to RGIII's ability to look at the field and assess the play and analyze it, which showed RGIII's literacy but also showed Jose's literacy. He dissected the video and supported his assertions by using the video as "text." He read the video in order to analyze it and support his perspectives, much like what RGIII did in the video, all of which created a literacy event that included him as well as his teammates. As the exchange moved forward, Dom emphasized, "They just talk with confidence and they know what they're talking about," in support of the literacy of both quarterbacks. He used the discourse of football to equate literacy with confidence and knowledge of the sport. Arnold continued, "And they weren't like mumbling or anything, just like speaking loud and clear so everybody can hear them." To him the quarterbacks were literate because they spoke clearly so that everyone could hear and understand them. The players did not mumble or mince their words, which in his perspective made an individual literate. Lastly, Max declared,

> Some people probably predicted that they [the quarterbacks] wouldn't be able to speak well, be able to talk, like understand. . . . Because basically what he's [Gruden] trying to do is trying to get in their heads, trying to see if he can confuse them or make them uncomfortable or like make them feel unconfident in what they were doing. So for them to be able to catch on to what they were talking about just shows they're not typical jocks.

Just like his counterparts, Max analyzed and discussed the video. He argued, "Some people probably predicted that they [the quarterbacks] wouldn't . . . be able to talk." By starting this way, he showed that he recognized how others might see these players and

their ability to speak, specifically their aptitude in using correct discourse and communication skills. He continued by analyzing the host and his motives. Max claimed what Gruden's "trying to do is trying to get in their heads, trying to see if he can confuse them or make them uncomfortable," a tactic, he contended Gruden hoped would make the players unsure of themselves, leading them to make mistakes or display traits stereotypically associated with football. He continued that the quarterbacks' abilities to "catch on to what they was talking about just shows they're not typical jocks," which implied that these individuals do not fit the mold of the stereotyped athlete. Moreover, he participated in another literacy event and conveyed his perception of the video by finding examples that support his "reading" of the text. Max's analysis of the video exemplified his literacy-based capability in breaking a text down while using support, demonstrating his literacy skills and knowledge. The junior football student-athletes' analyses of the video demonstrated their use of football discourse, their specific literacy skills, and their ability to take part in literacy events where they displayed their ability to comprehend and analyze the "text" and address literacy.

Literate Perceptions of Race

This theme draws on the junior football student-athletes' perceptions of race both in the questionnaire concerning the effect race has on literacy and the conversations in which focus group participants discussed, participated in, or alluded to stereotypes that exist in the sport.[16] The participants use their literacy skills and the discourse of football to discuss the stereotypes that they believe people hold about players. Moreover, race

[16] For this paper, I define stereotypes as "over-exaggerated truths" that society often attributes to an entire group (e.g., race, religion, gender, sport, Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 516).

plays a greater role than gender in the football environment because the student-athletes addressed race in their answers to questions about literacy as well as when they discussed football, specifically players and player positions. Consequently, the football student-athletes use their literacy knowledge in connection with discussing how race plays a role in football. However, only some participants directly addressed race and stereotypes (Fries-Britt, 2000), which meant that they clearly stated the stereotypes were based on race and not on the position. Likewise, very few students critiqued the sport's stereotypes from their position as a player, showing their perspectives and comfort level with them (McIntyre, 2002). As stated in Chapter 4, this theme builds upon the previous three and expands the junior football student-athletes' perceptions of literacy that are based on literacy, race, and stereotypes.

The screen: Race as a factor. During a play, a screen is used to hide the receiver in order to fool the defense into thinking the quarterback will do one thing when in fact he will do another. The junior football student-athletes have the knowledge and skills to recognize a screen on the field just as they do the role race plays in football. Despite a screen being set up, race is recognizable to those who participate and the juniors freely discussed the role race plays on the football field, during the questionnaire and focus group session. The questionnaire asked the junior focus group to what extent they thought race affected literacy. Once more, the student-athletes were asked to choose a degree of agreement or disagreement with the aforementioned statement.

Table 5.4

Junior Questionnaire Responses: I Think Race Affects Literacy.

Name	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**Somewhat Disagree (2)**	**Neutral (3)**	**Somewhat agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**

	(42%)	(8%)	(17%)	(25%)	(8%)
Dom				X	
Jose	X				
Jonathan				X	
Lawrence		X			
Max				X	
Terrell	X				
Ivan			X		
Mackey	X				
Norm			X		
Arnold	X				
Carl	X				
Nick					X

Of the questionnaire participants, 42% contended that race did not affect an individual's literacy and chose a 1 (strongly disagree) on the scale. Arnold, Mackey, and Jose, all of whom self-identified as black, gave reasons why they chose 1 and had these perceptions. Arnold supplied a resolute written response: "Race never matters." He simply affirmed his opinion that race makes no impact on any aspect of one's life. Mackey wrote, "Once again there are stereotypes about literacy and race but that [literacy] all depends on the person." He briefly mentioned people hold stereotypes associated with literacy and race, but further contended that one's literacy depended on the individual. Jose penned, "Race has nothing to do with literacy. It has more to do with the kind of education you

receive." He agreed with Arnold and Mackey but argued that education makes the crucial difference when it comes to literacy. Only 8% of the junior participants chose 2 (somewhat disagree) and none of the focus group participants did. Dom, who identifies as black, agreed with the 17% of the participants who chose 3 (neutral) on the scale. However, Dom did not elaborate in his questionnaire answer, though he later gave an explanation in the focus group session. Max, who identifies as black, like 25% of participants as a whole, chose a 4 (somewhat agree) on the scale. He wrote, "Yes, because certain races have limited literacy—sometimes depends on your color." In Max's perspective race was a factor in literacy and he implied minorities, such as blacks or Hispanics, might have limited literacy because of their skin color. Lastly, only 8% of the juniors chose a 5 (strongly agree) on the scale but none of the focus group participants fell into this category. Overall, the juniors had different perspectives on the effect that race has on literacy in their questionnaire answers but expanded their perceptions when they discussed the impact race has in the college setting.

Awareness of the coverage: Race in football. Football players are constantly aware of their opponent's location on the field, in order to block them, tackle them, or make sure the other team does not gain any ground toward a touchdown. Just as the junior participants understand where their opponents are on the field, and they anticipate the next move, they also were aware of stereotypes, specifically concerning race, in the sport of football. The junior football student-athletes players either directly or indirectly[17] described how race affected literacy in education and on the football field.

[17] I use a "direct statement of race" to mean a straight connection to literacy with the use of the word or an allusion to it. An "indirect address of race" connects race to literacy without directly referencing literacy.

Arnold:

Because if you look at it, if you look at it, it's a lot of . . . it's a lot of African Americans that's . . . And this is just how society has made it, they rely on . . . they rely on sports more than education.

Researcher:

Sports more than on education?

Dom:

That's the only way out.

Arnold:

That's their only way out.

Researcher:

So it is the only viable option?

Dom and Arnold:

Yes.

Dom:

Like say if you come out of high school, you know you're not the smartest person, like the smartest kid on the football team but you know you have good talent on the football field, so therefore you can look to football as your way for college. So . . .

Arnold addressed race first, saying, "African American's . . . and this is just how society has made it . . . they rely on sports more than education." He directly linked race to stereotypes and to the way that many individuals felt about the connection between sports and education. Dom added, still referencing African Americans, "That's the only way

out," then Arnold reiterated and rephrased, "That's their only way out." Research backs Dom and Arnold—African Americans view sports as their avenue for social, geographical, and educational mobility (Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010). Dom explained, "Like say if you come out of high school, you know you're not the smartest person . . . but you know you have good talent on the football field, so therefore you can look to football as your way of college." He did not explicitly tie this mindset to race, but his earlier comments suggest "you" here meant African Americans.

As the conversation went on, the participants focused on the stereotypes of black males on the campus they attended.

Max:

I just think that as a male, as a minority male, I feel like most people look at you in the sense that oh, he's probably more . . . He's probably here to play sport or like . . . like especially at a campus like this or like any, any campus that's not an HBCU [Historically Black College or University], really, like most . . . You see a physical specimen you're going to think . . . And they're a minority, you're going to think . . . you're going to think they're here to play sports.

Mackey:

I just think that's just a natural stereotype that you'll be walking around with no stuff on and like people will be like, oh, he plays . . .

Dom:

Plays sports.

Max

Yeah, he plays this or that. So I mean I think it's just how society is, like it's just

taught. It's just like stereotype . . . Everybody says stereotypes are bad and whatnot, but it's just how it is and how it's probably always going to be.

Arnold:

Agreed.

Max discussed race: "As a minority male . . . I feel like most people look at you in the sense that oh . . . he's probably here to play sport." He asserted that on his campus people assume he plays sports because he's black and male. He continued, "You see a physical specimen you're going to think . . . And they're a minority, you're going to think . . . you're going to think they're here to play sports even though it's like." Max's use of "physical specimen," directly addressed the stereotype associated with race and the physical ability of black males, placing his comment in the context of history, specifically how blacks were seen during slavery, and how that is perpetuated in the media (Buffington, 2005). Therefore, he believed black male students were mistaken for football players and presumed to be on campus "to play sports," and not for an education. Mackey joined the conversation and added that Max referred to a "natural stereotype," normalizing the stereotype. This comment disturbed me since a stereotype cannot be "normal," however often repeated. But, as Bruce (2004) contends if the stereotype is "embedded in everyday practices of televised sports," it becomes covert and acceptable to many individuals (p.861). Mackey indirectly discussed race, commenting on the thinking of a majority of his peers and the college community. Moreover, he did not indicate whether he agreed with this stereotype but through social commentary implied that society has constructed his fellow students' views. Dom appended that the stereotype was that black males at the school are only there to play a sport, thereby directly speaking

about race and its impact on his college campus. Max concluded this portion of the discussion by asserting, "it's just how society is . . . like, it's just taught." He continued, "Everybody says stereotypes are bad and whatnot, but it's just how it is and how it's probably always going to be." His words showed that he might not agree with the stereotype but acknowledged its pervasive existence. Essentially, in his opinion, the stereotype might persist forever. The student-athletes directly and indirectly discussed stereotypes as they pertained to their college experience asserting that race plays a role in how they are perceived. While the participants did not necessarily see race as playing a role in football, they identified it as a major factor in perceptions of and stereotypes surrounding black males on their college campus. Yet, race and stereotypes later became a topic in connection with literacy in the focus group session.

Race and the quarterback position. As we moved into the video excerpts from *Gruden's Camp*, featuring Andrew Luck and Robert Griffin III, the juniors further analyzed race and stereotypes as they pertained to the quarterback position. The junior football student-athletes directly addressed race as an aspect of the stereotypes associated with football and considered whether Luck and Griffin played into those stereotypes. In addition, the juniors used their football discourse to examine the stereotypes that they encounter in the sport. The conversation began when I asked the junior focus group participants to identify a few general stereotypes that were associated with football.

Jose:

Running quarterbacks can't throw.

Dom:

The black players are more athletic than white.

Mackey:

Bigger is better.

Max:

Jocks.

Arnold:

Like when they talk about white players they talk about yeah, he's a great technician.

Jose asserted that one of the stereotypes in football is that "Running quarterbacks can't throw." Dom's stereotype centered on race when he declared, "The black players are more athletic than white." Mackey expressed a physical stereotype and quipped "bigger is better." Max chose a general stereotype of football players when he stated, "Jocks." Lastly, Arnold, just as Dom had, chose a racial stereotype. He argued when the media or coaches speak about white players, "they talk about yeah, he's a great technician," and do not focus on his athletic ability. Race orients these stereotypes race that players and fans associate with the sport and with the disproportionate number of racial minorities in specific positions, such as whites in the quarterback position (Buffington, 2005). Additionally, the junior student-athletes demonstrated their use of football discourse again through their discussion of these stereotypes. They used the words and phrases associated with the sport to speak and analyze the sport from various perspectives. The dialogue continued with the participants' further addressing stereotypes seen in football.

Max explained he thought stereotypes of football players as poorly educated stemmed from their public appearances. He asserted,

> I mean I feel like sometimes it's like . . . I feel like sometimes it's just natural for people to think like when you see guys get ready . . . like big, big football players get ready to get onto the podium and speak, like some people are just like waiting to see what they're going to sound like because a lot of them may have learning disabilities and things like this, so they may be stumbling over the words and not being able to say big words and so they just . . . It'll sound almost childish what they're saying and stuff. So a lot of people like are anticipating that but then when RGIII, like they were surprised when he wasn't like that. So like that's just how it is.

In his opinion, it was "natural for people to think," some of the things that he brought up as part of the conversation. He stated when some of these football players go up to the podium to speak after a game people expect a performance that suggests poor literacy. His understanding of stereotypes as "natural" showed the stigma found to be attached to the sport and the racial undertones perpetuated in the media and by players, fans, and coaches (Simons et al., 2007). He explained, "like some people are just like waiting to see what they're going to sound like because a lot of them may have learning disabilities and things like this." He went on to say sometimes these players are "stumbling over the words and not being able to say big words. . . It'll sound almost childish." He believes this happens often but does not necessarily have anything to do with race. However, he gave the example of RGIII, rather than the white and equally well-spoken Luck, saying people "were surprised when he wasn't like that," subtly addressing race as a factor by choosing a black player. His final comment, implies that society may always view black quarterbacks and black football players in general as poorly educated, a common

perspective that has been researched and documented in the sport of football (Mercurio & Filak, 2010). Yet, earlier he stated that Gruden's failure to trip up these two quarterbacks showed their literacy. Jose read the interviews with a different perspective:

> If you remember like right after RGIII had that interview people were just . . . Instead of saying . . . I mean like I guess I'm saying people were acting like he wasn't supposed to be smart and that was like the highlight of his interview, people were saying, "Oh my God, RGIII is so intelligent. Like we knew he was fast, we knew he was athletic but we didn't know he was smart." So that just shows you, like why didn't they say that about Andrew Luck? So I think . . . That's what I mean when I say race still plays a role in sports.

Jose indirectly addressed race when he spoke about RGIII and people's perceptions of him prior to his interviews. He pointed out that in RGIII's first interview, people "were acting like he wasn't supposed to be smart." Likewise, he asserted that after the interview people said, "RGIII is so intelligent. Like we knew he was fast, we knew he was athletic but we didn't know he was smart." To this Jose contended, "So that just shows you, like why didn't they say that about Andrew Luck?" He indirectly stated that race was a factor in the perceptions that people had of RGIII, a black quarterback, and his intelligence compared to Andrew Luck's, a white quarterback. It is not until the end his commentary that he directly named race as a factor: "That's what I mean when I say race still plays a role in sports."

Max discussed race as a factor in the perception of RGIII and Andrew Luck and examined how the two quarterbacks were portrayed and talked about in the media. Jose participated in the conversation in order to add to Max's points.

Max:

Yeah, just like he was like oh, Andrew, quarterback, he's white, he's a quarterback, he can lead the defense . . . I mean, he can lead your team, he can read defenses, he's intelligent, he can diagnose stuff but RGIII, oh he's just a running quarterback, he just drops back there and then if he doesn't see an opening he just runs. So I don't know, that's . . .

Jose:

I'd like to say just thinking back on what he said, I think a lot of times like in any sport you often hear like black players being referred to as he's just a freak, he's an animal, he's just a beast on the field. But when you hear them describe the Caucasian players they'll say, "He's a great . . . he's a great technician. You know, look at his mechanics," and stuff like that, it's attributed to his work ethic and stuff like that. When they're saying that the black people who are good, they were just born with it, you know?

Max directly addressed race when he spoke about different perceptions of Andrew Luck, and RGIII. He identified stereotypes in the perception of the two quarterbacks in connection with their abilities on and off the field, which is seen as a biased and the larger issue of race in the sport of football (Niven, 2005). He believes people view Luck as someone who "can lead your team, he can read defenses, he's intelligent, he can diagnose stuff," but RGIII as "just a running quarterback, he just drops back there and then if he doesn't see an opening he just runs." These perceptions reflect the media's portrayal of quarterbacks based on their race, not their actual ability on the field (Mercurio & Filak, 2010). Jose agreed with Max and gave specific examples of

perceptions of black and white football players. He asserted that black players get "referred to as he's just a freak, he's an animal, he's just a beast on the field." Whereas white players get described as "He's a great . . . he's a great technician . . . look at his mechanics and stuff like that, it's attributed to his work ethic and stuff like that." The junior student athletes conveyed the stereotypes of black players as naturally athletic and white players as intelligent; research shows the mainstream media perpetuate these stereotypes (Mercurio & Filak, 2010). Both Max and Jose directly discuss racial stereotypes that they encounter in the sport of football. Moreover, they do this with the use of the discourse of football. Yet, neither of the players directly challenged these stereotypes, though they clearly disagree with them.

Jose and Max concluded the dialogue with the argument that the media imposes these stereotypes on players. Max stated that RGIII should shift the stereotypes but he saw no evidence of their weakening.

Jose:

I think a lot of it has to do with how much pressure has been placed on them from the media and the comparisons made to people who come before them. So it's not something that's new, I think it's the same stereotype that's been going on for a long time; it just happens every generation.

Max:

I mean you would think they would have a positive effect on other minority players and minority quarterbacks especially, just because I feel like that position is . . . There are certain positions on the field that you would think either Caucasians or minorities should play and that's when you have someone who's

different and who's actually good at it it's like sort of a big deal. And since he's not just a typical . . .

Jose believed that the two quarterbacks conform to particular roles because of media portrayal. He recognized "how much pressure has been placed on them from the media and the comparisons made to people who come before them," implying that they might not actually be this way but the media was making them appear this way. Moreover, "It's the same stereotypes that's been going on for a long time, it just happens every generation," so in his opinion nothing has changed. This comment suggested that he did not agree with the stereotypes but did not challenge them, because "it just happens every generation" which is confirmed in research that has explored the historical nature of the stereotypes that exist in the sport of football (Niven, 2005). His comment suggested the stereotypes do not bother him. Max asserted, referring to RGIII and others like him, "you would think they would have a positive effect on other minority players and minority quarterbacks." But then he went on to state, "There are certain positions on the field that you would think either Caucasians or minorities should play and that's when you have someone who's different and who's actually good at it it's like sort of a big deal." Yet, he believed that despite RGIII potentially breaking the mold of the stereotypical black quarterback, people still expect black quarterbacks to be poorly educated. Jose and Max do not address race in their statements but they purported that the stereotypes persist and even if an individual breaks the mold or the stereotype, people still see the race and players in certain ways.

The next section presents the interviewees. The focus group themes give an overview of the conceptualizations of literacy in the various aspects of the junior football

student-athletes' lives. Moreover, these conceptualizations help explain where and how players formed them and the role they play in the expectations student-athletes encounter on and off the field. The interviewees offer insight into the literacy expectations coaches and professors hold for the junior football student-athletes. This individual perspective sheds light on what these expectations mean for them on and off the field.

I address my fourth and final research question, "How do football student-athletes characterize and deal with the expectations of literacy held by coaches, themselves, college instructors, and university classrooms?" through the interview data from both Arnold and Mackey.

Introducing the Interviewees

Arnold and Mackey communicated and explained the various expectations they encountered both on and off the football field. In particular, they focused on the literacy expectations of their professors in the classroom and their coaches' literacy expectations in the classroom and on the field. Therefore, in this portion of the chapter, I address my final research question: How do football student-athletes characterize and deal with the expectations of literacy held by coaches, themselves, college instructors, and university classrooms?

Each section below begins with a brief overview of the interviewee, in order to get to know each of them in more detail. Then I comment briefly on Arnold's perception of literacy in school and on the field. Next, I move into Arnold's perceptions of the literacy expectations his professors and coaches hold for his performance on and off the field, and how he handles them. I provide excerpts from Arnold's interview that show his opinions in order to give a richer and more detailed view of his conceptualization of

literacy. Then, I will summarize Arnold's perspectives. Next, I speak briefly about Mackey's perception of literacy in school and on the field. Then, I move on to Mackey's perceptions of the literacy expectations his professors and coaches hold, on and off the field, and how he handles them. I provide excerpts from Mackey's interview that show his views in order to give a richer and more detailed understanding of his conceptualization of literacy. Lastly, I summarize Mackey's perspectives.

Arnold

Arnold grew up in a suburban area and attended a private high school. Arnold's has a full beard and a short well-kept Afro and identifies as black. On the field, he plays defensive end, the position he played in high school and was recruited to college to play. He enjoys his position because,

> I get to be the aggressor. I feel like I get to impose myself on somebody else. Which, I know, I translate a lot of negative energy off the field onto the field. Because I am able to do that, it makes me good at my position.

Arnold asserted that the stereotypical individual who plays his position "are usually tall, fast, [and have] long arms." However, he was a little above average height (6'0") and defined his body type as compact. He also stated, "Because people have told me . . . that the position that I am playing now, I am too small for . . . and for everything they told me that I would or wouldn't be able to do, I have been able to do." He asserted that he could play his position and play it well. A doctor diagnosed Arnold with sleep apnea in high school and he says he "can sleep for two whole days without getting up out of bed." He majors in American Studies with a minor in African American studies. He stated he enjoyed reading but did not consider himself a reader. Arnold enjoys discussing society

and the impact it has on his life; moreover, he enjoys participating in conversations but his fellow players see him as long-winded.

Arnold's Perception of Literacy

I asked all the participants to define literacy**.** Arnold earlier asserted that literacy meant, "Being able to read and write." When I asked what it means to be literate in the interview he responded,

> Being literate means to do and know how to read and write no matter what it is as long as you can read or write. 'Cause like when people say you are illiterate, I say, when it comes to French I am illiterate. I can't read French, I can't write it. But when I say or people say Spanish, I say, I am literate because I can read and speak Spanish.

His definition did not change much from the questionnaire; he expanded it by comparing literacy to illiteracy. Furthermore, he supported his perspective by giving the example that since he cannot read, write, or speak French, he is illiterate in that language. Yet, he can read and write Spanish so he considered himself literate in that language. As the interview continued, I asked, "Does literacy play a role in your life?" He said literacy is part of everything he does.

> Because, it is all around you. Everyday, all the time. Like I said, the ability to read and write, sometimes comprehend and understand. And like I was saying earlier, with you, when we did that activity [the focus group], a couple weeks ago, you play football, you have to be literate. That is literacy. You have to read the plays on your card. You have to be able to dissect plays and player tendencies and stuff like that. That is literacy right there. That is comprehension right there.

> It is showing that you understand. And then, it makes it easier for you, just like anything else, if you read more, if you take more notes for class; it makes it easier for you. Game time is test time for us. That is why games are always easier than practice.

Arnold explained that literacy plays a huge role in his life. In his opinion, he uses literacy everyday and in every aspect of his life. He restated his definition that literacy is the ability to "read and write, sometimes comprehend and understand." Moreover, he declared that if you play football you have to be literate, thus connecting his definition of school-based literacy to football. Arnold asserted, "in football you have to read the plays on your card. You have to be able to dissect plays and player tendencies," which showed his understanding of literacy and how he saw its application to the sport of football. Additionally, Arnold stated that if an individual can comprehend and understand football, they are football literate, which "makes it easier for you, just like anything else." Thus, he furthered demonstrated the role and his perspective of how literacy plays into the sport of football. He ended his point stating, "Game time is test time for us. That is why games are always easier than practice," punctuating that what one does in practice makes the test of the game easier. Essentially, he addressed the importance of literacy but pointed out that all of the things that one does in practice, in connection to literacy, comes out and shows on game day, resulting in success. His perception of literacy in college and his perception of literacy in football are not separate; rather he applied the same definition and thought process to both. Arnold connected the academic and athletic literacy in his life together to show how one impacts and influences the other.

Arnold's Multiple Expectations of Literacy

I explored the expectations that Arnold faced and confronted in college. Arnold discussed his management of his own expectations, his professors', and his coaches'. This discussion provided insight into Arnold's own perceptions of literacy on and off the field. He did not complain about the coaches' and professors' expectations'; rather he embraced them and appeared to enjoy the challenges that he encountered.

Literacy expectations of Arnold's professors. Arnold discussed his perspective on his professors' general expectations and literacy expectations:

> Professors see college football players, actually it depends, on like, I will give you different perspectives. . . . One perspective is that they see okay, we got this athlete in my class who just doesn't care about academics, all he cares about [is] meeting the requirements so he can play whatever sport that they play.
>
> **Researcher:**
>
> So you said some see you that way and then others see you how?
>
> **Arnold:**
>
> Other professors see us as, they respect what we do and they understand that it ain't easy being a student athlete. And it is hard to juggle both so they because of their respect and they try to understand, they work with us and they try to see us for more than just athlete and even a student. Sometimes they like to see us as persons, as people, and I know that there are professors out there today that like to see us succeed as people so they help us out and I like professors like that.

Arnold began by identifying two different perspectives that professors might have about football players. The first perspective is "this athlete in my class who just doesn't care about academics, all he cares about meeting the requirements so he can play whatever

sport that they play." Research shows football student-athletes often perceive professors this way (Benson, 2000). Other professors, he contended, "see us as, they respect what we do and they understand that it ain't easy being a student athlete . . . they try to see us for more than just athlete and even a student. " This opposite perspective reflected experiences that positively impacted Arnold's perception of professors and the literacy expectations they hold. He added how much he likes the professors who care:

> I mean they give you like words of encouragement, they let you know they support the sport that you play, and even if they don't even know about it, they try to learn, they just engage in conversations other than football, they just make us feel good. Like even if we are down or like say we have x amount of time to do something, they might work with a time that accommodates us so that we can get it in, quality work and as long as you put in quality work.

Arnold stated several ways that professors have supported him through encouragement, engaging in conversations with players and did not speak about football. Essentially, if a professor spoke to a football student-athlete about something other than their sport they betrayed a sense that the student is more than a football player—also a student. He went on that these types of professors care about the quality of work that the football student-athletes turn in and adjust deadlines to support quality work. I found Arnold's perspective on his professors' expectations of football players interesting because he purported that professors that care about the players spoke to them about things beyond football but at the same time understand athletes' time constraints. He wanted professors to treat him like a college student, not stereotyped as a football student-athlete, but at the same time he wanted to be respected for playing football and all the work that goes into

being a student-athlete. Despite his obvious liking of one type of professor over another, Arnold offered two different perspectives on the literacy expectations of his professors.

Arnold felt his professors held more negative literacy expectations than overall expectations. He again referenced two perspectives about professors' literacy expectations but believed that one often overrides the other, noting,

> Well, I would say that in my case, from what I have seen from my experience is kind of, like once they got their image in their head, it is hard to change that even to the extreme point with like you could be trying so hard, you could be out doing everybody in the classroom, you can be answering all the questions and they still like, I hate to say it, they still like discriminate against you.

He felt professors had literacy expectations based on previous experiences and therefore once they, "got their image in their head, it is hard to change that." So, if a professor had a negative experience with a football player, Arnold believed that he or she would remember that and would hold those lower literacy expectations for a current player. He continued, "you could be trying so hard, you could be out doing everybody in the classroom, you can be answering all the questions and they still like, I hate to say it, they still like discriminate against you." Despite working hard, participating, and doing well in the class, Arnold asserted that some professors would still discriminate against a football student-athlete. Research supports the idea that professors hold negative perceptions of football student-athletes in their classes and in general and speak about them accordingly (Benson, 2000; Simons et al., 2007). Thus, Arnold asserted that football players had little control over professors' expectations of their literacy. We did not discuss how he dealt with these lower literacy expectations but he stated, he "hates to

say it," but professors discriminate and he saw little prospect of change. He went on and spoke about the professors that changed their minds about football players. He stated, "But then there are others that if you just, you know, just bust your ass, then yeah, they start to change and like they change their idea of you." He believed that some professors changed their minds and their expectations once they saw him or his teammates' class work, writing, grades, and communication that they cared about the class.

The literacy expectations of Arnold's coaches'. At the start, Arnold contended that his professors had varying views of him and his teammates. These views neither overwhelmed nor shocked him; rather he asserted that he dealt with people's expectations by proving them wrong and doing what people said he could not. When it came time to discuss his coaches' expectations of him, he explained that coaches base their literacy expectations on several factors:

Arnold:

Remember when I said literacy also involves comprehension? . . . Well, a lot of the guys before, even myself and a lot of the guys I am with now, some of them don't comprehend or understand what he [the coach] wants us to do.

Researcher:

Okay.

Arnold:

And because of that, it affects how they view us and because of that, they are going to get the guys that . . . understand, and go with the flow. And this is what I feel like it is, I feel like he wants us to go with the flow. Don't resist. Fall in line. Don't step out of line. Don't question. Just we got everything.

Researcher:

So do you think it is the intelligence level they are changing or the literacy expectations?

Arnold:

I think it is more so, not an intelligence thing, I think it is more so . . . and of course I don't think I would quote that but I think it is more so the literacy aspect than the following everything.

Arnold contended that some of the players do not have sufficient literacy levels and could not understand and comprehend what the coach wanted them to do. Additionally, he emphasized that the coach wanted individuals who would "go with the flow. Don't resist. Fall in line. Don't step out of line. Don't question," which inferred that the coaches do not want players on the field who ask questions; they want players who will follow orders. I further probed, asking if these expectations related to intelligence or literacy levels. He responded that the coaches' literacy expectations of the players were changing and that they wanted players who understand and comprehend their expectations on and off the field. However, when I asked, were his coaches' and professors' expectations of his literacy similar, he compared the two and made an interesting point:

Arnold:

I would say it is the same but at the same time I think the only difference is the urgency.

Researcher:

Okay, why? What is the difference between the urgency of your professors and the urgency of your coaches?

Arnold:

> Because I feel like the professors, you know, if you don't do well that is on you. They try to instruct you, but as I said before, of course there have been some who don't want to help you but you have to be willing to get the help and actually do something about it. But the coaches, it is kinda like, they like, if we don't do it right, and we mess up, and we start to lose because of that, they are on the hot seat and they don't have that much time to correct things and if they can't get it correct [he snaps] . . . gone.

Arnold identified a distinction between coaches' and professors' expectations of literacy, based on what he called, "urgency." Specifically, he contended that when football student-athletes did not do well in class based on literacy expectations, it was not the professors' fault, it "is on you." In his opinion, the student, not the professor, shouldered ownership of failure in class. However, if the football student-athletes did not meet the literacy expectations coaches set, the coaches lose their jobs. Moreover, he states in the case of coaches, many factors play into one another such as "we mess up, and we start to lose because of that, they are on the hot seat and they don't have that much time to correct things and if they can't get it correct [he snaps] . . . gone." So, if the players did not do well in the classroom, it lead to them not doing well on the field, which lead to the coaches having to fix things, and if they could not, they get fired. Arnold anticipated these expectations from the coaches and recognized the impact of not meeting those expectations for him as well as the coaches.

Thus, Arnold saw both the coaches' and professors' literacy expectation as similar and not conflicting, but he did recognize the pressure on coaches to make sure that their

players' met the literacy expectations that they had set. In the end, Arnold recognized the various expectations that he must contend with from his coaches and his professors. Furthermore, he understood and accepted the literacy expectations that he encountered from his professors and his coaches on and off the field. However, he dealt with these expectations by trying to prove to people that he could exceed their expectations. Arnold wanted to prove his professors and his coaches wrong if they underestimate his literacy or his ability to succeed on and off the field.

Mackey

Mackey grew up in the southern part of the country and had to adjust to the northern mentality, which, in his words, was not "laid back." He identifies as black, is tall, broad shouldered, enjoys cutting and growing out his hair into a mohawk, and loves the color purple. During the interview, he wore a fishing hat that had bottle caps attached to the brim and supplied the interesting fact that he is "very laid back." Mackey grew up in an urban area and went to a public high school. At the time of the interview, he had declared Family Science as his major, but by fall semester 2012 he had changed to American Studies, with a minor in education. Mackey likes to call himself a redneck, citing his preference for country music and going mudding.[18]

His position on the field is outside linebacker. As an outside linebacker, Mackey "destroys stuff," meaning the other teams' plays. More precisely, he interrupts the other teams' plays by, "Sending it back the other way, being there when I am not supposed to be there. Someone was supposed to block me but they didn't." Mackey's role on the field is to either provide run protection for his team or pass protection to interrupt the other

[18] Mudding is taking a truck or jeep for a spin in the mud until the entire vehicle is covered in mud.

team's defensive play. The coaching staff has changed a few times while Mackey has been on the team, and he has changed his position; he recently became a linebacker because he could not gain enough weight to be on the defensive line. He said he liked the new position because you get to stand up (meaning you do not have to crouch down like you do on the defensive side) and he did not have to gain weight and feels healthier. I asked if people hold a stereotype about his position and he responded, "No, but we are the heart and soul of the defense. . . . Like, we are supposed to be the bad assess on the field, the hard defense. We are the ones that are supposed to make the plays, make things happen." He asserted that this position suits him because he is laid back in life but on the field he has to be quick, fast, and make plays.

Mackey's Perception of Literacy

In the questionnaire, Mackey had written that his definition of literacy was "being able to read, write, talk and hold a conversation." Just as in the other interviews, I asked Mackey how he would define literacy. His definition resembled the one he provided in the questionnaire, but this time he focused on conversation as the most important aspect.

> Being literate is just being able to at least hold a conversation with somebody. Not really being ignorant or short answered. . . . Like if somebody asks you a question and all you can say is, "I don't know," or "Uh, no." Being able to explain why you feel a certain way or maybe.

His definition encompassed the idea that being literate had to do with being able to hold a conversation and express oneself. He contended that holding a conversation showed sufficient literacy to express opinions and perspectives. When I asked if there are multiple definitions of literacy he asserted, "Yes, definitely. Cause you can be book

smart, you can be street smart, just regular common sense. So some people can explain things differently in ways." He believes in multiple literacy types. Each type of literacy includes conversation, but as he stated, people explain themselves in different ways and through various discourses, thus there are multiple literacy definitions. He further supported his point commenting, "I mean just like there are multiple intelligences, you should be able to see that there are multiple literacies. Some people comprehend things different ways," which suggested that despite his literacy perspective he saw believed people were unique and comprehend things in various ways. Therefore, he argued the need to recognize the multiple literacies that people have and embrace them as part of literacy.

As the interview continued, he stated that he encountered football literacy. I asked if had seen a disconnect between football literacy and school literacy. He asserted,

> Well from my perspective I don't think so, cause like I said literacy is a very diverse thing. So you have literacy in football and literacy in college and I mean when it comes down to it they are both communication regardless. You gotta read football. You gotta be able to communicate with the people next to you, around you. And just being able to understand what is going on.

Mackey began by stating his earlier point that literacy was diverse and there were various types of literacy. He supported his perspective by saying, "literacy in football and literacy in college and I mean when it comes down to it they are both communication regardless." He saw both literacy in football and literacy in school as involving communication skills, regardless of the situation or environment in which he used those skills. Furthermore, his example that "You gotta read football. You gotta be able to

communicate with the people next to you, around you. And just being able to understand what is going on," all refers to actions of a literate person on and off the field. Essentially, he perceives literacy as having different definitions all built upon the same skills and knowledge, specifically communication, and to be necessary in all aspects of one's life.

Mackey's Multiple Expectations of Literacy

Mackey, just like his counterparts, discussed the multiple expectations he encounters as part of being a football student-athlete. He explained that his professors' expectations sometimes mimicked his coaches' expectations, and other times they varied. Yet, he felt he could handle these multiple expectations that he confronted both on and off the field. We began with his professors' expectations and then moved on to his coaches' expectations.

Literacy expectations of Mackey's professors'.. When I asked Mackey about his professors' expectations of him in the classroom, he discussed how professors' views of football student-athletes varied based on their own prior or personal experiences:

> Well, it depends. Some professors see us as another football player that is going to skip my class, just try to get out of here with a C. And some professors are like, here is an athlete, someone who is probably going to put forth effort. You know, somebody I can work with or just some people, see us as another student who is here for a different reason.

Mackey's perception mirrored his teammates'. He stated that professors have different expectations of football student-athletes, sometimes based on prior experiences with other players. Furthermore, he stated that some professors see the players as individuals,

who will skip class and "just try to get out of here with a C," a view research supports, that black football student-athletes asserted that professors do not care if they attended and coaches just wished for them to stay eligible (Benson, 2000). However, other professors saw them as "someone who is probably going to put forth effort," and "another student who is here for a different reason." In his perspective, some professors look at student-athletes as individuals who have work ethic and others look at them as students there to learn. Thus, he believed it depended on the professor. I continued to probe and asked him how these views of football student-athletes impacted the expectations that professors have for them in the classroom. He explained,

> Depending on them, some of them they think he just wants to get out of here with a C, some professors might want to work with you, make sure you do well. And other professors, like I said, you are just another student so they just expect good out of you either way.

Mackey described the different expectations that professors had for football student-athletes in the classroom. Again, he stated that it depended on the various professors' perceptions of the football student-athletes. He reiterated that some professors "think he just wants to get out of here with a C," others "might want to work with you, make sure you do well," whereas others thought of him as "just another student so they just expect good out of you either way." In each case, he never stated how he felt about these expectations, just noted them. Lastly, I asked him specifically about the literacy expectations of professors when it came to football student-athletes. He contended,

> I mean depending on the professor though, maybe they could have had a bad experience with another athlete or something like that. But I mean, sometimes, I

> feel like professors can see that potential in you. Like, if you write them a paper or send them an email, they are just like oh well, he didn't just say "Hey professor, I need help with this," he explained himself, he comprehended before he talked or he does participate, or something like that. So, it all depends on the professor and how they feel about you.

He did not directly assert these expectations of literacy that his professors hold but he did offer writing as something that can change a professor's perspective. First, he discussed that some professors, "could have had a bad experience with another athlete or something like that," which lent weight to the interpretation that professors hold low literacy expectations for student-athletes. Next, he asserted, "Sometimes, I feel like professors can see that potential in you. Like, if you write them a paper or send them an email," and do it well, professors may change and raise their literacy expectations, despite an earlier negative experience with another athlete. Mackey further contended that if the football student-athlete explained "himself [or showed that] he comprehended before he talked, or he does participate, or something like that," professors may also raise the literacy expectations. Nonetheless, he reiterated his original point that literacy expectations depend on the professor and their view of him based on several factors, some of which he could not control. Mackey did not directly account for dealing with expectations, but his answers suggest his recognition of these expectations and of the mindset that if he did his work and did it well, his professors would have different view and raise their literacy expectations of him.

The literacy expectations of Mackey's coaches'. In the interview, Mackey addressed the literacy expectations that coaches hold for their players on and off the field. He discussed the literacy expectations on the field:

Mackey:

I feel like coaches sometimes, look at you as a blank slate. Just like, a machine, ready to be put together and all they do is feed you information and they just expect you to just forget really. Not necessarily, think, more of it is just a reaction.

Researcher:

So you think, they don't expect you to be critically thinking?

Mackey:

Yeah. They just want you to go. Just no thinking, just hear the play and know what to do and just go.

He asserted that coaches, when it comes to the field, look at players as machines and not individuals. The coaches want the players to meet the expectations they set on the field and do what they need to do on the field to succeed. Research on the contrast between coaches' expectations and the university setting affirms Mackey's perception (Benson, 2000). He believes coaches do not want the players to think critically on the field because they expect them to mechanically enact plays the coaches prescribe on the field. However, he wavered on this perspective slightly as we continued speaking:

Mackey:

I mean . . . in football, period. Like, it is always just go. It is that go mentality. When it comes down to it, you gotta have football smarts. So sometimes, even the coaches say it, sometimes you just have to be a football player.

Researcher:

So being football literate essentially?

Mackey:

So if you know, it is 4th down and it is long, don't expect them to run the ball. They are going to throw it. Things like that. . . . And then if something goes wrong, like you guys don't get a play, you gotta be football literate, alright, put us in this defense. As a player, you gotta know some stuff. . . Other than that, it's just relying on them to tell you what to do and just do it.

He argued that on the football field, coaches expect you to concentrate on the game and use what he calls "football smarts." This meant that sometimes you had to anticipate the next play, know what the other team's players will do, and as he says, "be football literate." Also, he stated that football smarts include relying on your coaches to tell you what to do, and being what he called a player not a thinker. Thus, despite his earlier statement that coaches want the players to be machines, Mackey pointed out that coaches want their players to have football smarts and know what they need to do on the field to succeed as a player and a team. Therefore, they want their players to be literate on the field and just literate enough in the classroom to pass and be able to play (Benson, 2000). Yet, his views of his coaches' literacy expectations changed when we moved on to discuss the classroom.

Mackey recognized that his coaches had different literacy expectations for him off the field. He commented, "I mean off the field, they still expect us to go to class, get good grades. It is pretty much the same thing, be a machine." However, he does consider that literacy expectations sometimes depend on other factors:

Researcher:

Okay, um, do your coaches' literacy expectations depend on your race?

Mackey.

Definitely. I mean like, there is a stereotype that defensive players are dumb so like . . .

Researcher:

Why? Explain please.

Mackey:

Uh, well 'cause offense is supposed to be complex and this and that. That is why some people make a big deal about like black quarterbacks. They are supposed to know the whole offense, know what everybody is doing and when you see quarterbacks sometimes, you only see a white quarterback. And if there is a black quarterback, normally he just takes off and runs. He won't necessarily shut down a play because he sees a different defense. While defense, we are supposed to be just be, like I said, machines. We are supposed to go. You hear the play you know what you have to do. There is no trick question, there is . . . no critical thinking, just put your hands in the dirt and hit the person in front of you.

Researcher:

So you think, coaches, see you, their players like that?

Mackey:

> Yeah. I mean, at the same time, that is just more football but at the same time, I feel like they do expect you to still do well in school. Still be like . . .

Mackey spoke about the stereotypes of race that exist in football. He maintained that race impacted literacy expectations of coaches on and off the field. Furthermore, he supported his comment by giving an example of the expectations of black quarterbacks and the defensive players. He stated, that quarterbacks are "suppose to know the whole offense. . . . And a black quarterback, normally just takes off and runs. He won't necessarily shut down a play because he sees a different defense." The stereotype of the black quarterback is that they are not as smart as white quarterbacks because they do not think critically; they just run, which points to their perceived athleticism (Buffington, 2005). Due to this stereotype, coaches see their black quarterback's literacy in such a way that does not lend itself to higher expectations (Mercurio & Filak, 2010). Defensive players also raise low expectations, based on Mackey's perception. Again, coaches may hold lower literacy expectations since defensive players do not need critical thinking; the position requires athleticism. Interestingly, Mackey did not feel threatened by these expectations or believe that all coaches think this way; he asserted that his coaches have higher literacy expectations than coaches at other schools. Lastly, we discussed whether there's a difference between the professors' literacy expectations and the coaches'. He argued,

> Just a little bit, 'cause the coaches are probably going to be more on a personal base than the professors. So they, professors, can guess my potential but the coaches probably know my potential.

In his perspective, coaches have literacy expectations based on personal relationships and knowledge of the players rather than professors. Professors do not know the players as well and therefore they can guess the potential of the player, but coaches based on their relationships, really know the potential a player has on and off the field. Basically, professors' literacy expectations reflect various experiences and possible assumptions about football student-athletes, whereas coaches know his potential because of their constant interaction with him on a daily basis.

Mackey described the various expectations held for him in the classroom and on the field. He knew about both the literacy expectations of his professors and his coaches on and off the field. From his perspective, professors carry various expectations for football student-athletes and depend on several factors such as prior experiences with players and their opinion of the player's work ethic. As for his coaches, he believed that several factors shaped his coaches' literacy expectations on the field. For example, he asserted that coaches sometimes viewed players based on their player position, their race, and their own views of what needs to be done on the field. Yet, Mackey felt that his coaches expected him to do well in class and that they based their literacy expectations on personal experiences and interactions, rather than stereotypes. Mackey, as a self-described "laid-back" individual, took the expectations in stride and did not did not directly address how he dealt with these expectations, but his examples and his perceptions showed that he knew about these expectations and intended to rise above the low expectations or meet the higher ones.

Chapter VI: Meet the Seniors

Introduction

This chapter takes a closer look at the third and final group, the senior football student-athletes.[19] All of the participants were considered seniors based on the number of credits (90 or more) that they had accrued during their time at the university. As in previous chapters, I address three of my research questions in this portion of the chapter: 1) How do male college football student-athletes perceive literacy, both in the classroom and on the field, based on various social experiences (i.e. school, sports)? 2) How do college football student-athletes see literacy as it pertains to the various aspects of their lives (e.g., football, classroom)? 3) How do football student-athletes see themselves and their multiple literacies, on and off the field? I start with a look at the senior football student-athletes as a whole and then I move to the individuals who took part in the focus group session. Next, I center on the participants in the senior focus group, analyzing quotes from the questionnaire and the focus group, in the order of the themes found in the qualitative data I collected (see Chapter 3 for more detailed information on these analytic frameworks). Lastly, I look at the senior interviewees who offered viewpoints on the literacy expectations of coaches and professors.

Getting to Know the Seniors

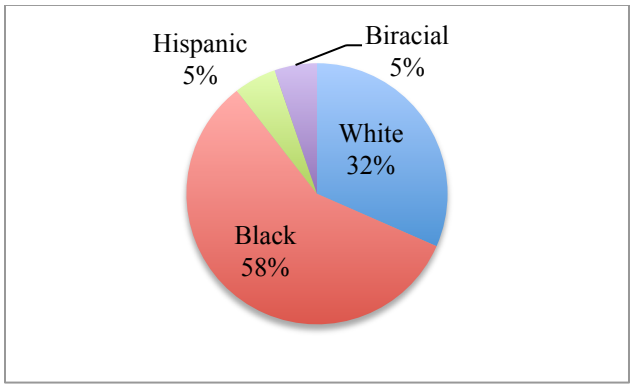
Overview

It is important to view the senior participant group as a whole before looking more specifically at the focus group participants, in order to have a better understanding of the senior football student-athletes. A total of nineteen seniors agreed to take part in

[19] All names have been changed to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

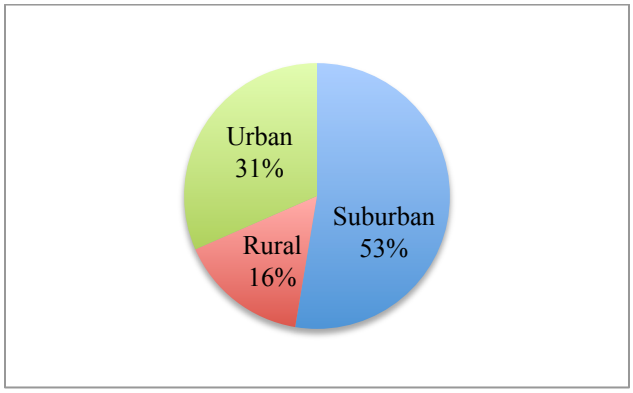
the questionnaire portion of the research study. The seniors were the largest participant group and the most diverse in race, major, and player position. Just like the sophomores and juniors, they were asked to identify their race. Over half (58%) chose black, 32% chose white, 5% chose biracial, and the remaining 5% chose Hispanic.

Figure 6.1: Senior identified Race



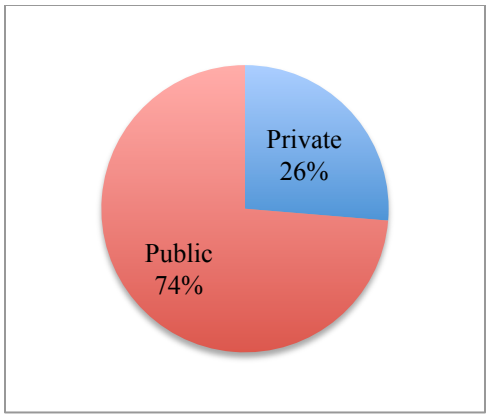
A total of 53% of the participants grew up in suburban areas, 31% grew up in urban areas, and only 16% grew up in rural areas.

Figure 6.2: Senior: Where did you grow up?



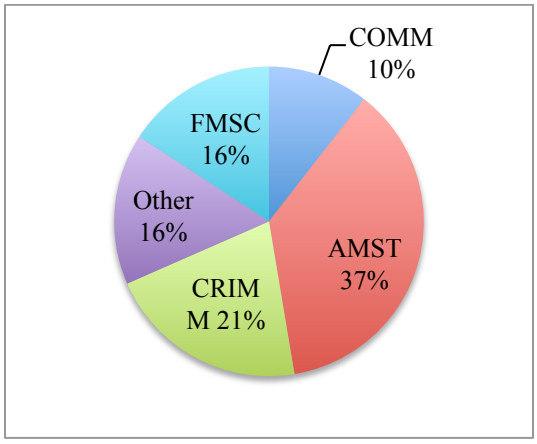
With respect to the senior student-athletes, 74% went to public school while 26% went to private high school.

Figure 6.3: Senior High School Demographics



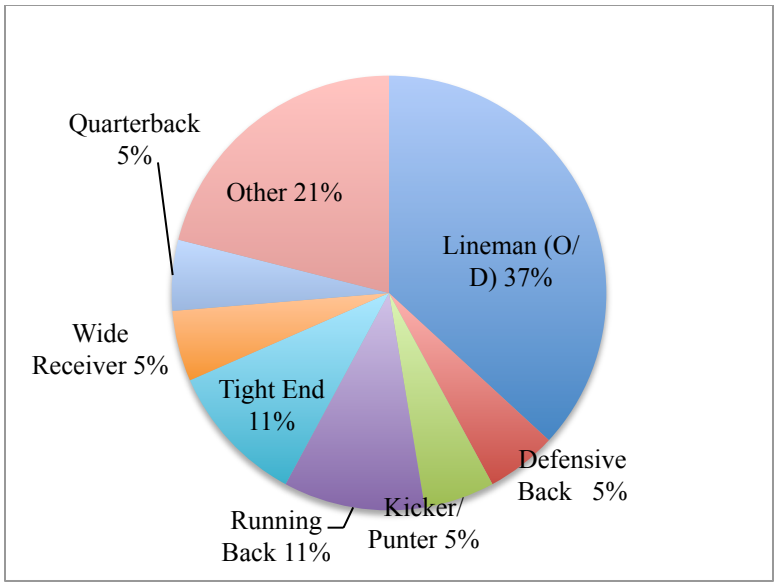
The senior football student-athletes had a wide range of majors: 37% reported American Studies as their major, 21% Criminology, 16% Family Science, 10% Communication and the final 3% were Kinesiology and Environmental Science majors.

Figure 6.4: Senior Majors



Lastly, 37% of the seniors were lineman, 21% were linebackers, 11% were running backs, 11% were tight ends, 5% were quarterbacks, 5% punters/kickers, and 5% defensive backs.

Figure 6.5: Senior Player Positions



The focus group. Eight senior football players participated in the focus group and each self-identified his race in the questionnaire portion of the study. Bryson, Jackson, Wendell, Pat, and Ken all identified as black; Jason as Hispanic; Calvin as white; and Ian as biracial. Each one of the individuals in the focus groups had played for the university for the previous three years; none of them were transfer students. There were eight participants in this focus group and all but one were considered part of the starting line-up of the team.

Table 6.1

Senior Focus Group Positions

Name	**Position**
Ian	Lineman
Bryson	Lineman
Wendell	Tight End
Pat	Lineman

Calvin	Quarterback
Jackson	Lineman
Ken	Linebacker
Jason	Running Back

At the time of the study, three of the seniors were graduating in the winter 2012, three would graduate in the spring of 2013, and one would graduate in the fall of 2013. The focus group took place at 11:00 a.m. on a Thursday morning in late June. All of the participants took part in the entire focus group session, except Ken, who arrived 15 minutes late because he had overslept. The desks were all pushed together as they had been previously, and I was seated on the northwest side of the desk with Pat, Bryson, and Jason to my left. Across from me was Calvin, with Wendell, Jackson, and Ken to his right; Ian sat in the middle of the two groups on the south side. Since it was summer, the participants were dressed in shorts and t-shirts, most of which bore some connection to football and the university.

Themes

This section of the chapter discusses the themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. I start with the senior football student-athletes and their perceptions of literacy based on gender. Then, I discuss how the senior football students-athletes defined and embraced literacy as it pertained to school. Next, I examine the senior student-athletes' use of football discourse off the field. Lastly, I explore the senior football student-athletes' directly addressing race in conversations about the stereotypes that they see in football.

Literacy and Gender

In this research study, the senior football student-athletes had different views of females and males with respect to literacy and reading. The senior football student-athletes saw females as better readers and as superior in school, with some expressing awareness of their own stereotyping of both males and females. Particularly, the senior football student-athletes emphasized a) gender's impact on literacy, b) their own reading choices, and c) gender-oriented text preferences (that is, males read non-fiction, female read non-fiction).

Gender's effect on literacy. Just as the sophomores and juniors did, the senior football-student athletes wrote either their initials or their jersey numbers on the questionnaire to provide a means of tracking their responses throughout the study. The senior participants' questionnaire answers pertaining to what extent gender affects literacy ranged from a 1 (strongly disagree) to a 5 (strongly agree).

Table 6.2

Senior Questionnaire Responses: I Think Gender Affects Literacy

Name	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	(32%)	(21%)	(10%)	(26%)	(11%)
Ian				X	
Bryson				X	
Dan	X				
Mark					X
Irving					X
Robin	X				

Denny			X		
Kevin	X				
Darren		X			
Nate	X				
Wendell				X	
Pat	X				
Calvin		X			
Gerry		X			
Jackson		X			
Nat			X		
Ken				X	
Kit				X	
Jason	X				

On the questionnaire, 32% of the participants chose 1 (strongly disagree) on the scale. Both Pat and Jason picked 1. Pat wrote, "I don't think it affects literacy but it does push people to read more." Jason noted, "If someone wants to be literate they are going to be. If they don't want to then that's on them." Neither Pat nor Jackson saw gender as affecting literacy, but Pat saw society as having an impact and Jackson felt it was dependent on an individual. On the other hand, 21% of the seniors chose 2 (somewhat disagree) on the scale, and Jackson and Calvin were among those individuals. Jackson wrote, "From the hegemonic aspect women are viewed as readers while men are not," providing the societal perspective on gender and literacy. Calvin wrote, "I believe that

gender doesn't affect literacy because the people who want to read will do so based on personal interest." From Jackson's perspective, much like Pat's, society rather than gender influenced literacy, whereas Calvin had a perspective similar to Jason's, since they both expressed the view that it was a personal choice, not a gender-oriented one. Only 10% of the participants chose 3 (neutra*l*) on the scale, and none of them gave written explanations. However, 26% of the senior football student-athletes chose 4 (somewhat agree). For example, Ken answered, "During elementary school the girls were always expected to have good handwriting and read better than the boys." Wendell wrote, "Girls have to be a little more literate as they are more likely to get desk jobs and they tend to enjoy recreational reading more then boys." Ian contended, "People are stereotyped and perceived by the gender you are." Bryson noted, "Depending on your gender you will be interested in different literacies." Ken, Wendell, and Ian saw literacy as being affected by gender because of the way society views females in school and the real world, while Bryson offered the perspective that gender plays a role in one's interests in literacy, rather than one's actual literacy. Lastly, only 11% of the participants chose a 5 (strongly agree) on the spectrum and none provided a written explanation Based on the questionnaire responses, a majority (53%) of the senior football student-athletes, to some degree saw gender as not affecting literacy. The seniors' perspectives on gender's effect on literacy became clearer when the senior student-athletes spoke during the focus group.

Gender and reading. In the focus group, the senior football student-athletes spoke about literacy and gender in several ways. As explained in Chapter 3, one of the activities in the focus group was looking at two pictures, one of a female athlete, Skylar

Diggins, and one of a male athlete, Trent Richardson.[20] The senior football student-athletes were asked what each would read based on his or her gender. In discussing Trent, the participants focused on their own preconceived notions of Trent as a football player, rather than as a general representation of the male gender.

Researcher:

What types of things would they read [Trent and Skylar]? Try to focus on the gender, not the person.

Wendell:

You can't . . . You can't even . . . You know what . . . This is not . . . Come on, this is not fair at all. One look and we are going to stereotype.

Calvin:

Based on the picture and the facial expressions? (laughing)

Ken:

Skylar would read like *50 Shades of Grey*. Trent would read *Goosebumps, Are You Afraid of the Dark.* (laughing and everyone laughs)

Bryson:

He would read Dr. Seuss to his daughter (laughing)

Ian:

I'm not sure if he even reads.

All:

Ian . . . (everyone obviously annoyed by this comment)

Pat:

[20]Please see Chapter 3 for the entire description of the activity

Look at you . . .

Bryson:

Come on man . . .

Jackson:

Why would you say that?

Ian:

(trying to defend himself)

I mean I don't know if he would read books.

Ken:

Well, maybe the bible but . . .

Wendell:

He looks like he reads *Sports Illustrated.*

Wendell began the conversation annoyed because he did not believe that he or his teammates could view Trent based solely on his gender, implying that their views of him would be based on who he was as an athlete. Calvin joined the conversation, "Based on the picture and the facial expressions?" The picture of Trent was of him in his full football uniform before he came out of the tunnel to play the game. He was not smiling and looked very intense,[21] whereas Skylar was part of a planned picture in which she was in her uniform, smiling and wearing make-up.[22] The picture depicted the two in different situations, and Calvin saw this as a comparison rather than just a picture. Therefore, his words could be interpreted to mean that he did not think guessing what the two athletes

[21] See appendix VII

[22] I had searched on the Internet and these were the best pictures to print and I did not see them as biased; however, the players did.

would read was possible because all he could focus on was the picture, or that he felt uncomfortable because he might end up stereotyping these individuals. Ken said, "Trent would read *Goosebumps, Are You Afraid of the Dark,"* with Bryson following suit, "He would read Dr. Seuss to his daughter." In both cases, they made their fellow senior focus group participants laugh at their answers. By their outright stereotyping of Trent as a football player, they showed their awareness of the perceptions that others have of his literacy, which was that he read on a fourth grade level and was illiterate. However, Ian made the statement, "I'm not sure if he even reads," appearing to his teammates to mean that Trent was illiterate rather than stereotyping him as a joke, as others had done. It could also be said that the players were comfortable joking around until Ian mentioned what he believed to be Trent's actual reading ability. Ian followed his comment with, "I mean I don't know if he would read books," clarifying his earlier statement in order to show that he was not implying that Trent does not know how to read. Although the other players had stereotyped Trent in their suggestions as to what he might read, the view that he might literally be illiterate was more than they were willing to entertain. Yet, when they discussed Skylar, the senior football student-athletes focused on Skylar as a female, not as a student-athlete.

Jackson:

She is female so she reads a lot more.

Ken:

Skylar would read like *50 Shades of Grey*.

Pat:

She would read one of those romance books.

Wendell:

One of them books, yeah. She'd read one of them girl books.

Jackson commented, "She reads a lot more," because she is female which supported the previous views expressed by the sophomores and juniors. Pat added, "She would read one of those romance books," to Ken's example of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, a novel. Pat and Ken both chose novels that were romantic (that is, with themes of love and relationships and with happy endings) and contained sexually explicit details of sexual relationships between the characters, thus stereotyping Skylar's reading choices as sexual in nature because she is a female. The participants saw Skylar as a female, not a student-athlete like Trent, and suggested that she would read fiction for pleasure, a common perception among teachers about a female's reading choices and preferences (Barrs, 2000). The connection between gender and literacy became clearer when the participants discussed their own reading choices and habits.

As the conversation continued, the senior football student-athletes concentrated more on how gender affected reading skills and practices. I asked, "Does your gender impact what you read?" The answers ensued:

Wendell:

Yeah.

Pat:

Yeah, it does.

Researcher:

Why?

Bryson:

We've got to read something about action or something that we are into.

Ken:

Yeah, just like females, it depends on the kind of movies or things you like.

Jeff:

Interests.

Ian:

Girls read like real books and education stuff.

Wendell:

Romance and like the fairy tales.

Calvin:

Like what is happening in their life right now.

Wendell, Ken, Ian, and Calvin thought that women would be more interested in fiction texts and topics that related to their lives; moreover, it appeared that what related to females' lives were fairy tales and romance. Thus, despite not giving specific titles or examples, the seniors viewed females as individuals who were more likely to read for school. They thought that both males and females read things that interest them, but for females that meant romance novels and happy endings.

In response to the question, "Do you read books?" a majority (58%) indicated that they did not read books. Pat, Bryson, Jason, Calvin, and Ken were among those who said they did not read books. However, the remaining 42% wrote that they did read books and listed a few examples. Jackson wrote that he read textbooks for school, and Wendell wrote that he read his course materials, while Ian said that he read books, but did not

provide specifics. The senior football student-athletes discussed their reading preferences in greater detail in the focus group.

Researcher:

What types of things do you read?

Wendell:

I don't read anything.

Jackson:

Yeah, I don't read.

Bryson:

I don't read books.

Ken:

Homework.

Wendell:

I read when I have to read, I don't read for pleasure.

Calvin:

I'll go on ESPN.com, and click and see what is on there. . . I'll go on Yahoo, see what things are going on.

Jason:

I will see what is going on (uses his fingers to circle around)

Bryson:

Yeah, say somebody got killed in my area, I'm reading that. . . . I mean I'm just saying something that interests me.

Pat:

The last book I read was called *The Man Book*

The above exchange between the senior football student-athletes is aligned with their earlier perspectives on male and female reading. Both Jackson and Wendell asserted that they did not read; yet, on the questionnaire they both indicated that they read course materials. Moreover, Wendell clarified, "I read when I have to read, I don't read for pleasure." Thus, his assertion positioned him as a reader; though it is a reasonable inference that Jackson and Wendell did not see what they read (course materials) as valid reading material because the readings were required rather than chosen for pleasure. Calvin stated that he would "surf" or "click" things on the Internet, implying that he didn't read much or in depth. Burgess and Jones (2010) found that 80% of the college-age males in their study were twice as likely to read webpages and blogs as to read traditional books for pleasure, which they interpreted to mean that reading online has increased while book reading has not. Hence, Calvin could be considered more of a reader than he asserted. Jason described his habits similarly, noting, "I will see what is going on," which showed that he surfed the Internet to see what was in the news or what might have been of interest to him. Bryson reported that he liked to read things that interested him such as "if somebody got killed in my area, I'm reading that. . . . I mean I'm just saying something that interests me." Finally, Pat commented that the last book he had read was something that did not relate to education, *The Man Book.* The book, at its core, is about what it means to be a modern man, with stories, notes, and hints on topics such as health, sports and games, women, the outdoors, and cooking. Given his earlier assertion that he did not read books, he might have seen non-educational material as an invalid book type. Consequently, the senior football student-athletes saw themselves as being able to read, which might be one of the reasons they were annoyed with Ian's

comment about Trent, but did not see themselves as readers per se since they did not read novels for pleasure. Moreover, the seniors' earlier annoyance with Ian's statement concerning Trent's inability to read does not seem to factor into how they saw themselves as non-readers, since they can read but choose not to read for pleasure.

The senior football student-athletes also shared their reading preferences as they pertained to the digital world of websites, blogs, and social media outlets. On the questionnaire, the senior participants were asked what type of websites, if any, they enjoyed reading. The websites mentioned varied among the 53% of the students who said that they read them. Ken wrote that he read websites like ESPN.com or others that had something to do with sports. On the other hand, Jackson read websites like worldstarhiphop.com, which has entertainment and hip-hop news. Ian wrote that he read websites, but again did not provide a more specific written answer. The remaining 47% did not read websites, or if they did they did not record them. Furthermore, when it came time to answer questions about whether the senior football student-athletes participated in Twitter and followed anyone on it, 32% wrote either that they did not have a Twitter account or that they did not follow anyone on it. The remaining 68% followed someone and/ or certain things on Twitter. For example, Bryson wrote that he only followed people he knew, Ken wrote "Friends," and Wendell indicated that he only followed people who followed him. Pat gave specific examples, such as "Jenna Jameson, Buffy the Body," and Calvin wrote, "Friends, Celebs." The senior football student-athletes participated more in Twitter than the sophomores and juniors. Thus, the senior football student-athletes reported reading websites and Twitter feeds that interested them, and it is clear that these students found particular choices in Internet reading, such as sport and

entertainment, widely acceptable. This is aligned with research on college-age male readers indicating that they engage in literacy behaviors frequently, such as reading online or social media, but choose not read traditional books for enjoyment (Burgess & Jones, 2010). The senior student-athlete participants saw themselves as readers who only read things that interested them or were required for school, while females read for pleasure, read fiction novels, and enjoyed educational material. Additionally, the seniors' use of Twitter, websites, and online social media forums showed them as readers, despite their assertion that they did not read.

Literacy and School

This theme builds upon the previous theme by further discussing literacy and gender as both pertain to education and giving more insight into the senior football student-athletes' conceptualizations of literacy. The seniors spoke about gender as influencing females to work harder in school because of lack of opportunities either in professional sports or future jobs. Additionally, senior participants defined literacy and described the significant role it played in their college education and future. The research data showed that the senior student-athletes saw females as more focused on education, demonstrated awareness of literacy in the context of college, and emphasized the qualities and skills needed to be successful in college and beyond.

Perceptions of literacy, gender, and school. On the questionnaire, the senior football student-athletes were asked to define literacy**.** Ian wrote that literacy was comprised of "people's beliefs and theoretical practices." He recognized that literacy was dependent on the individual's values and personal perspective. However, the other participants centered their definitions on reading, writing, comprehension, and

communication. Bryson wrote, “reading and writing.” Wendell wrote that literacy was “the ability to read and comprehend material,” and Pat had a similar definition, “comprehension of reading material.” Likewise, Jackson noted, “how well someone can read and understand the material,” which echoed both Wendell and Pat’s definitions. Ken’s definition, “being able to comprehend literature and write,” added the element of writing, something his fellow participants had not included in their definitions. Jason wrote, “Literacy is the way you form sentences to communicate using your vocabulary,” thus asserting that communication, specifically the accurate use of vocabulary, defines literacy. Lastly, Calvin noted, “the ability to read, comprehend and interpret what is being written/said,” adding interpretation and listening as part of being literate. The focus group participants agreed that literacy was based on reading, comprehension, and interpretation, with Ken and Jason including writing and communication in their definitions and Ian stating that individuals’ personal beliefs and practices played a role.

Along with defining literacy, the senior student-athletes asserted that females and males both viewed education as important; however, they indicated that the way that males and females were perceived in both education and sport differed. When asked, “Do you think gender affects education just as much or less than sports?” the seniors responded:

Wendell:

I can say all of them [words] because just like there's like one and stuff like that, so it's not like . . . You know, and women still need an education.

Jackson:

Women need an education and they sometimes do play sports.

Ian:

Agreed.

Calvin:

I think you know, male sports are much more dominant than female sports, I think that playing football definitely separates . . . definitely separates them [females] from you know, in basketball or golf or any other sport, especially in the United States. So I guess yeah, in terms of that aspect.

Wendell:

What I'm trying to say is I don't think you can separate it, like which ones . . . like you were saying you were trying to separate it and I don't think there's much of a separation between the because they play sports just like we do and they need an education too.

Pat:

I personally agree with Title 9.

Jason:

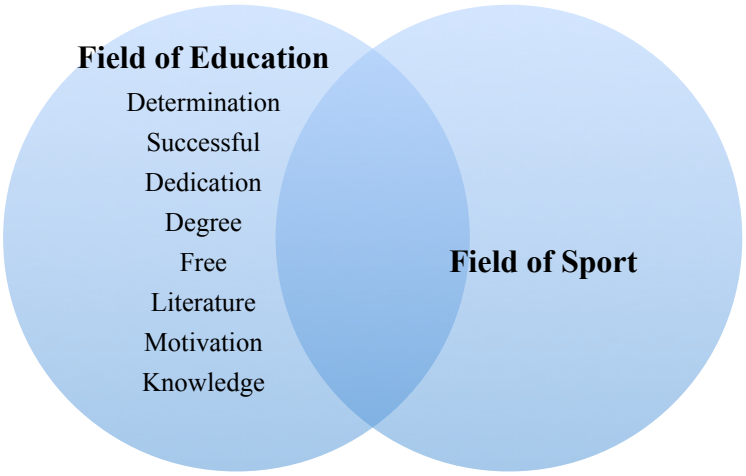
I think when a girl . . . when a good looking girl comes up to a professor he gave them an extra couple of days, a week I believe. He like you know with guys, the due date was today and you know, I don't care if your mom just died, you've got to still turn in the paper.

Wendell stated that the words his fellow focus group members had put up on the board all connected to women because females valued and knew the importance of education just as much as men. Jackson responded, "Women need an education and they sometimes do play sports." From his answer, he did not seem to be sexist, but rather to perceive

education as more important for women than playing sports . Calvin saw a division between football and female sports based on the importance of football in the United States. He did not mention education, but he too appeared to agree that sports were less valid or important for females. Wendell responded to my question, “What I'm trying to say is I don't think you can separate it . . . I don't think there's much of a separation between us because they play sports just like we do and they need an education too.” By recanting his earlier statement, he contradicted Calvin’s and Jackson’s comments, and asserted that females and males were not separated with respect to school and sports because both genders played and participated in each. Jason ended the conversation with his own experience and stated, ” when a good-looking girl comes up to a professor he gave them an extra couple of days, a week,” which is not what he saw as the case for most males. Jason asserted that there was a double-standard with respect to men and women in the college classroom; females, from his perspective, were given the benefit of the doubt with respect to missed work and classes. Moreover, based on his earlier comment and this one, there is the chance that he was being sexist, raising the question of what matters more from his perspective, gender itself or gender and good looks. The senior focus group students believed that females cared about their education, often just as much as males, but that there were double standards with respect to the classroom. Also, with respect to sports, the seniors acknowledged that there was a division between the two genders in that women’s sports were not as accepted or as highly valued as men’s. Despite seeing females as more engaged in school and benefitting more from it, the senior football student-athletes were aware of and able to articulate the qualities that made an individual successful at the college level.

Qualities needed to succeed in education. The senior football student-athletes saw females as benefitting more and being more engaged in school than males, but they were aware of the importance that college, specifically literacy in college, afforded them, both in the present and in the future. As explained in Chapter 3, in one of the focus group activities, I had the student-athletes write down words that they associated with school and place them in the "Field of Education," circle portion of the Venn diagram I created.

Figure 6.6: Seniors: Words for education



During the activity, the senior football student-athletes discussed the qualities, attitudes, and values needed to be successful at the college level and beyond. For example, Jackson asserted, "You need education to be successful . . . I mean determination, dedication . . . all that stuff is involved." He emphasized the importance of education along with the two traits, determination and dedication, that he found essential for success. Wendell continued, "necessity," because "without it [education] you can't really . . , we are past the time when you can be uneducated and be successful so that's why necessity." From his perspective, a degree and education were a "necessity," to procure a job and be successful, in today's world. Bryson contributed "degree," and his rationale was "the whole point of education is to get a degree," aligning with Wendell's perspective. Pat

stated, “Free,” noting, “Since I am on scholarship, I do not have to pay for school.” Ian chose, “literature,” because “you read a lot in college,” demonstrating his recognition of the importance of reading. The seniors were aware of the significance of education to their futures, but they also saw education as a necessity in today’s world. Thus, the senior participants knew the necessary literacy-based qualities and traits needed in order to be successful in education and beyond. Moreover, the senior football student-athletes viewed education and its components, reading, writing, interpretation, and communication as major factors in their futures.

Additionally, the senior football student-athletes’ questionnaire answers made apparent that not only were the student-athletes aware of the qualities, values and attitudes needed to be successful in college, they also understood the role that literacy played in their own college education. In their questionnaire answers to “How does literacy play a part in your college education?” the seniors centered their written responses on literacy as a constant in their education and a major factor in their future. Bryson wrote, “College is all about reading and writing. The ability to learn and explain what you learned.” Thus, without literacy, Bryson implied that he would be unable to participate, learn, and actually get something out of the college experience. Ian on the other hand wrote, “Literacy plays a big part in students’ understanding of scholars’ thoughts and ideas.” He asserted that literacy played a role in the comprehension of texts students have to read in college settings. Wendell wrote that literacy played a role in college because “the ability to read/comprehend will determine how difficult college will be for you as a student.” In his opinion, literacy was an indicator of how much a student might struggle to do well at the college level. Pat noted, “If you’re in college and can’t

read, you are in trouble," implying that, despite what people might think, college football players have to be literate to attend college. Calvin wrote on his questionnaire, "Do a lot of reading for school and football." So from Calvin's perspective, literacy's role in college pertained to both aspects of his experience, education and football. His response was unique in that his assertion showed that reading, specifically a lot of it, was done in football and in school, something that the other participants did not see in this portion of the study. Based on the senior football student-athletes' perspectives on the role literacy played in the college setting, it became increasingly obvious that they were discussing literacy it as it pertained to the classroom through reading for class, the comprehension of material, and the skills needed to be successful in college. The senior participants embraced school literacy in multiple conversations (e.g., college, words, qualities and skills), spoke about its significance in college and their lives, and understood the literacy skills necessary to succeed in the college classroom.

Literacy and Football

Based on the two previous themes, there is little doubt that the senior football student-athletes are literate. The seniors demonstrated their knowledge of and ability to articulate their perspectives on literacy in the academic setting, and they were able to further show the extent of their literacy knowledge and skills while using their football discourse[23] and engaging in literacy events[24] about football and their experiences in it. Since this theme focuses on football and the sport is male-oriented, the senior football student-athletes did

[23] For the purposes of this paper, "football discourse," is defined as the language terms, qualities, social identities, and communication used in football (Gee, 1989; Mahiri, 1991).

[24] A literacy event is where the comprehension and/ or analysis of a text or oral exchange takes place and an implicit or explicit connection to literacy is made (Heath, 1982; Mahiri, 1991).

not address gender and its impact on literacy on the field. Thus, this theme builds on prior themes by demonstrating the literacy skills and knowledge of the senior student-athletes when discussing football, specifically with respect to plays, literacy, and individual players.

Talking on the field: Literacy in football. In football, "talking on the field," consists of the physical actions that take place on the football field that lead to success (touchdown, tackling the quarterback, long passes). The "actions," are the player/players' ways of showing their skills, abilities, and knowledge of the game of football. Furthermore, these actions include being able to communicate, understand and execute the plays. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, "talking on the field," comprises the actions that make an individual literate on the football field. As part of the questionnaire, the football student-athletes were asked to choose on the spectrum from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with respect to the role that literacy plays in football.

Table 6.3

Senior Questionnaire Responses: I Think Literacy Plays a Role in Football.

Name	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**Somewhat Disagree (2)**	**Neutral (3)**	**Somewhat Agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**
	(16%)	(11%)	(10%)	(37%)	(26%)
Ian				X	
Bryson				X	
Dan				X	
Mark					X

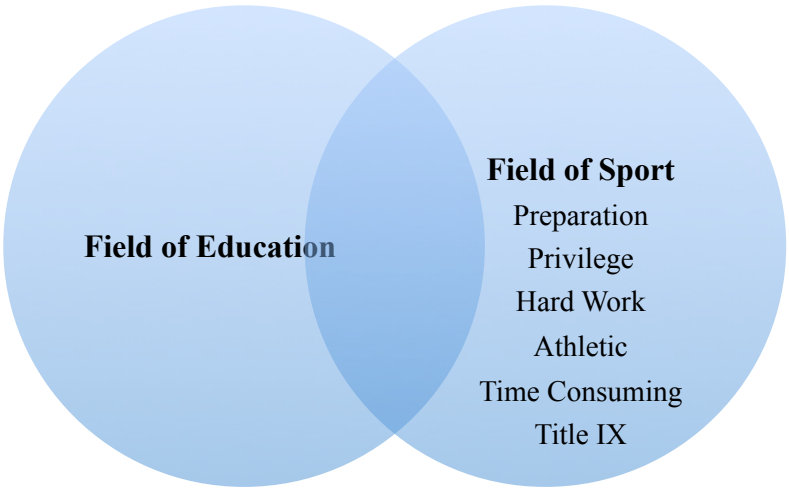
Irving			X		
Robin				X	
Denny			X		
Kevin				X	
Darren		X			
Nate					X
Wendell					X
Pat	X				
Calvin				X	
Gerry				X	
Jackson					X
Nat					X
Ken	X				
Kit		X			
Jason	X				

A total of 16% of the senior participants chose a 1 (strongly disagree) for the statement that literacy plays a role in football. For example, Pat wrote, "If you can't read you can still play sports." He shared that regardless of literacy level, an athlete was still able to participate in sports. Ken agreed with Pat, and stated, "There are a lot of football players who do not have great literacy." He too suggested that there were players who did not have "great literacy" to play football, but that they had some literacy nonetheless. Jason wrote, "I have seen kids who are dumb as rocks but are great football players." He

equated being smart with being literate, and he contended that neither quality was necessary in order to play football. Even fewer, 11%, chose 2 (somewhat disagree) on the scale and another 10% chose 3 (neutral); no focus group participants were in either group. The highest percentage (37%) of answers was 4 (somewhat agre*e*) that literacy plays in football. One such example was Ian, who wrote, "People perceive football players as dumb and pointless." Ian alluded to the stereotype that football players have to deal with in connection with the sport of football. Bryson argued, "You have to be able to read and learn in football." He explained that literacy, specifically reading and comprehension, does play a role in football. Lastly, 26% chose 5 (strongly agree) that literacy plays a role in football. Wendell wrote, "Those who struggle to comprehend and retain material struggle on the field as well." His perspective showed that he saw a connection between an athlete's literacy in the classroom and his or her literacy on the field. Jackson wrote, "From the hegemonic perspective football players are viewed as dumb jocks." His use of "hegemonic" signified his belief that society was the reason for the overall perspective that permeates the sport. Simons et al. (2007) contends that society perspective is often based on media portrayals and athletes who conform to these stereotypes. In the end, a majority of the players (63%) agreed that literacy played a role in football whereas only 37% did not see literacy as affecting football. In the next part of the focus group, the senior student-athletes further discussed the role literacy plays in football when we talked about the words that they would assign to the sport.

Discourse of football. For this section of the chapter, I take a look at the words that the focus group participants chose for football and the rationales for those words.

Figure 6.7: Seniors: Words for sport



Like the sophomores and juniors, the seniors did not choose words such as "football," "field," "sport," "coaches" or "team." From an outside perspective, some of the words they chose appear simplistic and can apply to multiple settings. Nevertheless, these words show the participants' perspective on football and its related discourse. Like their counterparts discussed in earlier chapters, they chose words that describe the actions and mental challenges of playing football. For example, the players chose words such as "preparation," "hard work," and "athletic," with respect to the physical aspect of the sport and "time consuming," and "privilege," for its mental or psychological aspect. The words conjured up images of physical practice and psychological challenges connected to the sport. Football student-athletes are expected to train to be in peak physical form at all times, and often they are susceptible to concussions and other injuries that might end their college and future football careers (Lumpkin, 2010). With respect to the psychological aspect of sports, research has found that those individuals who are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to do well in their respective sports are able to overcome the challenges that being a college student-athlete might present (Podlong & Eklund, 2005).

However, it was the participants' rationales for these words that showed their grasp of the use, knowledge, and comprehension of the discourse of football. The rationales that the senior student-athletes gave for their word choices offered insight into their perceptions and ideas while simultaneously using their football discourse. The senior football student-athletes are mentored into the sport of football, just as any athlete would be in any sport, by learning the words, phrases, and language that are associated with it through constant interaction with their peers, modeling from coaches, and outside sources such as the media, leading to learning the discourse of a sport (Mahiri, 1991). When the senior football student-athletes discussed their word choices, listed above, they demonstrated their understanding of a number of literacy skills:

Wendell:

I put "preparation" because people don't really . . . People just watch it, you know what I mean, and just watching it you can't really appreciate the preparation. Like we practice all week, people come out on Saturday and they just are barking from the mouth but they don't know, we had Calvin being hit 600 times, getting pulled down eight times, you know what I mean? Like people can't appreciate the preparation of sports. Although they might watch it, you know what I mean, people don't know.

Bryson:

I put "hard work" just for the same reason, there's a lot of hard work that goes into playing sports, specifically football.

Ian:

I chose privilege. Not a lot of people can play the sport or . . . you know? So they're kind of . . . jealous.

Calvin:

I put athletic, for most sports you have to have some type of athletic ability and hand-eye coordination to play.

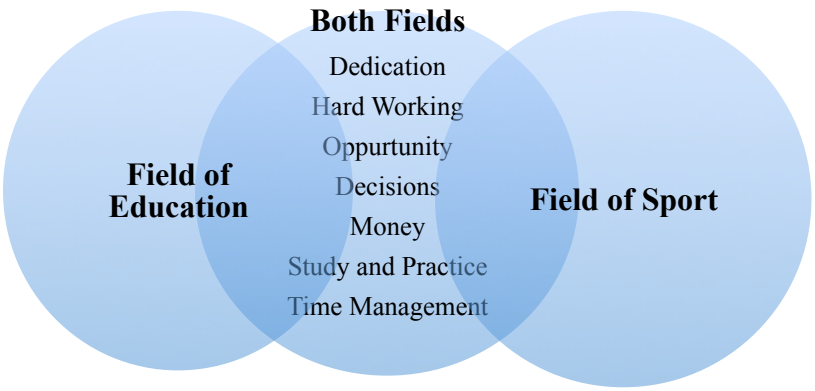
Wendell centered his point on the fact that there are many people who do not appreciate the preparation that the football players put into playing football. He focused on the physical aspect of the sport and did so by using his football discourse. His phrases "being hit," and "getting pulled down," are both used in football in connection with the quarterback position and those who are charged to tackle him, such as linebackers and defensive backs.[25] Taglione (2009) used these examples and others in her article to show the complexity of the sport, along with key terms and phrases that one needs to know in order to understand and comprehend the sport of football. As the conversation continued, Ian added that his word "privilege" related to sport because, "Not a lot of people can play the sport or . . . you know? So they're kind of . . . jealous." Ian indicated that being given the chance to play college football was a privilege and that some individuals might be jealous of the opportunity that he had and they did not. The seniors discussed the words that they associated with football, ranging from the physical to the psychological. Moreover, the participants showed the connection between football and education in choosing and discussing words for the last part of the Venn diagram exercise.

The seniors were asked to choose words that they associated with both school and education as part of the Venn diagram activity. The conversation was most lively and in-

[25] See position chart in Chapter 3 for more information.

depth with respect to what words came to mind for both circles, rather than each one individually.

Figure 6.8: Seniors: Words that overlap for education and sport



The participants focused on the qualities and traits that make an individual successful on and off the field. Calvin, Bryson, Jackson, and Ian all commented on the activities that take place in both spaces. For example, Calvin stated, "studying," and Bryson asserted, "studying and practice," because "you have to do both on and off the field." Thus, they connected the two spaces by the actions that help individuals do well and get better. Jackson explained that time management is an essential aspect of both environments, because "you've got to find an efficient way to maximize your time on the field and in studying." Ian said that "hard work" was a necessity in both places because "you can't be successful in either without it." On the other hand, Ken, and Wendell focused on the future and what that meant for those two spaces. Ken explained, "I said opportunity because both give you opportunities for the future," which showed his perception that each aspect of his life gave him a chance to do certain things in the future, whether they

be sports or educationally related. This connection was evident in the junior student-athletes' word choices as well. Wendell chose "decisions," and explained, " you've got to make decisions in your education and in sports but ultimately you know, sports and education go hand in hand because they're going to lead to the decisions you make in your life usually." From his perspective, the decisions made in both places were connected and one would lead to the next and eventually to larger life decisions. Lastly, Pat and Jason both shared the perspective that all the words that we had discussed on either side were to some extent interchangeable and necessary for each other. Pat asserted, "Because you need all that (pointing to the education circle), you need all of that (pointing to the sport circle) to be successful." Jason added, "If you look at the traits for sports and the traits education, like you need a lot of the same characteristics to be successful," which showed he saw the same traits as benefitting an individual in education and sports leading to success on and off the field. The senior football student-athletes were more concerned than the sophomores of juniors with the skills that were used in both places, the future as it pertained to both education and sport, and the constant intertwining of these two spaces, The greater sophistication of their perspective may have reflected their maturity as seniors. The senior football student-athlete participants showed their ability to use their football discourse not only by choosing words but also by being able to explain their reasoning.

The senior football student-athletes continued to use their football discourse in conversations throughout the focus group session; furthermore, the participants were explicit in their addressing of literacy, meaning they were able to articulate and clearly

state the connection between literacy and football, specifically through their football discourse. The senior football student-athletes asserted:

Pat:

Because if you're illiterate you're not going to be . . . Like it might be easier for you to pick up some plays but you've still got to read your playbook, like they've still got words in there that you have to use.

Ian:

You need literacy in both school and football.

Calvin:

I was going to say I think it's both (school and football), just from the fact that literacy and education is different than literacy and sport. Just based on the context you're going to learn differently and there's different learning patterns in sports than there is in, I think education in terms of the environment that you're going to learn in. So people are going to be able to interact differently and you're going to be able to learn, whether it be if you're reading or someone's taking notes in a different way, you're going to do something that's going to make you feel comfortable and help you learn faster and learn more efficiently.

Pat contended that if an individual were illiterate he would have difficulty learning the plays, playing football and participating in the sport, thus encompassing all of the aspects of literacy that the seniors had identified: reading, comprehension, and application. He said that one needs to be literate to "read your playbook," and "they've still got words in there [the playbook] that you have to use." By using the discourse of football (i.e., read the playbook) to explain his rationale for the importance of literacy in the sport and

addressing the need to know the discourse of football, he showed his own knowledge of and use of literacy skills. Furthermore, Calvin explicitly argued that literacy is not the same in the education and football settings, but that there is no doubt that one needs literacy in both environments. From his perspective, literacy in education and sport are both important, but they are based on different contexts. He purported that in each context an individual learns differently: "there's different learning patterns in sports than there is in, I think education in terms of the environment that you're going to learn in." Furthermore, he stated, "So people are going to be able to interact differently and you're going to be able to learn," which implied that not only is literacy different in each milieu, but the way one learns to be literate is different. Research has shown that individuals' ability to learn is often supported by their learning styles (that is, visual, auditory) but also their own knowledge of their styles (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2009). The participants continued to speak about literacy in regards to communication in football:

Wendell:

I think it's very, like it goes hand in hand because what information can you be presented with that's not some type of text or some type of form? Whether it's in sports or not. I mean yeah, you've got circles, you've got diagrams and stuff like that, but as far as explaining things, as far as being able to accurately interpret information, you need literacy. . . . Like Pat was saying, like it's words in a book, I mean everything you're ever going to get, most of the things that you're going to get that's meaningful in your life is in form of what, text, some type of text. Whether it be you know, a screen, a book, whatever. . .

Bryson:

I agree with him.

Jason:

Because you see the people who have literacy issues and issues with stuff like that, they have problems. Like you know, money problems, they have problems in their career so they can't . . . They might be good athletes, they can't pick up plays, and some of them never make it because they can't comprehend information well. So . . .

Jackson:

Oh yeah, in the middle because you've got to be educated to understand the plays . . . and athletic enough to be able to play.

The football student-athletes speak about comprehension, specifically football comprehension. Wendell purported that in education and in sport, each works with a text, which requires that you comprehend what is written inside the text. For example, he describes his playbook, which he was required to read, learn, and comprehend, and then go out onto the field and apply what he had learned. He explicitly made the connection between the reading of a text (playbook) and the comprehension of it, which was the key to him when it comes to football literacy. Jason too was focused on comprehension of the playbook, particularly the plays as texts, plays as the text and the importance of comprehension when it comes to playing football. Overall, the players saw the playbook and the plays within it as texts that have to be read, comprehended and then eventually executed, showing that these individuals not only understood the importance of literacy in football, but also the literacy skills needed to be successful on the field. In addition, the other classes did not see this perspective as explicitly as did the seniors, which one

might infer to mean that the longer that one has played college football the more likely they are to see the comprehension of the playbook as a factor in literacy and football.

Just like analyzing the plays. As mentioned earlier the football student-athletes, as part of their sport, often watched videos of past games to analyze their performances and videos of future rivals in order to study their opponents for upcoming games. In the case of this study, the senior student-athletes did not watch videos of games or opponents; instead they watched and analyzed two excerpts from *Gruden's Football Camp*[26] and used their football discourse in discussing the two quarterbacks featured. In this exercise, the senior football student-athletes again explicitly addressed literacy and how they perceived it through their analysis of the perceptions of Luck and RGIII's literacy.

Researcher:

Are Andrew Luck and Robert Griffin III literate?

Ian:

Yes. (with a look that implied that he felt the answer to the question was obvious)

Jackson:

Very. They're very, very literate.

Researcher:

What are we basing this off of?

Bryson:

They are good at sports and education.

Jackson:

[26] Refer back to Chapter 3 for more detail.

They can communicate.

Wendell:

I base it off everything. I base it off one, that they're . . .

Calvin:

Graduates.

Wendell:

First of all yeah, that they're graduates. Number one. But number two, like how they can

orchestrate their teams pretty much. They can like orchestrate their teams on the field and handle themselves off the field, you know what I mean, in front of cameras and stuff like that. I mean that's all we've really got. We've never seen the real person.

Jason:

Right, we've never . . . We don't know them personally, we just know what we see on TV essentially.

Ken:

Exactly.

Pat:
Very articulate

The senior football players shared that these two players are literate because of how they are able to work on and off the field. It is Wendell who contended, "They can like orchestrate their teams on the field and handle themselves off the field, you know what I mean, in front of cameras and stuff like that." For him, there were several factors both on and off the field that that make one literate, but his caveat offered a new perspective that

what the public sees might not be the whole truth. He used the discourse of football with words such as, "orchestrate," which referred to how RGIII made sure his team worked together and executed plays and "handles" in connection with RGIII's ability to speak in front of the media clearly and articulately. Bryson supported Wendell's perspective because despite not using his football discourse he shared that the two quarterbacks "are good at sports and education," which implied that both on and off the field abilities make these individuals' literate. Jackson further explained that since both quarterbacks could communicate well, they were literate. Lastly, Ken agreed with Jason and Pat that both Luck and RGIII were "very articulate," which referred back to Jackson's perspective that these individuals were literate because they could communicate. Although there is no research concerning what makes a football player literate, there is research that contends that what makes a great sports leader are individuals that can lead their teams, communicate, and their ability to work with others (Eys, Loughead, & Hardy, 2007), all aspects of how the senior football players define literacy with regards to these two quarterbacks. As a group the senior football student-athletes asserted that these quarterbacks were literate because they were able to communicate on and off the field and could bring their team together as well as do well in the classroom.

Literate Perceptions of Race

The final theme is based on the senior football student-athletes' perceptions of race in both the questionnaire concerning the effect race has on literacy and the conversations in which focus group participants directly discussed stereotypes[27] that exist in the sport. The

[27] For this paper, I define stereotypes as "over-exaggerated truths" that society often attributes to an entire group (that is, race, religion, gender, sport) (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 516).

senior participants showed their literacy skills and knowledge while using their discourse of football to examine the stereotypes that they observe in football. Again, since this theme concerns football, the senior football student-athletes did not discuss gender, but did address race in their short answer questions about literacy and in their discussion of football, specifically the quarterback position. A majority of the seniors spoke directly, rather than indirectly, about race and stereotypes: they openly expressed in their comments that race was the reason for the stereotypes and that race plays a role and affects the sport of football. Additionally, the participants criticized the sport's stereotypes, which showed through their ability to speak and break down the stereotypes. Lastly, this theme builds upon the previous three and furthers the discussion of the senior football student-athletes' perceptions of literacy based on literacy, race, and stereotypes.

The screen: Race as a factor. Just as a screen can prevent the other team from seeing a receiver on the football field, race as a factor in football is often shielded by a veil of ambivalence both in society and on the field. However, during the questionnaire and focus group the senior football student-athletes were willing to discuss race as it connects to the sport of football. In the senior focus group participants' questionnaire, they were asked to what extent they thought race affected literacy. Again, the student-athletes were invited to choose a degree of agreement or disagreement with the aforementioned statement.

Table 6.4

Senior Questionnaire Responses: I Think Race Affects Literacy.

Name	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	(26%)	(10%)	(16%)	(11%)	(37%)

Ian					X
Bryson				X	
Dan	X				
Mark	X				
Irving					X
Robin	X				
Denny					X
Kevin	X				
Darren		X			
Nate			X		
Wendell					X
Pat					X
Calvin			X		
Gerry		X			
Jackson					X
Nat				X	
Ken	X				
Kit			X		
Jason	X				

Twenty-six percent (26%) of the seniors chose a 1 (strongly disagree) with respect to the extent that race affects literacy. Both Ken and Jason were among those individuals. Ken, who identified as black, wrote, “I really don't believe much in the term race because it is

socially constructed." He asserted that he saw race as a word and an identity created by society that had no effect on his perspective on literacy. Jason, who identified himself as Hispanic, noted, "If someone wants to be literate they are going to be. If they don't want to then that's on them," suggesting that race was not an influence and that literacy was the result of an individual's own choices. Only 10% of the seniors chose 2 (somewhat disagree) and 16% picked 3 (neutral) as their perspective; none of the focus group participants chose either. Calvin, who identified as white, wrote in his questionnaire that he had "met both people with different types of race that read and don't' read." Thus he explained his answer echoing Jason's view that individuality had more influence on literacy than race. A small percentage, 11%, picked, 4 (somewhat agree) on the scale. Bryson, who identified himself as black, supported this answer by saying, "Depending on your race, you will be interested in different literacies." From his perspective, each race had different interests, leading to their knowledge about and understanding of various literacies. Lastly, 37% chose 5 on the scale (strongly agree). Jackson, Pat, Wendell, who all identified as black, and Ian, who identified as biracial, were among that group. Jackson contended, "From the hegemonic view, the African American population are illiterate," showing that he believed that the racial majority had created the view or stereotype that African Americans were illiterate; from this viewpoint, race does affect one's literacy. Pat wrote, "Society does not help those with color." He supported Jackson and expanded the perspective beyond just African Americans to other minority groups. Furthermore, Wendell wrote, "Whites, in relation to other minority races tend to be more educated," giving a perspective that supported the hegemonic view of race and literacy. Ian directly stated, "Race plays a huge role in people's perception of your intelligence

level, literacy level, and thought process." His perception was that race played a role in how others view an individual's literacy, intelligence and critical thinking.. The various perceptions of the effect race had on literacy varied, but society's view of race, not race itself, was the factor affecting literacy. The seniors showed openness on the subject of race in the sport of football in this discussion, and this openness continued to be evident when the conversation moved on to stereotypes.

Awareness of the coverage: race in football. Just as football players are aware of their opponents' locations and movements on the field, so too were the senior football student-athletes cognizant of prevailing stereotypes, including racial stereotypes, in the sport of football. The senior football student-athletes began the exchange about race and stereotypes without being prompted by an activity. The spontaneity of this exchange suggests the importance of race in the minds of these players.

Wendell:

Calvin, what position do you play?

Calvin:

Quarterback.

Wendell:

How convenient.

Researcher:

Could you elaborate on that comment?

Calvin:

Elaborate, elaborate (laughs). Why would you say that? (smiling)

Ken:

Quarterbacks are Caucasian.

Calvin:

Why is that?

Wendell:

Because you guys [whites] are smarter than us [blacks] so you guys are supposed to be able to run and manage things.

Calvin:

Now is that a stereotype towards black or white people?

Wendell:

It's a stereotype towards everyone.

Calvin:

Is it saying that you guys (black) aren't smart or is it saying that I'm smarter or is it saying that you guys are dumb?

Kerry:

It's saying that is what coaches look for.

The exchange between these seniors offered an interesting perspective on race and its role in football, that race plays a role in the quarterback position from the players' perspective as well as from that of the coaches. Obviously, since Wendell and Calvin play for the same team, they are each aware of the other's position, but the conversation about racial stereotypes and the quarterback position started when race entered the discussion. Ken asserted, "Quarterbacks are Caucasian," directly addressing race as a factor in the quarterback position. Moreover, Ken's perception is not unfounded: white athletes are often overrepresented in the quarterback position (Buffington, 2005).

Wendell addressed the stereotype that whites are smarter than blacks; thus, from that perspective whites were expected to be the natural leaders of a team, a common misconception in football (Mercurio & Filak, 2010). He said, "Because you guys are smarter than us [blacks] so you guys are supposed to be able to run and manage things," in response to which Calvin asked, "Now is that a stereotype toward black or white people?" Calvin's response allowed him to turn the table on the conversation, absolving him from being the one who stated the actual stereotype. Wendell used a similar tactic in his rejoinder, "It's a stereotype towards everyone," making the race issue in football about everyone rather than just one race. Subsequently he expanded on the issues of race he saw as existing in football. Calvin continued, "Is it saying that you [black] guys aren't smart or is it saying that I'm smarter [white]," thus formally addressing the persistence of racism in the representation of both the black and white quarterback, which research has found is grounded in the history of slavery and white dominance (Bruce, 2004). Ken's final comment put the stereotype in perspective, indicating that it was not about intelligence level or one's ability, but about "saying that is what coaches look for," (i.e. white quarterbacks). The conversation continued:

Pat:

I mean but you look on like ESPN and all that around draft time, when they talk about like certain quarterbacks . . . Like they talk about Andrew Luck, they talk about his smarts, like him being smart (taps his head) and accurate and all that. When they talk about like Robert Griffin they talk about him being smart but . . .

Wendell:

(interrupts) His natural ability.

Pat:

Yeah, they talk about his athletic ability. Both [Luck and RGIII] of them are extremely athletic, though, and both of them are very smart but one . . . You see the white quarterback got the (taps his head to indicate intelligence) . . . you know

Calvin:

You mean I get picked (for the draft) first (laughs and smiles).

Wendell:

(laughing and smiling) Yep.

Ian:

But that could be said on both sides because Andrew Luck's not athletic? I mean he's played, he's pretty good, so I feel like it's both. I mean no . . . It's a huge difference for the black quarterback but I mean they fault the white quarterbacks for not being athletic

. . . They say Peyton Manning is not athletic, that dude's pretty athletic.

The senior football players continued to engage in a discussion about race, but their conversation became more focused on particular players who play the quarterback position. The senior participants discussed not only how RGIII was stereotyped but how Luck was stereotyped as well. Thus, the seniors had a different take on the stereotypes of the quarterback position than did the juniors and the sophomores, in that they were focused on the stereotypes of the white and black quarterback, not just one or the other. The sophomores and juniors directed their conversations about the stereotypes of quarterbacks toward RGIII because they saw the stereotype explicitly connected to him since he was black and that stereotype was more prominent in the sport. For example,

Pat's initial point was that he saw both Luck and RGIII as intelligent and athletic, but the media viewed Luck as being more intelligent because he was white, conforming to the widely accepted stereotype that black quarterbacks are more athletic and white quarterbacks are more intelligent (Mercurio & Filak, 2010). However, Ian's commentary referred to Wendell's earlier statement that stereotypes of quarterbacks applied to both white and black players. Ian stated, "They fault the white quarterbacks for not being athletic," which has created another stereotype. The media has stereotyped certain white quarterbacks as not being athletic enough, such as Tim Couch (NFL draft pick number 1 in 1999) whose intelligence was often noted, while his athletic ability was rarely discussed (Buffington, 2005). The direct mention of and attention to race in the above conversations showed not only the participants' perceptions of stereotypes and race as they play a role in football, but also their ability to discuss these stereotypes using their football discourse. Their use of this discourse in analysis techniques and examples showed their literacy skills and knowledge. The senior football student-athletes did not indicate that they agreed with these stereotypes, only that they existed and were recognizable.

As we moved into viewing the video excerpts from *Gruden's Camp*, the seniors further analyzed race and stereotypes as they pertained to the quarterback position. The senior football student-athletes continued to directly address race as an aspect of the stereotypes associated with football and considered whether Luck and Griffin played into those stereotypes.

Researcher:

So do they or do they not play into those stereotypes that you discussed earlier?

Bryson:

I think no they don't.

Pat:

I think Robert Griffin doesn't play into that stereotype especially because you see him, he's . . . Like everyone thinks . . . When someone thinks of a black quarterback, they think like probably . . .

Jackson:

Athletic not smart.

Bryson:

Really athletic.

Wendell:

They highlight his [RGIII] athletic . . . you know, his athletics more than his education . . . I've been watching a lot of old games and they never once, I've never heard them once mention when he was getting drafted that he graduated with double major in three years. He was in grad school his senior year. I don't even know for what . . . You know, I don't even know if he finished grad school but . . . You know what I mean? That's worth knowing. They keep saying, "Oh, Andrew Luck went to Stanford," he's this, he's that, but never once did anybody know that he [RGIII] graduated a junior double major, I mean that he was going to grad school by the end of his junior year. Nobody knows that but everybody knows that he ran a 4.3, everybody knows he can throw the ball far.

The overall consensus of the senior football student-athletes was that neither of the quarterbacks played into the stereotypes willingly but that the media was at fault for the

making these players into stereotypes. Wendell stated, “They [the media] highlight his athletic . . . I've never heard them once mention when he was getting drafted that he graduated with double major in three years.” He asserted that the media chose not to highlight RGIII’s impressive educational accomplishments but instead focused on his athletic ability, further solidifying the stereotype that Wendell acknowledged in the sport of football. He pointed out that RGIII’s education was “worth knowing about,” but that the media continued to highlight only Luck’s educational achievements. Wendell’s perspective and those of his teammates are well documented in research, which has found there are residual and lingering effects of the historical belief that blacks had mental inadequacies in relation to their white counterparts (Woodward, 2002). Woodward also found that 53% of white Americans in his study still believed that African Americans, in general, were less intelligent, and he concluded that if this stereotype existed in society there was little reason it would not persist in the world of sports as well. Ken, Wendell, and Ian continued the discussion on whether Luck and Griffin played into quarterback stereotypes based on race:

Ken:

To me Robert Griffin plays into the stereotype, like on the field. If he didn't he would be like he was going against the stereotypes.

Researcher:

Explain that, because I don't understand.

Ken:

Of course he uses all his athletic abilities and the stereotype for black quarterbacks is that most of them are like freak athletes, great at running but yeah,

if he didn't run a 40, didn't showcase his speed at all, like didn't put that on display for the NFL other than in game situations then to me he wouldn't be like going into that stereotype, he would be going against it.

Ian:

I think it's worse with Cam Newton. Cam Newton first came out, because of Cam Newton, Robert Griffin III had to deal with this and I remember watching video and listening to him. I mean he . . . He embraced it[the stereotype].

Wendell:

See, the thing is I don't think Robert Griffin embraces it. Like the way he . . . Like you can tell the way he handle his business, like how he talks, you know like they kind of stuff . . . I remember when he was getting drafted and they messed up his 40 time, you know what I mean, and the people were madder than he was. He was like you know, "I ran my 40; actually it's supposed to have been a 4.3." I think they had him down for a 4.1, but they expected him to be pissed, you know what I'm saying?

Ken contended that if RGIII did not as he said, "run a 40, didn't showcase his speed at all, like didn't put that on display for the NFL other than in game situations then to me he wouldn't be like going into that stereotype, he would be going against it." So, from his perspective, RGIII played into the stereotype of the black quarterback, maybe not as much off the field , but his athletic ability was well documented on the football field. He further stated that RGIII placed himself in the stereotype and did not appear to fight against it on the field. Ian, on the other hand, explained that a former first round draft

pick for quarterback, Cam Newton,[28] who is black, dealt with similar issues as RGIII; furthermore, he believed that RGIII had to deal with the stereotypes pertaining to the black quarterback in part because of Newton's embracing his athletic ability rather than his intelligence. This comparison further showed how the players directly identified race as a major aspect of the stereotypes that they recognized in the sport of football. Wendell agreed with Ian, adding, "See, the thing is I don't think Robert Griffin embraces it. Like the way he . . . Like you can tell the way he handle his business, like how he talk, you know like they kind of stuff." Thus, Wendell indicated that he saw RGIII as more than athletic: RGIII was able to show that he could speak well, had great knowledge of the game, and carried himself and his intelligence proudly, breaking the black quarterback stereotype. The football student-athletes concluded the conversation with their discussion of Luck and the stereotype of the white quarterback:

Calvin:

I don't know if he plays into it as in like he's just being himself and the stereotype is him.

I think he can't change it.

Jackson:

Yeah. (nodding his head in agreement)

Calvin:

Like people say stereotypes because you know, that's just the way . . .

Wendell:

Society builds it.

[28] Cam Newton was a first round quarterback draft pick in 2011 for the Carolina Panthers. He also won the Heisman trophy while he attended Auburn University.

Calvin:

Right, like it's not like he can change and do something that he can't do. It's not like he can go against the stereotype.

Jason:

It's like RGIII is a prodigy, RGIII surprises you. . . But if Andrew Luck did everything he was supposed to do, like what society thinks you're supposed to do, it's okay what he's meant to do. But RGIII does something out of the ordinary, it's surprising.

Calvin argued that Luck played into the stereotype of the white quarterback only because he happened to conform to the stereotype as a player (that is, not athletic but intelligent). He asserted, "He's just being himself and the stereotype is him. I think he can't change it," implying that Luck could not disrupt the stereotype that society had already assigned to his race and football position. Again, the participants discussed the idea that society has created these stereotypes. Bruce (2004) asserts that these stereotypes have become part of the language associated with great athletes, and that they are grounded in the historical assumption that Blacks were more physical than whites, which was "used to justify the institution of slavery . . . [and] constructions of White supremacy" (p. 862). Thus, the senior football student-athletes addressed race as a factor in the stereotypes of the quarterback position. However, none of the senior participants contended that these stereotypes should be criticized. Perhaps they believed that since society had created them, coaches subscribed to them, and the media perpetuated them, they would not change, making it pointless to address them. The players openly discussed race and saw

the stereotypes of both the white and black quarterback, showing that they believed the stereotypes affected everyone, not just one race.

As the chapter continues, we move into the individual interviews. The focus group themes discussed above give an overall view of the conceptualizations of literacy by the senior football student-athletes. These conceptualizations also help us to understand where and how they had been formed and how they played a role in the literacy expectations that these individuals encountered on and off the field. The interviewees, Pat and Wendell, offer insight into the literacy expectations coaches and professors have for the football student-athletes. Moreover, we gain understanding of how each interviewee handled these expectations. It is with these individual perspectives that we further learn and recognize what these literacy expectations meant for them on and off the field.

Introducing the interviewees

Of the eight senior focus group members, only two agreed to participate in the individual interviews. In the interviews, Pat and Wendell described the various expectations they each encountered both on and off the field of football. In particular, they focused on the literacy expectations of their professors in the classroom and of their coaches in the classroom and on the field. Thus, in this last section of the chapter, I address my final research question: How do football student-athletes characterize and deal with the expectations of literacy held by coaches, themselves, college instructors, and university classrooms?

As in previous chapters, each of the individual parts below begins with an overview of the interviewee. Then, I briefly address the interviewee's perception of

literacy in school and on the field. Next, I move onto his perceptions of the literacy expectations that are held by both his professors and coaches, on and off the field, and how he handles them. I provide excerpts from the interview showing the interviewee's opinions in order to give a richer and more detailed view of his conceptualization of literacy. Lastly, I summarize the interviewee's perspectives.

Pat

As a sophomore, Pat was part of the pilot study that I conducted in the spring of 2011, and I was glad that he was willing to participate again in my dissertation research study. Pat identified as black in his questionnaire. He had an older sister who was earning her master's in Journalism at a university in New York City, and both his parents worked in law enforcement. Pat was tall and broad-shouldered, both requirements for his position as an offensive lineman. He kept his hair short and always had a full beard. Pat went to a private school and grew up in a suburban area about 30 minutes away from the campus. I interviewed him the day before his birthday, and when I inquired what he had asked his parents for, he replied, "You know what I actually asked my parents for my birthday? . . . To do a genealogy." He was interested in learning about his family history, which seemed congruent with his original major in History. However, because his GPA had been too low a couple of semesters in a row, he had to change his major to American Studies, with a minor in African American studies. When he began college, he had been set on becoming a history teacher, but both his GPA and his football schedule made it difficult for him to pursue this degree. However, he was not deterred from pursuing his future plans:

> But I know what I want to do after school, I have a lot of stuff planned out. . . I want to play for five years. Then after that I want to teach and coach, preferably in North Carolina, which is where I want to move for some reason. And then me and David, and Ed we are going to start a training facility but that is what David and Ed want to do. They are going to start a training facility but with my part it will be a tutoring program.

Pat indicated that he had a plan and knew what he wanted after he graduated from college; moreover, his plan gave insight into his aspiration to be a teacher who wants to make a difference. Pat played offensive lineman or guard, either the right or the left. His job was to protect the quarterback and the running back from getting sacked, which he asserted was similar to his personality, recalling that "growing up I was always displaying those kind of tendencies. I was always protective of my friends so I guess it makes sense that I turned into an offensive lineman." Pat connected his position (that is, protector, front line) to his personality as someone who is a loyal friend, a protector of those close to him, and the first person to jump in when his friends need help.

Pat's perception of literacy

As in the previous interviews, the participant was asked to define literacy**.** In his questionnaire, Pat defined literacy as "Comprehending reading material." His definition in the interview was an extension of that idea: "Being literate means, you can read, you can understand information and then you can go back explain the information." In this definition he added communicating the information one comprehended. Moreover, when I asked if there were multiple definitions of literacy, Pat stated,

> Yeah. There definitely are. That is just my personal definition of literacy. People might think that being literate means just being able to read or just being able to read and comprehend. But, for me I say, you need to be able to explain it because, yeah, that just shows that you fully grasp the concept of what you are learning.

He explained that his definition is reading, comprehending, and being able to explain information, but other individuals or even society might have different perspectives. Additionally, he stated being able to show "that you fully grasp the concept of what you are learning" is an important aspect of being literate. When I asked what aspects of college one needs to be literate for he commented, "Everything," then continued,

> You can't read, I don't know how you got into college in the first place to be honest. And um, yeah once you are in college you will have to be able to read and comprehend and explain the test to your teacher. What it is you learned, so, you gotta be literate, there is no way around in it in college.

He sees literacy as a necessity and something that distinguishes one individual from another. More specifically, Pat implied that individuals who believe the stereotype of college football players as illiterate are mistaken, since from his perspective there is no way an individual can be illiterate and not only attend college but stay in college. Pat communicated that literacy played a role in football. He argued,

> Because you need to be able to read. You need to be literate to understand, the plays, everything about football. You have to know the playbook, it can be very confusing if you do not know how to read and understand the information. So you have to be literate.

Pat's shared that his playbook consists of more than 100 pages before the season begins and comes in huge binder with his name and position on the front of it. As season begins, he stated the playbook gets smaller because it becomes specific to the opponent that the team takes on each week. I have had the opportunity to explore the Pete's binder, and as Pete stated, if you do not know how to read the plays, it is confusing mess of lines, X's, O's and other diagrams that make no sense. Therefore, I agree with Pat's assertion that one must be literate, more specifically, football literate, to understand the plays and the game itself. Pat's definition of literacy encompassed both education and football; additionally, it became evident that for Pat being literate included reading, comprehending, and analyses and was necessary for both college and football.

Pat's Multiple Expectations of Literacy

I explored the expectations that Pat encountered in the college setting. Pat discussed his own expectations and those of his professors and coaches and how he managed them. His perspective on the expectations and how he handled them showed insight into Pat's own conceptualization of literacy both on and off the field. He did not contest the expectations of his coaches or professors; rather, he embraced and exceeded them.

Literacy expectations of Pat's professors. The conversation began with a discussion of how his professors viewed him and his fellow college football players. In general, he asserted that it varied, which was the same answer as his fellow interviewees had given earlier. Pat stated,

Pat:

It varies for who the professor is. Some view us as lazy and here on a free ride. While others expect a lot of us 'cause they know if they don't reach a certain GPA then we can't play. So they expect us to work hard so we can play our sport.

Researcher:

You said yesterday about, a professor that you had given you . . .

Pat:

Oh, Dr. B, he said he expected us to work, but especially in his class 'cause he knew we all played football. He wanted us to succeed and he said, that in the real world, nothing is going to be as easy as in college. So, we would have to get used to working hard and he was right.

He asserted that expectations were wide-ranging. Pat used Dr. B as an example of a professor who had high expectations for football student-athletes. This is often not the case. Simons et al. (2007) found that the faculty tended to treat athletes differently and saw them negatively, with the result that the athletes felt less positive toward professors and college overall. Thus, Pat's use of a positive example of a professor rather than a negative one implied that he remembered or wanted to portray the positive impact and higher expectations of his professors rather than the negative perceptions. The conversation continued as we discussed the literacy expectations of his professors.

Pat shared that often professors were shocked by how literate he was because they, he believed, did not expect that much from him. He began,

Pat:

Some of them are also shocked when they see how literate I am. I give an answer and they just wouldn't expect that from me. Um, but I am going to go back and

say that it is a stereotype again. Cause I don't do a whole lot of talking in class even though you said I do like to talk a lot but I know what I am talking about when I do talk and that . . .

Researcher:

You sort of pick and choose when you want to talk?

Pat:

Especially in American Studies, there is a lot of stuff that you can relate to just because if you go through it, it is life . . . So there is always something I can say but um, I just, if I don't have the best answer, I am not just going to say something to just say it. If I am going to say something, I want to get my point across and let the professor know I do know what I am talking about and that I do and I know the issue that we are discussing.

Researcher:

So you don't want to talk just to talk?

Pat:

Yes. I feel like some of them don't expect us to be literate at all. They think since we are here just to play football. Um, then you do have a lot of professors that want us, you know, want to hear what we have to say and expect more out of us because we are athletes.

In his opinion, his some professors did not expect him to be literate. As he stated, "Some of them are also shocked when they see how literate I am. . ."but added "I am going to go back and say that it is a stereotype," which showed his awareness that he was stereotyping just like his professors. Oftentimes, professors play and act on the

stereotypes of athletes because of how the athletes react to the professors, which in the end is a losing situation for both sides (Simons, et al., 2007). In class, Pat contended that he wanted to prove to his professors that he was literate and that he knew what was being discussed and taught in class; in addition, he wanted to contribute and add substance to the conversations in class rather than just speaking to receive participation points.

The literacy expectations of Pat's coaches. Pat contended that his professors had varied views of his literacy and of him as a student. When we discussed his coaches' expectations of him, he explained that the expectations in the classroom differed from those on the field. Pat said that on the field players are expected to give their all, and in the classroom they are expected to remain eligible to play.

Pat:

> On the field you know just do whatever they tell me to do. At one hundred and ten percent and then off the field, maintain, a certain GPA that we need to have and not to get into trouble.

His perspective was clear and to the point. Coaches want their players to do what they are told to do and do it to the best of their ability. However, in the classroom he believed that coaches wanted him to be average, maintain his grades to play and not get into trouble that would jeopardize his continuing to play football. Pat views his coaches' expectations as being high on the field and average in the classroom. These expectations appear to be very limited, but Pat's view is not unfounded in light of Benson (2000) who discovered that the football student-athletes in her study felt from the beginning of their college career to their graduation that they received messages from coaches that school was not important and their intellectual ability was not valid. I probed further:

Researcher:

Do you think your coaches' expectations conflict with your professors' expectations?

Pat:

No, I don't think so. I definitely think that they expect more out of us academically than our coaches. The coaches, they probably say they do, but they just want us to play football. There is nothing around that. But no, it doesn't conflict.

He saw his professors as having higher academic expectations of him than his coaches. Pat claimed that his coaches said that they wanted him to do well academically but what they wanted was for him to stay eligible. His comment "There is nothing around that" could mean he did not see these expectations as anything more than words that his coaches preached but did not believe. His final comment suggests that he was not shocked or upset over the expectations but rather accepted them as the status quo. From his perspective, the expectations of his coaches and his professors did not intertwine, but did not conflict with each other either. Yet, despite the differences he saw in his professors' and coaches' expectations, he was aware of their expectations in each context. Pat also explained that he and his teammates were tested the night before a game, and that was where literacy expectations were often seen.

Pat:

We do, we go over the playbook everyday except for Friday. No actually, I just thought about it we do go over it on Friday, because Friday nights, we have our tests.

Researcher:

You have a test?

Pat:

Yeah we have a test. Every Friday.

Researcher:

On the plays? How do they test you?

Pat:

What your assignment is. If you are a left guard, I need to know my assignments, and I have to say what the right guard's assignment is and then most of the time because you are working with another ten dollar tackle, you basically have to do their assignments. So you end up doing, pretty much the whole line.

Researcher:

Do they just hand out a quiz?

Pat:

No it's a test. It is like, they have three or four columns, one column will be one play, the second column a second play, and the third column another play. And then in each box it is a different formation that that team runs and so what we can expect based on our formation.

Researcher:

Oh my goodness. So how do they grade it?

Pat:

Just if you get the right, the right block. If you say it, all you gotta do is write down what your block is but I mean it takes a long time. It takes awhile cause

some tests can be, the shortest test I ever had was sixteen pages long. The longest was like 23.

Researcher:

And do your coaches look them over?

Pat:

They grade us like any other test.

This exchange between the Pat and me provided new insight into the literacy expectations in football; furthermore, it appeared that there was more to literacy in football than reading the plays and reading the defense. Earlier, Pat had contended that the expectations of coaches and professors differed with respect to school, but it appeared that, when it came to literacy, coaches have high expectations. For example, Pat said that the coaches wanted to make sure that each player knew where they should be on the field, which player position to tackle, and what the other offensive or defensive line would do. So, coaches expected the players to be literate not only about the plays and their positions, but also regarding what they needed to do on the field to ensure the team success. In explaining these expectations, he used his football discourse, with words and phrases such as, "assignment," "right guard," and "whole line," showing his knowledge and understanding of the topic as well as how well he knew his position and the sport as a whole. Pat's words also provided a new perspective on the literacy expectations of coaches, who required their players to know the information and be able to apply their knowledge for the game the following day. Thus, literacy with respect to football went beyond reading to include memorization, comprehension, and the physical action of playing on the field.

Pat perceived his coaches' and professors' literacy expectations as varied and not in conflict, but he did recognize that his professors saw him as being less literate because he was black and a football student-athlete. Moreover, he contended that the literacy expectations held by his coaches were not only high but also broad, including the player's knowledge, execution, and ability to communicate the necessary information for each game. Yet, with respect to school, the expectations were lowered to the level of eligibility. Lastly, Pat embraced his coaches' school and football expectations as well as his professors' expectations, but attempted to exceed both sets and prove his literacy and ability both on and off the field.

Wendell

Wendell had graduated at the end of the Fall 2012 semester with a degree in Family Science and was trying out for several National Football League (NFL) teams over the following few months. He mentioned during the interview that he had a degree and had completed several internships, so if the NFL did not work out, he was prepared to find a job. Wendell identified as black, wore his hair in long dreadlocks down to the base of his neck, and was known for wearing t-shirts that were too tight in order to show off his muscles. His two older sisters both graduated from college. He counted his mother as his only parent. He grew up in a suburban area and had gone to both a public high school and then to a private prep high school. Like Pat, Wendell had participated in the pilot study questionnaire and interview in the spring of 2011. When he walked into the interview he told me that, since there were more questions this time than in the pilot study, he was "going to give short answers." However, Wendell liked to talk, so his interview was the longest.

When I asked for an interesting fact about Wendell, he said he had not played football until his sophomore year and on "the first day I put my pads on backwards." Also, he added that he was "an All-State basketball player in high school," but " they [coaches] said I wasn't tall enough to play in college." Therefore, he explained that he did not choose football; it chose him, because the only scholarships he was offered were for football. Wendell played tight end on the field and described his position:

> Tight end is a forgotten position. I mean nobody ever checks the tight end really, but I like it because you get to a little bit of, you get to see both sides of the spectrum . . . we are the only players on the field that are required to do things. We wound up in backfield like a running back, we ran up like a receiver and we also we are attached to the line too.

As he stated, his position is versatile on the field, and he believed those who play tight end are the only ones who are required both to run and to catch the ball. For the past three years, he has been the starting tight end on the team. Wendell's perspective and reflection on how he has grown while in college showed his maturity and his knowledge of himself:

> **Wendell:**
>
> When I first got to college, it was just like, I felt college was a task, I didn't think of it as
>
> . . . I just thought about it as something I had, I didn't want to do it, I had to.
>
> **Researcher:**
>
> Something that had to be done but you weren't looking forward to it?
>
> **Wendell:**

> Yeah, so I was just, in that sense, you will take just getting passing grades. After awhile, I just got tired of worrying about grades at the end of the semester, I got tired of like, making stuff hard. It is harder that way, you, loaf around, you do it because you have to, you go to class cause you have to, you study cause you don't want to get a terrible grade but . . . I mean, it just changed. You just realize it is much easier to just, do it. But why not get something out of it. Why not try to learn?

He shared that when he originally entered college he thought of it as something that he had to do and not something that he wanted to do. Wendell's account of his later realization demonstrated not only how his perspective had changed but also how he had changed. He no longer wanted just to pass his classes; he wanted to do well. His growth process was evident from his increased grade point average each year (3.0 upon graduation) and his mature outlook on where he was and where he has gotten during his college years.

Wendell's Perception of Literacy

Wendell's definition of literacy focused on reading, comprehension and application of material. In the interview he described it as follows:

> Being literate means to me, means that you are able to comprehend print material, or internet, books, you know language, whatever. It's the ability to comprehend something that is written to me. I mean, and many people can argue about what comprehension is, like do you understand and can you apply it, et cetera. But to me it just means, you show me something, I can read it, can I understand it, and I

can apply it, can I follow the directions. People might be able to read it but they can't apply it so that is what it means to me.

For Wendell, being literate was more than reading and comprehending the material: it extended to the application of the information. Furthermore, his definition included more than just traditional texts, such as books: he extended it to new literacies, including the Internet. On the other hand, his assertion that others could argue with him showed that he might not be as secure in his original and somewhat nuanced definition. Therefore he added his own example, showing his own literacy, which solidified his perspective and definition of literacy. Next, we discussed literacy and its role in football.

In his questionnaire, Wendell wrote, "Those who struggle to comprehend and retain material struggle on the field as well," asserting that literacy played a role in football just as it did in the classroom. During the interview, he described the impact of literacy and what it meant to football.

Researcher:

Does literacy have a place in football?

Wendell:

Absolutely. Okay, you get a playbook, it is a hundred and somewhat pages long, each playbook has, a diagram, on this diagram there are circles, boxes, it has letters that indicate, positions, and these letters are charted underneath in a box and in this box, your letter has a description next to it. Well, what does this have to do with literacy? If you don't know what a Y is, you won't know that you have to read the Y assignment. Even if you know what a Y is, you still have to be able to comprehend what it says. But then it has a load of abbreviations, LOS- means

> Line of Scrimmage, you know a deuce is a double team with another person besides you, a tag e. All these abbreviations you got to be able to comprehend. Not only do you need to be able to comprehend but also you got to be able to apply them. You gotta be able to, and sometimes you gotta be able to make calls, so you got to be able to, you gotta know schemes. Then next to that, that is one play with the background, letters and description, right next to it you have that same play, with different shells of defense.

His in-depth response showed the importance of literacy and the role that literacy played in football, in his mind. Wendell's use of the terms and abbreviations that are prevalent in football, and his description of the playbook and the knowledge needed to read it, showed the importance of not only reading but also comprehension and application of the playbook on the field. He continued to use his football discourse when he emphasized the importance of comprehension: "If you don't know what a Y is, you won't know that you have to read the Y assignment. Even if you know what a Y is, you still have to be able to comprehend what it says." His example gave more credence to the role he portrayed literacy as playing in football. Wendell also shared that not only is it important to know the abbreviations, but applying them on the field is important as well. Throughout his explanation, Wendell used his football discourse to show the significance of literacy and demonstrated his own literacy levels in football. For Wendell, literacy on the football field is reading, comprehending, and applying the plays and information you have learned to the field; in short, he defined literacy in terms of football, similarly to the way he had defined literacy earlier, and maintained the importance of literacy in football. As the conversation continued, he connected literacy in football to literacy in college and

further showed his football discourse and knowledge of literacy in both football and school.

Wendell emphasized that there was a link between literacy in football and literacy in college. However, he indicated that the connection is not about staying eligible to play in college, but rather that literacy affected both education and football. He explained,

> There is actually a complete chain because if you don't study you are gonna look terrible. If you don't study for a test you are probably going to do terrible. And if you don't study your playbook you are gonna make mistakes. So, I don't think there is any conflict, the only conflict is, like really fatigue. You get tired, after practice I am not reading s**t. I am going to sleep or I am going to do something I want to do because I go to school all day, and then I come to practice, you know what I mean. So it is just, I am going to do something I want to do.

He asserted that studying and being literate is important in school and on the football field. He directly addressed literacy in his claim that a player who did not put in the effort to be literate in both aspects of his life would do badly in school and on the field. However, from his perspective, literacy in school and on the field were at odds with respect to the fatigue of putting in effort in both school and football. It was not lack of motivation or intelligence that had a negative effect on players' literacy or perceived literacy, but rather their exhausting schedules and the high expectations of coaches and professors that hindered their ability to work and excel both in school and on the field. In Simons et al. (2007), students expressed the overwhelming nature of both school and their sports. The researchers contended that the athletes might be interested in school, but that their commitment to both their sport and school made it tough for them to do their

best in both, as in Wendell's perspective. After speaking about literacy, we discussed the multiple expectations that he encountered in the classroom and on the field.

Wendell's Multiple Literacy Expectations

Wendell discussed the multiple expectations that he encountered as a football student-athlete. He asserted that his professors' expectations and his coaches' expectations at times varied but often were similar. Wendell stated he liked the image that people had of him because he played football: "I am going to get a degree and I am going to do very well in your class just to piss you off." Moreover, he liked to shock people and prove them wrong; this attitude drove him both in the classroom and on the field.

Literacy expectations of Wendell's professors. Wendell pointed out that previous encounters with other players had influenced his professors' expectations, but he argued that the expectations were not always valid, and professors often underestimated the football student-athletes at the university he attended.

> I think that, but a lot of them are kinda of ignorant [professors] . . . I always think like that but some professors, I think some people like to think of athletes and normal students are two totally different ends of the spectrum. They don't respect the fact that, in their minds, we are not good enough to be in this school and you know, theoretically, not even theoretically speaking but most of us wouldn't have the grades to get in this school. Like, to be honest, but you know in the same token, if they had an athletic document, none of you [professors] all would or should have either, you know what I mean. So it is give and take.
>
> **Researcher:**

And there is the chance that you guys didn't have the skills to get in?

Wendell:

Exactly, but, my thing is that, you put us in this institution among all these people who deserve to be here and most of us graduate. If we put you on the field, none of you, maybe, if we put the whole school on the field, maybe two of you would make it through a season successfully.

He explained that there were professors that he thought were ignorant because they believed that most of the football players were at the university just to play their sport and did not respect the players as students. Wendell candidly admitted that some of the student-athletes would not have gotten into the university because of their grades; however, Wendell still believed that despite that, professors needed to respect the players as students. He argued that the expectations of the professors might be low, but 72% of the football players graduated from his university (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013, p. 9), therefore, it did not matter how the football student-athletes got to the university. Again, Wendell went back to the inability of many of the students or professors to do what he and his teammates did on the field. He contended, "If we put you on the field, none of you, maybe, if we put the whole school on the field, maybe two of you would make it through a season successfully." He turned the expectations of his professors back onto them and predicted that they would not be as successful as he and his teammates were on the field, implying that he might not have the highest expectations of his professors either.

Wendell asserted that oftentimes the literacy expectations that professors had of football student-athletes were due to previous encounters with players. He contended that

this was not a surprise or a shock because people commonly made assumptions about others:

> Professors expect us to do little and don't expect a lot. They don't expect us to want to work, they don't expect us to be diligent about things, and they don't expect us to be on time. They don't expect certain things and that is because there are a few people, some of our teammates have done that. They have tried to get an extension on papers, came to class late, turned in papers late, tried to take shortcuts. I mean, you know, I just think that professors are shaped by their experiences with athletes. Like, if they had all good athletes, they might have had a set of us who came on time, and they based their perceptions on that but if they had the ones, then their perception is going to be that of everybody which is I think is fair. If you, if I had only had to experience one set of people and that is all I had to judge a whole group of people, I mean even though, maybe everybody is not like, I can't really fault them for judging us that way cause that is cause we set it up for ourselves really. I mean, I tried to be the opposite, I try to be on time and I try to get my work in on time.

Wendell argued that professors had a poor view of the literacy of football student-athletes because of their past experiences with other players' behaviors, such as taking shortcuts. Thus, he was not astonished by the literacy expectations of his professors. However, at times in his response it appeared that he understood the professors' perspectives, possibly because he had been in the same position as them (i.e., making assumptions about people) and therefore is less surprised when others do the same. Wendell indicated that, during his time at the university, he has tried to be different in order to give professors a

new perspective but he did not say whether that had made a difference or changed the image previously created. Again, he was aware of how people viewed him and what that meant for him as an individual in the classroom. Lastly, he declared that the expectations of his professors and past experiences with other football student-athletes should not be taken to indicate a student-athlete's ability and literacy in the classroom.

> So, yeah, we might not have been here but I don't think that should be the sole indicator to why, how, or what type of students we are. Just because we get here, it doesn't mean that we have to stay here. We still have to do, our work that doesn't change, our work doesn't change, and we do the same work as everybody else. We are sitting in the same, the same people who sit next to us with a 4.0 GPA and a 1350 SAT and we sit in there with our little 850 and our little 2.5 GPA we sit right next to them we are all doing the same work, we are. But we can do that. And if we don't meet the requirements we get kicked out anyways.

From Wendell's perspective, professors should not base their expectations on the student-athletes' being athletes and the assumption that they are just in college to play their sport. His rationale cast a new light on the assumptions that professors make about student-athletes. Wendell made a valid point that it was just as easy for these players to fail out as it was for them to work to graduate. Wendell's point was that despite the football student-athletes' not having attained high GPAs and SAT scores, they were not illiterate, and they were still required to do the same work and take the same classes as the other students. Moreover, if they did not do well, they were made to leave the university; thus, to judge all players the same was not fair. Wendell did not argue against the literacy expectations that his professors had of him, but he did challenge the

perception and stereotype that all football players at the college were there to play football and were unable to do the work. He did not judge his professors but did persevere beyond the stereotypes. Correspondingly, Simons et al. (2007) found that the most common response (35%) by student-athletes to stereotypes in the classroom was to work harder and to reject this perspective, just as Wendell contended he did in class with his actions, work ethic, and literacy skills. Wendell understood the expectations and strived to excel beyond them and show his professors that they were wrong and ignorant in their perceptions.

The literacy expectations of Wendell's coaches. In the interview, Wendell addressed the literacy expectations his coaches had of him on and off the field.

> I think, my coaches' expectations, off the field they just expect me to do my work and not be a problem, which I am not. But on the field some of their expectations are pretty ridiculous. Like, they will say things like, I had a coach tell me that every time I touch the ball I should score. That is ridiculous. I've had them, my expectations are different than the next person's. Because I am a better athlete than everybody in the room, I got to do extraordinary things. So you can't tell me, this is my problem, and I have told them, I have this problem, you can't say that I am better than anybody else and judge me on a different pedestal but put me behind somebody because I don't meet this threshold. So, if you judge him on this, judge me on the same thing. . . . That, my expectations are once again based on my physical stature as usual and they like . . . it is ridiculous.

As he stated, the expectations in the classroom were pretty straightforward from his perspective: "off the field they just expect me to do my work and not be a problem, which

I am not." Thus, he felt that he met all the school expectations that his coaches held for him. Moreover, his perspective echoed his teammates and that of Benson (2000), where the football student-athletes contended that the coaches did not preach that school was a top priority. Yet, with respect to the expectations on the field, the perception changed, and he asserted that because of his athletic ability he felt that the expectations of him were higher than those his counterparts faced on the field. Additionally, the passion he displayed when he spoke about these expectations and his belief that they were unfair was greater than in any other conversation we had. His passion stemmed from not agreeing with his coaches' expectations on the field, which he found to be ridiculous and unfounded. In other words, he easily met all other expectations off the field, but he believed that those on the field were designed to make sure that he never reached them, putting him at a disadvantage despite his being the best player at the position. Yet, he still persevered and worked toward proving his coaches wrong with his on the field performance and work ethic, much as he did in the classroom with his professors. As we continued, I asked what he believed were the literacy expectations of his coaches. He stated that the expectations of the players were based on where an individual grew up rather than their race or their nationality.

> So, I mean it is, it is tricky . . . I just think about where each player came from. . . I came from this area, okay, these are the type of guys who come from this area, then he must be like this guy. So, it is just a generalization, you know what I mean. Not until they are with you for a long time, till where they are like, okay, he is not what I thought he was. So it took awhile because we got new coaches so. . . He might have played with a guy who was black, who didn't understand

things and grasp things as well. So his own generalizations, came from where he was playing or players he has coached. So, it is not until you spend time, you spend legitimate time that you get to make accurate judgments really.

He argued the literacy expectations held by his coaches were based on where an individual came from and that most often these perspectives are "generalizations." He does not fault his coaches or even judge them, as he did above, because he asserted that he understood where their literacy expectations on the field were coming from. It is a plausible inference that Wendell did not fight against these literacy expectations because he had repeatedly faced them and did not believe they would change. Wendell believed that only if coaches really got to know their players individually would they stop making generalizations about them and their literacy. Despite his statement that race did not factor into the generalizations, the example he used did show that sometimes race played a role in football and in the classroom. He explained that the generalizations made by coaches based on race, neighborhood or past experiences did not change till the coaches spent ample time with the players and were able to make accurate judgments of their literacy.

Wendell perceived the literacy expectations as low and based on their previous encounters with other football players. On the other hand, Wendell saw the literacy expectations of his coaches as based on where a player was from and his education background. Wendell handled the literacy expectations on the field with an open mind and lens on the reality of the situation that he encountered. In addition, he took the literacy expectations of his professors as a challenge to prove his literacy and push himself toward graduation.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

There is growing concern from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), Athletic Directors, athletic programs, and universities across the country about sub-par academic performance among college football student-athletes. The national average graduation rate for Division I football student-athletes is 70%, which is up from 67% previous years (2002-2003) but still well below the average (80%) of their non-athlete counterparts (Lapchick, Lily, & Kuhn, 2010). As fewer than 2% of college football student-athletes will make the National Football League (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013), it is crucial that all football student-athletes be able to get a college education. Exploring the perceptions of athletic and academic literacy that these student-athletes encounter can help us understand why so many of these students are not reaching the goals that have been set for them by the NCAA and the university community.

My research study focused on sophomore, junior, and senior college football student-athletes at a large public university. Having come to this study as a result of my own experiences with football student-athletes, I was concerned with the poor graduation rates and lackluster grade point averages of these students and the negative perceptions they had of school and of their own academic ability and performance. The results of the pilot study I conducted in the spring of 2010 confirmed the importance of these concerns. Therefore, as part of my dissertation research study, I sought to investigate in more depth the academic literacy and the athletic literacy of the football student-athletes had and what that meant for them as college students.

Through this study, I was able to identify the implications of the football student-athletes athletic literacy for college literacy and the academic world that many of the

football student-athletes do not participate in to the full extent of their abilities. Additionally, this study was the first step in the process of investigating the connection between athletics and academics from the direction of literacy, a connection that is foundational to the effort of fostering the academic development of student-athletes at the college level. Hearing the voices of the football student-athletes and learning how they conceptualized the academic and athletic literacy in their lives provided new insights into what needs to be done in to improve their college experiences and graduation rates. Thus, this study will be a starting point for future research on the literacy perspectives of football student-athletes and how those perspectives play into their academic performance.

There are four major findings concerning this research study that can be explored. To begin, the football student-athletes reported and displayed gendered perceptions of literacy, meaning they saw females as readers of fiction and more focused on their education than males. As mentioned earlier, gender and literacy has been a major reading and literacy topic in recent research (Smith & Wilhelm, 2005; Tatum, 2005). This research study augments existing research by focusing explicitly on college male football student-athletes as a distinct population and extending the research beyond K-12 setting. In addition, this study also focuses on the football student-athletes' knowledge and perceptions of the stereotypes they perceive as playing a role in football. As stated earlier, existing research concerning the stereotypes in football explores the impact of race on the sport of football through the culture, the media, coaches perceptions and historical context (Benson, 2000; Bruce, 2004; Mercurio & Filak, 2010); this study's research on the perceptions of stereotypes as a form of literacy among college football

student-athletes offers a new perspective on the specific role of such stereotypes in college football. Furthermore, this research provides more voices and allows the players to purport their knowledge of these stereotypes through the discourse of sport. However, for the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to focus on two specific findings, football discourse and the connection between academic literacy and football literacy, due to their originality and contribution to the existing research as a whole.

I begin this chapter with the findings of my research study. Next, I examine the educational implications of the research data, the contributions this study makes to our understanding of literacy among college football student-athletes, and identify the audience for these findings. Then, I consider the limitations of the research study. Lastly, I discuss the directions that future research might take to enhance our understanding of the academic and athletic literacy of student-athletes in football and in other collegiate sports (e.g., field hockey, wrestling) as well.

Findings

In this section, I summarize the major findings of this study. I have divided this portion of the chapter into two sections corresponding to the two major types of findings: 1) football discourse and 2) the connection between academic literacy and football literacy.

Football Discourse

In his 1991 study, Mahiri found that literacy played a role in basketball, but he did not go as far as calling it the discourse of basketball. In his research observations of young basketball players, Mahiri discovered information similar to that I found in my interviews and focus groups. I found that the football student-athletes were able to use

specific language (e.g., words, terms, and phrases) not only to participate in their sport but also to demonstrate their literacy knowledge and associated skills. My study went a step further than Mahiri's (1991) in that, rather than asking the football student-athletes to discuss the sport of football directly or to analyze a play, I asked them about other topics. As a result, the participants engaged in "football discourse," demonstrating the relevance of the literacy skills and knowledge gained from football to non-football related activities. In my data chapters, I defined "football discourse" as the language terms, qualities, social identities, and communication used in football (Gee, 1989; Mahiri, 1991). The football student-athletes used their football discourse throughout the questionnaires, focus group, and individual interviews, showing their ability to use their football discourse and their literacy knowledge and skills in various settings. The sophomores used words such as "reading one's opponents," when discussing literacy in the game of football, and the juniors discussed how RGIII and Luck were both literate through examples and football discourse based on the video excerpts. Moreover, when the seniors analyzed the stereotypes of quarterbacks, they used position-specific terms such as "reading the field" and "orchestrating their teams" in discussing their literacy and supported their perspectives with examples from the video as well as their prior knowledge. Additionally, the football student-athletes discussed qualities, such as "passion," "dedication," and "hard work," as traits that are much needed for success on the field. Furthermore, all three focus groups used and explained football specific terms such as "reading the defense," "playbooks," and "orchestrate," in examining the role of literacy in the game of football. The football student-athletes' use of specific discourse to

support their literacy perspectives, word choices, and opinions showed their knowledge of football and their literacy skills both on and off the field.

The football participants in the individual interviews discussed the various social identities associated with the sport, as indicated by the varying literacy expectations of professors and coaches. Andrew said that professors often saw football student-athletes as individuals who were not interested in receiving their degrees, and Pat reported that he often felt coaches' expectations of literacy in the classroom were lower than the standards they preached. KB asserted that professors had different expectations of him once they read his papers, and Arnold shared that he strived to move beyond the low expectations he felt that professors had of him. Moreover, in discussing the importance of literacy in football, Wendell noted the significance of specific terms that need to be used on the field, and Mackey mentioned the often-used sport discourse between his teammates and his coaches. The football student-athletes used the discourse of football in various instances and ways, showing their literacy knowledge and understanding through their football literacy. Thus, the football student-athletes demonstrated through these discussions that they had the necessary literacy skills and knowledge (that is, analyses, support, terminology) needed to be successful in the classroom environment.

In responding to the questionnaire and participating in focus groups and interviews, the football student-athletes used their football discourse to discuss the sport, to support their rationales, to analyze video excerpts, to talk about the literacy expectations of coaches and professors, and to discuss the stereotypes that in their view permeated the sport of football. The sophomores, juniors, and seniors, at this point in their lives, had participated in the sport of football for numerous years and had had ample

time to develop their use of this discourse on the field and in connection to the sport. However, this is not to say that this discourse is easy to learn and use. These student-athletes are well versed: they have spent years using this discourse while developing their knowledge and skills in the sport. Approximately 85% of the football student-athletes began playing football in the Pee-Wee leagues (ages 7-10). When the football student-athletes used their football discourse during the various parts of this study, they simply used it to explain themselves, their sport, their rationales, their perspectives on expectations, and their analyses. The ability of all of the student-athletes in the study to use their football discourse in various contexts showed that the student-athletes have the kinds of literacy skills and knowledge that are often valued in the classroom setting.

Literacy beyond the football field: From the sophomores to the seniors. The football student-athletes' use of their football discourse in responding to the questionnaire and in focus groups and interviews showed that they have the literacy skills needed to succeed in the classroom environment. The sophomores, juniors, and seniors used their football discourse, in varying degrees, to analyze, support, and discuss their perspectives on literacy throughout the research study. The sophomores were able to use their football discourse to discuss football, but used it at surface level without in-depth support for their answers. The juniors were more articulate: they were able to move beyond the basic football discourse and integrate examples, support, and analyses into their comments. The seniors' football discourse and literacy skills were the most sophisticated and advanced, as shown by their fluid and articulate analyses and conversations and their ability to provide support for their perspectives.

The sophomores were able to cite specific examples from the videos and from personal experience to support their claims about literacy in football and their perceptions of the literacy of the quarterbacks (Luck and RGIII) and to discuss the rationales for the words they had chosen to describe football. For example, in numerous exchanges the sophomores analyzed the video excerpts and gave examples, such as the school Luck attended and the intelligence of RGIII on the field, to support their perspectives on the two quarterbacks as literate beings. However, the sophomores often did not make a direct connection between these individuals and their literacy, leaving the connection to be inferred by the listener. Moreover, when they examined the role of literacy in football, they identified "reading the plays" and "reading body language" as examples of literacy, but did not provide much explanation, showing the basic nature of their football discourse. Also, the sophomore student-athletes used their football discourse to analyze and support their views during the focus group and interview session by using specific terms and words (e.g., "two-a-days," "life," "receivers") associated with football to explain their perspectives. The ability to provide this kind of analysis and support is an important skill set in the college classroom. Thus, despite not addressing literacy directly, the sophomores demonstrated their own literacy knowledge and skills through explanations, specific discourse, and basic analysis skills, rather than just basic knowledge of literacy.

The junior football student-athletes were very much aware of the discourse of football, and they used it to explain their answers very clearly and articulately throughout the focus group and interview sessions. The juniors, like the sophomores, freely used their football discourse; they were able to use it specifically to explain their choice of

words such as “passion and “values,” for the Venn diagram to analyze and make meaning of "texts,” such as the videos, and through these instances they showed not only their ability to use the discourse of football but their literacy skills as well. First, the juniors explained their choice of words; for example, Mackey explained such as, “team bonding” was part of the sport since players tended to be around the same people all the time. When the juniors analyzed the “texts,” they discussed the literacy of the two quarterbacks based on the video itself. Jose asserted that both Luck and RGIII were literate, but used words such as “diagnosed” to describe RGIII’s actions in going up to the board and breaking the play down for the host. Also, Max discussed articulateness with respect to the ability of the two players in the videos not to mumble or mince their words. Their articulateness made them sound intelligent, which to him was a sign of literacy. In addition, the juniors were able to use their discourse to connect the sport of football to education, by identifying the traits and qualities that were needed in both to be successful and defending these choices. For example, Arnold suggested the word “compete,” because either on the field or in the classroom, a student-athlete needs to make sure he can put forth effort and work to be the best. Dom commented that both athletics and education were connected to one’s future because either one of them would help an individual in life, whether that meant getting a job or playing the sport he loved. In the end, the juniors were able to explain their perspective using their football discourse but also were more adept and more secure than the sophomores in their use of the discourse, as seen in the confidence they displayed in their answers and the clarity of the football discourse they used to support their thoughts.

Of the three focus groups, the senior football student-athletes were the ones who had used the discourse of football the longest and also the ones who used it more often and more thoroughly throughout the questionnaire, focus group, and interviews. In our discussion about stereotypes in the sport of football, the seniors showed their ability to use their discourse through specific stereotypes and examples of race in football and the impact that it had on the sport of football. Ken shared that coaches wanted a white quarterback because white quarterbacks were seen as smarter and black quarterbacks were viewed as more athletic, showing not only his knowledge of the stereotypes but also his application of them in a non-football setting. In another instance, when Calvin discussed Luck and the white quarterback stereotype, he asserted that Luck was who he was and happened to fit into the white quarterback stereotype, since he was smart but not necessarily as athletic as others. This comment showed that he (Calvin) clearly saw a connection between Luck and the white quarterback stereotype. During the seniors' discussion of their word choices for sport, they used their discourse to explain their answers. The rationales that the senior student-athletes gave for their word choices offered greater insight into their various perspectives on literacy in football, while simultaneously using their football discourse. For example, "reading the playbook," "reading the field," and "communication," were some of the football discourse terms used to discuss the role that literacy plays in football. Moreover, their rationales for these terms -- that if you can't "read the playbook," then you are unable to execute the plays, and that part of being a good quarterback is "reading the field," and being aware of what is going on at all times -- were all phrased in terms of being literate in the sport of football. The seniors were able to directly address literacy in football, discuss the

stereotypes in the sport, analyze and support their perspectives on the videos, and explicitly defend their word choices, demonstrating their literacy skills and knowledge of through their use of football discourse.

Football discourse also encompassed social identity and the qualities associated with the sport of football. Based on the research data, these student-athletes did not mind being defined as football players and felt comfortable in the football environment. As seen in the individual interviews, the football student-athletes were also aware of the various expectations associated with being a member of a college football team, both on the field and in the college classroom. The interviewees described their perspective on the expectations that their coaches and professors had of them on and off the field. For example, KB asserted that the literacy expectations of his coaches included their desire for him to succeed in both aspects of his life. Arnold, on the other hand, asserted that the difference between his coaches and his professors was the sense of urgency that he saw in his coaches, since they could be fired if he did not live up to the literacy expectations. Pat gave a positive example of a professor that not only gave him advice but also wanted to make sure that he worked hard in the classroom, making an impact on his classroom and college experience. Moreover, the participants shared that they were able to handle these various expectations, further showing their identities as both a football player and student along with their knowledge of football and college. None of the interviewees had any problems accepting the literacy expectations of their coaches, but with respect to professors they were more open to constantly working against the stigma associated with football and showing that they could significantly exceed the low expectations that might have been set by professors.

Furthermore, the players had been mentored into the football discourse by their coaches, peers, and the media, and had become comfortable in the use of their literacy in this environment, rather than in the college classroom, where many of them believed they had not mastered the discourse of academia. As evidenced in the data chapters, these football players knew the qualities and traits needed to succeed on and off the field. In the discussions, sophomores, juniors, and seniors were able to show versatility in their use of football discourse through their rationales, their perspectives, and their personal examples. The football student-athletes were able to show they could use their football discourse to express their thoughts, support their views, and analyze texts, all literacy skills that are valued in the college classroom. The discourse of football has value and provides a way to assess the literacy knowledge, skills, and ability of college football student-athletes. By acknowledging the value of this discourse, we can come to see it as a gateway to learning the academic discourse needed for the college setting and to improving both the academic and athletic performance of these students.

Academic and Athletic Literacy: The Connection

Through the focus group and questionnaire answers, it became evident that these college football student-athletes are literate beings. The participants saw literacy as playing a role, if not a major role, in the sport of football. All three focus groups discussed, in several instances, that literacy plays a role in football in the reading of plays, communication between players and coaches, speaking to the media, and in the execution of plays on the field, all skills that are often expected and required in the school setting.

At the same time, the football student-athletes defined literacy as it pertained to the classroom setting. They were aware of the qualities and traits needed to be successful in the classroom, and all of the participants saw literacy as a necessity in the college environment. The sophomores chose words such as "knowledge," and "hope," with the juniors mentioning "life," and "transcript," and the seniors "motivation," and "dedication." They all used variations of these terms because they all saw them as necessary for success in the classroom. In his 1991 study, Mahiri found that young basketball players showed their literacy skills in events that took place on and off the court. However, he did not discuss literacy with them or have them define literacy. In this research study, college football student-athletes not only discussed literacy but also saw the connection between school and sport, further demonstrating their conceptualizations of the academic and athletic literacies that they make use of on a daily basis.

The football student-athletes saw literacy in both aspects of their lives; yet, the extent to which they made the connection between academics and athletics depended on their year in school. The sophomore football student-athletes defined literacy as it pertained to school and as it applied to football. A majority of the sophomores focused on the "reading" aspect of football and the reading and comprehension aspect of school. During the Venn diagram activity, the sophomores were able to discuss the traits and the qualities that both education and football share, but they did not identify the deeper connection between the two or skills that are used in both spaces. For example, the sophomores chose words such as "enhancement," and "savior," since both education and sports can improve one's life and each one can save you from and move you forward in

various aspects of one's life (e.g., high school to college). The sophomores also saw the connection between school and football as "staying eligible," making sure one's GPA was high enough (2.0) in order to continue to play. Since the sophomore football student-athletes had only been in college for one full year, it is not surprising that they did not have a deeper understanding of literacy and the connection between the academic (college) and athletic literacy in their lives.

The juniors had a more sophisticated perspective with respect to the link between football literacy and academic literacy. For example, the juniors were able to connect the same definition of literacy to both the football and school environments. Furthermore, the juniors had a deeper understanding of the relationship between football and education with respect to literacy than the sophomores, who only noted the importance of staying eligible. The juniors asserted "life" and "diligence" as words that pertained to both education and sport. The juniors were better able to explain and articulate the connections between the two milieus and to give examples from each. They cited the importance of being able to communicate with an employer and of perseverance in all aspects of one's life, as well as the view that both football and school would offer benefits for the future. Thus, the junior student-athletes demonstrated that they saw an indirect connection between academic and athletic literacy, showing that they were better able to see the connection between the two literacies than the sophomores, although they still were not as clear the seniors with respect to the role of literacy in both environments.

Lastly, the senior football student-athletes saw a direct connection between football and education with respect to literacy. The seniors defined literacy in both education and football as reading, comprehension, communication, and application of a

text. They viewed the playbook and the plays as texts that had to be read, comprehended and executed, much like the readings that they indicated they had for many of their classes. This definition was not seen as clearly as by the sophomores and juniors, and it might be inferred that since the seniors have been in school longer they have learned the importance of literacy in school and football. However, I would argue that the differences between the student-athletes corresponding to their years in college are not as important as their shared awareness across all years that literacy played a role both in football and in academics from the beginning of their college careers. Additionally, the senior football student-athletes understood the importance of literacy in football but also in education, as shown by the overlapping explanations and rationales for the words they chose. For example, they chose "time management," since they had to learn how to optimize their time for studying both on and off the field, as well as "decisions," since in both school and football the decisions they made would determine how they spent the next part of their lives. The seniors saw that the definition for literacy was the same for school and for football, and were able to make explicit the nature and extent of the overlap between literacy in education and literacy in football.

Overall, the football student-athlete participants saw reading, comprehension, and sometimes analysis and application, as aspects of literacy both on and off the field, showing that they knew what it meant to be literate, which arguably are half the battle with respect to being successful. But this research data also showed another side of the football student-athletes, which is not normally seen, that they are literate and see literacy as playing a role in both aspects of their lives, school and football. Consequently, the knowledge of literacy, its definition as it pertains to both school and football, and the

connection between both spaces, showed their understanding of literacy and use of literacy skills. The results of this study make us rethink the stigma attached to football student-athletes with respect to their literacy knowledge and skills, where literacy takes place and the importance of literacy in football and school in the football student-athletes' college careers.

Educational Implications and Contributions to the field

This research study adds to the body of research on football student-athletes by exploring their conceptualizations of literacy and its significance to them as college students. I hope that my research and the voices that are heard throughout this study will help shed light on how football student-athletes perceive literacy in both academics and athletics and how their knowledge of literacy and the connection between the two aspects of their lives can help improve their academic experience at the college level. My findings demonstrate that these students are literate and are able to use their football discourse in a variety of ways, showing their literacy knowledge and skills.

These results have four implications for football student-athletes and the athletic academic programs that support them: a) the value of athletic literacy and football discourse in various settings, b) an improved connection between education and athletics, c) a model for a future program to support the football student-athletes based on the first two implications, and d) lessons for future researchers.

The Value of Athletic Literacy and Football Discourse in Various Settings

Athletic literacy and the various discourses of sport have application beyond the sphere of athletics. The research data suggest that the football student-athletes did not see the immense value of their football discourse and their football literacy beyond the

field. They understood its value in the contexts of speaking with coaches and showing one's knowledge of the sport and in connection with the media's perspective on football players. However, they did not see the value of football discourse in the classroom setting. Mahiri and Van Rheenen's (2010) study suggests that educators and institutions need to take a greater responsibility in promoting and encouraging a playful spirit and open perspective in the classroom, because many of the participant athletes believed that they had to conform in certain ways not only in their physical sport but in the academic environment as well. Moreover the researchers asserted, in order to encourage a playful spirit, students should not be sitting in their seats, listening to teachers, and stifling their desire for physical movement on a daily basis. To be playful and have an open perspective in the classroom entails moving around, having discussions, being creative, and showing one's individual personality. But these two qualities are not often seen in the college environment, particularly at big universities and in huge lecture halls.

In many ways, my research aligned with Mahiri and Van Rheenen's (2010) perspective, because I, too, agree that an "open perspective" is necessary. Yet, the results of my study showed that the student-athletes have literacy skills developed on the field that are connected to and appropriate for the classroom setting. Teachers and administrators should validate these literacy skills and discourse through activities that allow students to use their skills from outside the classroom in the classroom setting. This can be done through discussions, analysis exercises, and making connections between one's knowledge and the subject at hand. Creating an environment open to these skills means greater use of conversations, analysis of different types of texts such as videos, newspapers, and websites, less lecturing, and more writing and less multiple-

choice exams. These types of methods give way for student-athletes to show their literacy skills and discourse through various class opportunities. Moreover, to create this open environment, both professors and student-athletes must move beyond the stereotypes and open up the lines of communication so that professors and student-athletes can have an open dialogue about their respective expectations and knowledge. In such an environment, professors would allow students to compare their perspectives to those of other people and draw upon their literacies with analysis, support of text, and the use of a different discourse to get one's point across. Creating an environment in which football student-athletes see their literacy skills validated can only improve the connection with athletics and literacy.

An Improved Connection Between Education and Athletics

The football student-athletes in this research study were literate individuals; these students could not have gotten to the level of sport they were at without being able to understand football and perform on the field. They are able to use the discourse of their sport (that is, words, phrases, persona, terms) to be successful on the field. In addition, these football student-athletes, showed their football literacy by analyzing, reading, supporting, and asserting the importance of literacy in football, all of which helped show that they have the skills essential for the college classroom. The connection that most of the student-athletes saw was not dependent on the physical aspect of sport, but rather on the literacy that is needed for both environments. Therefore, it is important to explore these connections in the classroom, on the field, and in further research. When these connections are made, and the student-athletes see the value of their football literacy as help rather than a hindrance in the classroom, evidenced by the seniors, the increased use

of their literacy skills and awareness may well lead to better grades and a smaller differential between the two.

Several research studies have proposed or designed programs that would help improve the connection between education and athletics. For example, Mahiri (1991) found a connection between the basketball players he observed on the court and literacy events that occurred on and off the court in relation to basketball. He argued that schools should take this type of literacy into account and be more open to the physical movements and outside literacy that students bring to the classroom. Furthermore, Comeaux and Harrison (2011) proposed a conceptual framework for student-athletes. The framework included a culturally relevant curriculum that uses the student-athletes' motivation and engagement in and outside the classroom to connect education and sport. Lastly, Harper, Williams and Blackman (2013) argue that although sports support services are working, coaches and staff in athletic departments need to encourage student-athletes to speak with faculty outside the classroom, work with non-athlete peers more often, and participate in major-specific internships throughout the year. All of the above research has offered new perspectives on student-athletes and ways to connect education and participation in sports. My research adds to the above perspective and program proposals by showing the increased extent to which the football student-athletes saw a connection between literacy in football and literacy in education the longer they were in the college setting. This new finding suggests new program ideas and new ways to improve this connection.

If football student-athletes can come to see the connection between literacy in football and literacy in education as valid and important, it has the potential to improve

both aspects of their lives. In addition, once they see the link between the academic and athletic literacies, the student-athletes may become more aware that the tactics that they use to study, comprehend, and discuss the sport of football are valuable for the classroom, rather than the classroom's being valuable for the field. This connection needs to be explored more in the college setting because so many student-athletes struggle to see the connection between their athletic literacy skills and their academic literacy skills, but it is also important to foster this connection before football student-athletes enter college. As the literature has indicated, many black football student-athletes see college football as a viable way to become successful and more beyond their childhood environment, school rarely factors into this equation (Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010). Therefore, a possible direction for future research is to look at the connection between sports literacy and academic literacy, not only at the college level but also in high schools and elementary schools.

Implications for college athletic departments. This research study and its results benefit several groups in the college athletic community beyond the football student-athletes themselves. First, this research provides college athletic departments with information that can help them improve their football student-athletes' academic experiences and grades from the start of their college careers. The program is specifically relevant to Learning Specialists, Academic Advisors, and Athletic Directors who work with college football student-athletes and are in charge of making sure these student-athletes are successful both on and off the field. Additionally, these individuals are the ones who can decide to adopt and implement this literacy program, which could increase the graduation rates and overall GPA's of their college football student-athletes.

Recently, the NCAA stated in a commercial spot (during the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament) that they are the cheerleaders and mascots of each individual student-athlete; therefore, this research informs the NCAA, which is constantly attempting to understand the kinds of support that student-athletes need, to ensure that the student-athletes are not neglected, taken advantage of or used as part of their college careers (National Collegiate Association of Athletics.com). Most current research concerning athletics is quantitatively based and there is little room for qualitative inquiry, despite the opportunities that such research offers for understanding these athletes from a different perspective. This research study showed the literacy knowledge and skills and the football discourse of these student-athletes. It was through the football student-athletes own words, explanations, and opinions, that they offered a new perspective on the literacy of a population that is usually seen as underprepared and failing (Lapchick, 2010).

Moreover, the NCAA and university academic departments have the power to institute mandates, programs, and support for student-athletes at various levels. If football student-athletes continually underperform in the classroom and fail to graduate, the university athletic department pays the price financially, athletically, and in the form of more structured rules put in place by the NCAA; thus, it is essential that we see these football players' literacy and discourse as valid and important to both their football and college careers in order for them to view their own literacy knowledge and skills to help them be successful on and off the field.

Finally, this research informs college professors and instructors. If faculty members are made aware of the literacy these individuals display in the classroom and on

the field, more of them may move beyond seeing student-athletes in stereotypical "dumb jock" roles. As Simons et al. (2007) showed, more than 50% of professors have a negative perspective on student-athletes and often do not see them as legitimate students on the college campus. Dissemination of research studies, including mine, to professors can further their understanding of these football student-athletes and the value that their literacy skills and knowledge can add in the college classroom. Moreover, new and returning faculty need to be educated during workshops concerning the football student-athletes' knowledge of literacy, literacy skills, and football discourse in order to not only understand the students better but to give way to new perceptions of these athletes as students whose athletics involvement builds the skills necessary to excel in the classroom. Additionally, disseminating and discussing what additional literacy skills these student-athletes bring to college can not only change the professors' perceptions of these athletes, but can help the student-athletes by disbanding the stereotypes of student-athletes as lacking college-level literacy skills or as less of a student due to their sport, which impact their perceptions of themselves. Lastly, faculty must become more aware of these student-athletes as students (i.e. at the university to earn a degree, not merely to play football), and that the sport they play has given them the opportunity to attend college. Their route to a college degree may differ from those of more traditional students, but nonetheless, they have entered the college classroom with the willingness to learn and the ability to succeed. It would benefit these student-athletes for professors to realize and understand that they bring a different perspective and knowledge to the college classroom, and that they should not be discounted or seen as a hindrance because they play a sport.

The Creation of a Program to Support Academic and Athletic Literacy

Taking the above implications into account, I have created program model to foster the connection between the discourse of football and the academic and athletic literacy that these students encounter. After completing this research, there are several directions that can be fruitful in helping create a connection. Therefore, I created an outline of a literacy program for freshman college football student-athletes before they officially enter the college classroom and throughout their first-year of classes and college football.

This program would begin, before the start of football camp in early August, with two weeks of daily 30- 60-minute presentations, exercises, and discussions pertaining to both football and education. What makes this program unique is that it would begin with the football student-athletes' football discourse and literacy rather than with their academic discourse and literacy. The reason for this is that, as shown in the research data: these students demonstrated their literacy skills best when they discussed football related topics. Therefore, I propose to begin with their strengths and connect these strengths to the academic area, where these student-athletes feel they need the most support, based on previous research (Benson, 2000). In these sessions, the student-athletes would be asked to participate in activities similar to those used in the focus group sessions -- word choice, analyses of videos, finding support for one's ideas, using the discourse of sport, and discussing stereotypes and gender -- to show these students their literacy knowledge and skills related to football.

After the introductory program, the players would continue exploring their literacy skills and the connection to academics. They would discuss gender and

stereotypes in order to explore the connections they see between literacy and gender and the stereotypes that exist in football. For example, the session might begin with their perspectives on what a male or a female would read and go on to explore legitimate reading choices, based on current research and societal views, in order for the participants to see the various perspectives on what is socially acceptable and understand how their reading preferences and perspective have been shaped. As in the focus group, the football student-athletes would view two video excerpts, one of a black and one of white player, preferably in the same position, and the group would explore how the football student-athletes see these individuals' literacy and the connection the players in the video have to the stereotypes regarding their position. From this perspective, the players would be able to use their football discourse to discuss the sport and its connection to stereotypes. One of the examples should be of a stigma connected to the sport, so that they understand where these views come from and what that means for them as players, allowing them to move beyond football while using their discourse and literacy skills. The group could then transition from their football discourse to academic discourse by connecting stereotypes to academics and society. These would be activities in which the group discussed and analyzed these things in a context that encouraged participants to use their football discourse to make themselves clear but also to talk about gender and stereotypes and the role they play in society and their individual lives.

As the program continued and the players began to feel more comfortable using their football discourse and literacy, academic literacy and discourse would be introduced through similar exercises. The academic literacy portion would come after these students become more comfortable with their use of football discourse and their ability to support,

analyze, explain, and discuss several different topics. For example, one of the activities would be the Venn diagram where the students are asked to place school words in each circle and then explain their rationales for them, which would help demonstrate their ability to support their choices through explanations and example. Another activity would discuss the definition of literacy as it pertained to each aspect of one's life (that is, education, football) along with analyzing a video in which the group would discuss how and why an individual is seen as literate, in order to show the students their abilities to support, analyze, and give rationales for their perspectives and thoughts.

Although these activities do not appear to relate directly to the college classroom, the skills the students would be using would help them to understand the expectations of many professors. By allowing them to use their skills, see the connection to football, and then make the connection to school, the program would enable the football student-athletes to more easily understand the expectations of their professors. Furthermore, it would only be after they had shown their ability to analyze in several instances that they would be asked to learn academic discourse. This discourse would take the form of common academic terms such as, "analyze," "evaluate," "support," "demonstrate," and "examine." Texts, such as videos, short articles, and literature could be used for practice. These exercises would continue throughout the fall and spring semesters and would show the football student-athletes how their skills on the football field translated into the classroom, encouraging them by showing them the knowledge and skill sets they already have rather than looking at what they might perceive as lacking.

Furthermore, what makes this program distinct is that it would begin from a sport perspective rather than an academic perspective. The rationale for this approach is that if

football student-athletes are aware of their literacy skills on the field, they will be better able to connect those skills to the academic world. As evidenced in Chapter 6, the seniors were directly aware of the connection between football and academics, whereas the sophomores saw only a minimal connection in the eligibility criteria and the skills and qualities that are needed in both sport and academics. Thus, it is important to make sure that these student-athletes see and understand this connection before they enter the college classroom so they know their own literacy abilities and skills, which many of believe they lack. Moreover, to reinforce it repeatedly throughout their first year to ensure a successful start to their college careers is important to allow them to show growth in both their academic and athletic literacy knowledge and skills.

Training for coaches, tutors, mentors, and academic support staff. Another component of this program would include trainings and workshops for the faculty and staff that support the football student-athletes, such as the coaches, tutors, and mentors. The training sessions would consist of disseminating the basic research findings and the importance of the student-athletes' literacy knowledge and skills, discussing and exploring football discourse, and connecting the athletic world to the academic world, which would further support the experiences the football student-athletes have in their own sessions. In the workshops, the participants would learn about the links the players see between academics and athletics and how to capitalize on "teachable moments," where academic language, literacy skills, and sports coincide, creating opportunities to reinforce the knowledge and skills that the players already have. For example, coaches could reference words and phrases such as compare and contrast, analysis, literacy, and discourse that are used in the classroom when discussing videos, plays, position

requirements, and expectations. In many ways, this referencing of academic language as it pertains to the sport of football in the football milieu is unique since often academic words and phrases are rarely associated with the football field. By using academic language in connection to football, a reversal of the language occurs (i.e., football to academics not academics to football) , which connects the two environments to each other through the skills and discourse used in both. In addition, coaches would role play in order to understand and learn how to use teachable moments to impact their players both on and off the field. Including the coaches and teaching how to see and use teachable moments will not only impact the students but also impact the culture of sport and reinforce the generally unacknowledged connections between academics and athletics.

Like the coaches, tutors, mentors, and academic support staff would also learn to understand and recognize teachable moments in which academics and athletics can be linked. It is not enough for the support staff individuals to teach individual skills and strategies to the student-athletes, they need to understand the literacy knowledge and skills these players already have in order to impact these individuals' performance, on and off the field. For example, teachable moments may arise when discussing an assigned reading or taking notes through encouraging the student-athletes to use their academic and football discourse and referencing the literacy skills connected to these activities such as margin notes, analyzing, support, and summarizing would be considered a teachable moment, connecting literacy skills used both on and off the field. Training workshops for these staff members would also focus on learning to help the football student-athletes use their knowledge to their advantage on and off the field. It is

the trainings in connection to learning and capitalizing on "teachable moments," that helps the academic staff further support and encourages the connection between athletics and academics that the football student-athletes need.

Lesson for Future Scholars

The relationship that I developed with these student-athletes depended upon time, trust, and respect. The world of football is very closely guarded and is often inaccessible to outsiders because of negative past experiences and adverse perceptions of the players, coaches, and the football environment that make it difficult for people to enter and even more difficult to study it. However, I was able to create a relationship with these students based on support, honesty, and being perceived as a neutral outsider. As a white woman who worked with predominately black males in a male-centered environment, I was placed into an interesting position and sometimes complicated position.

It was important for me to have already worked with these students for over two years before I felt that they would not only be willing to participate but that the interviews and focus group sessions would provide a space in which they were able to be honest and discuss various topics. Also, I think since I was a student myself and chose to work for the Athletic Department, my role was perceived by the students as helpful to them, adding to the openness and trust that the student-athletes felt with me. This position gave me access and generated an environment of trust and respect. Creating this environment could not happen until I had earned the students' respect and was no longer seen as an outsider based on my race and gender. Another essential component of this research was the continuous support of the football department and the university's Athletic Department. I was granted access only after working closely with the academic

staff and educating them about my research. Staff support in turn convinced coaches and administrators that they too should grant me access.

The activities that took place during the focus group sessions were helpful in understanding the students from different perspectives, but could only be done once students are comfortable enough with one another and with the instructor to speak freely and openly. Football student-athletes are well guarded, both by themselves and their athletics program, but if they feel comfortable, supported, and not threatened, relationships can be formed that facilitate this type of research. Therefore, future researchers need to be aware of that access of football is difficult but not impossible, but only through gaining the respect of and creating a repertoire with the student-athletes as well as having the support of the academic staff can this research be conducted successfully.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research study. Because this was a qualitative study, the number of participants was relatively small, and only one school was included. But at the same time, to my knowledge, no qualitative research study has explored the conceptualization of literacy by this many football student-athletes. However, a larger-scale qualitative study could provide for a more nuanced examination of the literacy perspectives of football student-athletes and extend the scope of the results. Such a study would offer the opportunity to hear more voices and perspectives, and to gain a greater understanding of the connection between the academic and athletic literacies that these football student-athletes participate in.

Another limitation of this study was that it centered around one university and one group of football student-athletes, and did not have a long in-depth survey, only a short questionnaire that included a few multiple choice and short answer questions. Therefore, the results are not generalizable. However, the results from this study show that this type of research and more qualitative research concerning the conceptualization of literacy by college football student-athletes needs to be explored at other universities in order to gain a greater and more complete perspective of college football student-athletes.

This research study is necessarily limited by its researcher. As a white female and a mentor and teacher whose position may be interpreted as powerful, there is the chance that students' perceptions influenced the outcome of some of the answers given in the focus group session and the interviews. Since many of the student-athletes have worked with me in some capacity, some for a longer period of time than others, the possibility that I have influenced some of their perspectives on particular issues such as race, gender, literacy, and school is possible. Moreover, it is interesting to note that several of the seniors had participated in the original study and were aware of my research focus, which might have influenced their participation in the research study.

Lastly, the study's findings could be considered limited by the demographics of the focus groups. The most racially diverse group were the sophomores, followed by the seniors, and finally the juniors. Also, the demographics of the groups could have influenced the conversations that took place in the focus group settings, since some of the questions and topics discussed may have been seen as more uncomfortable than others. However, the seniors were the most comfortable speaking but that could be because they have played together for so long, whereas the sophomores might not feel as comfortable

with one another. Despite the varying demographics of the focus group, I would not change the line of questions used in the focus group since it was important to discuss and explore these questions and perceptions of literacy to further understand the conceptualizations of literacy of the football student-athletes.

There are several aspects of this research study that could be furthered explored and amended based on the results. To begin, the interview aspect of this research study did not have a long interview follow-up component, despite it originally being planned. There was not enough time between the football student-athletes and researcher's schedule, so only short follow-ups that included clarifications were possible. A longer follow-up interview would offer further questioning based on the interview data provided and could provide more detail and perspective on the literacy expectations of professors and coaches.

One activity I would amend in the focus group session would be the comparison between the male and female student-athletes. It was a beneficial and important aspect of the focus group, but the pictures that were chosen were not comparable and the individuals were too recognizable. Selecting individuals that the football student-athletes were not as familiar with might offer better conversation. Furthermore, I would like to have included another activity that explored in more detail the football student-athletes' perspectives on female student-athletes, their literacy, their college education, and the differences they ascribe to gender. This would have offered another perspective on the football student-athletes' perceptions of females, specifically female student-athletes.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has several implications for future research on the conceptualizations of literacy by college football student-athletes. As evidenced in the data chapters, there is little doubt that this type of research needs to be further explored with other football student-athletes at other universities to see whether the results can be replicated elsewhere. Broadening the base of the research would give us a better grasp of what needs to be done to help these football student-athletes improve their college experiences both on and off the field. More research, with more teams, will increase the validity of the research findings.

There is an increasing need for research on literacy and athletics for students before they enter college. Conceptions of literacy may be forming in the early years, for many students of all ages who play various sports. This study points the way to discussion of these issues and further research on the connection between literacy and sports, specifically football, and what this means for male athletes at an early age. By learning how literacies are constructed in children who engage in sports, we may be able to help make school-based literacy practices more appealing and accessible through the K-12 years.

There are several directions for future research. To begin, one direction consists of focusing on the conversations specifically concerning the stereotypes that exist in the sport of football. For example, during the senior focus group, the student-athletes engaged in signifying (Gates, 1988), the use of a verbal strategy to discuss a gap they perceived between race and football, when the conversation turned to the racial stereotypes that they identified within the sport. By signifying, the seniors engaged in powerful conversations in which they tackled difficult issues of race and stereotypes and

the impact the stereotypes have on them as players, the coaches, outsider perceptions, and player positions. The use of signifying offered a new perspective to explore as both a literacy and a discourse in connection to football. Another direction for future research is to look at the intersectionality (McCall, 2005) between race and football student-athletes, in which both being black and a football student-athlete can be viewed as being part of a minority group. The data gathered from this study clearly indicates the need for further research as it pertains to football student-athletes and their perceptions of literacy as it relates to gender, school, and football.

Another direction for future research is to expand the project to other sports at the collegiate level. Much of the research being done is quantitative research in revenue-producing sports, such as men's basketball and football; however, it is important to expand this research beyond the football student-athletes since each sport has its own discourse and literacy that can be seen as a connection to the world of academia. The NCAA would find this information helpful because it would increase our knowledge of literacy in more sports and may help improve the GPAs and graduation rates of student-athletes, many of whom struggle to succeed in college. My hope is that bridging the gap between sports and college can help more student-athletes succeed in the classroom and beyond.

Appendix I: Pilot Study Questionnaire

1. What is your definition of literacy? Are there multiple definitions?

2. Have you been exposed to different literacy practices throughout your college experience? If so where and when?

3. Have any of your classes talked about literacy? If so in what terms and how?

4. Have any teachers affected your definition of literacy? If so how?

5. Are girls or boys more literate than the other?

6. How do you perceive literacy paying a part in your education?

7. What role does literacy play in real life?

Appendix II: Pilot Study Interview Questions

1. What are your current views of literacy? Have these views changed from high school till now? If your views have not changed why do you think that they have remained the same?

2. What are the benefits of being literate in college? Please explain your answer.

3. What types of activities pertain to being literate? Please explain.

4. How do you think society defines literacy? Please expand.

5. Do men and women see literacy the same? If not? Why? Please explain your answer.

Appendix III: Institutional Review Board Initial Application

1. Abstract:

Literacy is a broad term that reading researchers often use when speaking about students abilities in primary and secondary grades; yet, rarely does this research extend to students who have made it to college. Several scholars have looked at male high school students and their perceptions and knowledge of being literate. Many times it is assumed that once students enter college they are literate and understand the definition of it as well.

Yet, after working and teaching male college students, both in the classroom and as part of a mentoring program, I have begun to wonder if that is true. For this study, sixty-five football student-athletes that I currently mentor through the Athletic Departments' Academic Department will discuss and share their knowledge and understanding of literacy through questionnaires, focus groups, and personal interviews.

At the initial meeting, students will receive consent forms that describe the study and protect anonymity to the fullest extent possible. All participants will be informed that they may withdraw at any time without penalty. The researcher will conduct interviews, focus groups, and hand out questionnaires to the participants. Lastly, all student names will be changed in the study results.

2. Subject Selection:

a. The researcher will extend an invitation to all subjects that are current sophomores, juniors, or seniors who are part of the football team, during their study hall time, to take part in a questionnaire, focus groups, and be interviewed for this study. Participants are able to do the questionnaire, and/ or the focus groups and interview. Sixty-five students currently play for the football team and are taking spring and summer semester courses will be asked to participate and an invitation will be extended verbally.

b. The subjects will be selected based on their year is school (sophomore, junior, senior). The criteria for selecting participants will be based on the collegiate sport that they play.

c. Given the nature of the football team and more specifically, my involvement as both a tutor and mentor, a random sample of interviewees will ensure that multiple perspectives and knowledge are included in the study.

d. A total of sixty-five students will participate.

3. Procedures:

At the initial session, I will read from the script (see appendix I) and the subjects will only sign consent forms so that they can be part of the researcher questionnaire. As stated above, participants will be encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study and will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The researcher will give one questionnaire to the sixty-five participants. The questionnaire (see appendix II) will be conducted in Gossett Football house in a private study classroom. The questions pertain to the students' perspective, understanding, and own personal meaning of literacy at the college level. The questions will offer insight into how some males view literacy as student- athletes. Furthermore, the survey will ask questions pertaining to how the student views literacy at this present moment in their schooling. The questionnaire will last between 20- 30 minutes. Moreover, these opportunities will offer a chance to explore what and how students perceive and view literacy through college and life experiences.

Next, the researcher will ask the students to participate in a focus group (two for sophomores, two for juniors, and one for seniors). The participants will be asked to volunteer for these focus groups. The focus groups will be conducted using several open-ended questions and a graphic (see appendix III) to elicit communication between the individuals. The focus groups will each last between 1 and 1-½ hours and be conducted during the months of June and July. The focus groups will be conducted in Gossett Football house in a private study classroom.

Lastly, the researcher will interview six participants (2 sophomores, 2 juniors, 2 seniors) participants. The participants will be asked to volunteer for these interviews. The interviews will be conducted using open-ended questions (see appendix IV) to elicit broad description and narrative accounts. Interviews will be conducted at a place designated by the interviewees or a mutually agreed upon space. The interviews will last between 1 to 1 ½ hours and will be conducted during the months of June, July, and August. Part of qualitative methodology is the importance of member checks.

Member checks provide validity to the study as well as offer the chance for participants to correct wrong perceptions. Each participant will have a chance to review and correct inaccuracies in the focus groups, interviews as well as typos in the questionnaire.

4. Risks:

There are minimal potential risks to subjects who choose to participate in this study, including anxiety experiences in interview situations, and/or feelings of discomfort based on the survey. To attempt to reduce and/or eliminate any of these potential risks, all participants are encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study and will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Moreover, participants may refuse to respond to certain questions if they so choose. Students will be asked to review transcripts from interviews and write-ups of the questionnaire answers for any inaccuracies.

5. Benefits:

The only short-term benefit of this study is understanding how male college student-athletes view literacy can be used to help the male student-athletes further succeed in the college setting. More long-term potential benefits for future students include understanding of literacy, their impact that this study might make in literacy research, as well as helping male college student- athletes succeed further at the university level.

6. Confidentiality:

All written products will use student and course pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the subjects. Responses and observations will be stored in the researchers personal computer, in password-protected files. Audiotaped interviews will be destroyed and discarded. In short, only the researcher and the PI, Dr. Jennifer Turner, will have access to the study data. The data will remain with Pamela Segal for at least 10 years and then will subsequently be shredded and removed from the computers hard drive. For more information on records retention, go to: http://www.dbs.umd.edu/records_forms/schedule.php (Faculty and Academic Records) or contact Michelle Solter Evers, Assistant to the Director of Business Services at 301.405.9277 or mevers@mercury.umd.edu.

7. Consent Process:

The researcher will describe the study during class time for the present students and will send out an informative email, based on the script, to those that are not present in the meeting. In either case, the details of the consent form will be explained and the students will be asked to sign the consent form, if they agree to participate in the study. Furthermore, the researcher will explain the purpose of the study. The consent form will only be provided in English because the class is conducted in that language. All participants will receive a copy of the consent form for their records.

8. Conflict of Interest:

No Conflict of Interest.

9. HIPAA Compliance:

Not Applicable.

10. Research Outside of the United States:

Not Applicable.

11. Research Involving Prisoners:

Not Applicable.

12. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Your Initial Application must include a **completed Initial Application Part 1 (On-Line Document),** the information required in items 1-11 above, and all relevant supporting documents including: consent forms, letters sent to recruit participants, questionnaires completed by participants, and any other material that will be presented, viewed or read to human subject participants.

For funded research, a copy of the Awarded Grant Application (minus the budgetary information) must be uploaded. If the Grant has not been awarded at the time of submission of this Initial Application, a statement must be added to the Abstract Section stating that an Addendum will be submitted to include the Grant Application once it has been awarded.

Appendix IV: Recruitment Script

This is a research project being conducted by Pamela Segal and will be supervised by Dr. Jennifer Turner at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a male student-athlete currently enrolled in spring and summer 2012 classes and part of football team. The purpose of this research project is to explore and understand how male college student-athletes understand and conceptualize literacy as it pertains to their own experience.

The study will be conducted on the University of Maryland, College Park campus during spring and summer 2012. The procedures involve currently enrolled male students being asked to participate in a questionnaire, focus groups, and a voluntary interview. Each questionnaire will take 15- 20 minute, the focus group will last between 1 to 1 ½ hours and interview will last between 1 to 1 ½ hours. Please see the attached questionnaire, focus group, and interview sheet forms for more information. We are requesting your participation throughout the spring and summer 2012 semesters.

We will do my best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for student names as well as for changing the course title. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. This research might not help you personally, but the results may help the investigators learn more about how literacy is perceived and if more research needs to be done in order to help these students succeed in the college setting.

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project, but we want to ensure that you do not feel compelled to participate or otherwise experience anxiety because of the surveys or interviews. All participants will have an opportunity to review and correct inaccuracies in the interview transcripts as well as the questionnaire write-up. Lastly, participants will receive a copy of the research consent form.

Appendix V: Dissertation Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Project Title	***Literacy: What does the term mean to male college student-athletes.***
Purpose of the Study	*This is a research project being conducted by Pamela Segal and will be supervised by Dr. Jennifer Turner at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a male football student- athlete currently enrolled in spring and summer 2012 classes. The purpose of this research project is to explore and understand how male college student-athletes understand and conceptualize literacy as it pertains to their own experience.*
Procedures	*The procedures involve currently enrolled football male student-athletes being asked to participate in a focus group as well as a voluntary focus group and/or interview.* *Each questionnaire will take 20- 30 minutes, focus groups will last 1 – 1 ½ hours and the interview will last 1 – 1 ½ hours. Please see the attached questionnaire, focus groups, and interview sheet forms for more information. We are requesting your participation throughout the spring and summer 2012 semester.* *You may be asked to participate in one audio taped focus group and interview. The tapes are being made so as to record the interview for transcription at a later date. Dr. Jennifer Turner, EDCI, and Pamela Segal, EDCI, at the University of Maryland, College Park, will be the only two with access to the audiotapes. The tapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Pamela Segal's office and they will be destroyed after 10 years.* *___ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.* *___ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.*
Potential Risks and Discomforts	*There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project, but I want to ensure that you do not feel compelled to participate or otherwise experience anxiety because of the surveys, focus groups or interviews. All participants will be encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Furthermore, all participants will have an opportunity to*

	review and correct inaccuracies in the focus group and interview transcripts as well as the questionnaire write-up.
Potential Benefits	*This research might not help you personally, but the results may help the researcher learn more about how literacy is conceptualized and understood by male college student- athletes at the University of Maryland, College Park.* *We hope that, in the future, the research will help further solidify the importance of research male college student-athletes and their literacy practices and understanding of the term.*
Confidentiality	*Using pseudonyms for student names as well as changing the learning program and course title will minimize any potential loss of confidentiality. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. All data will be stored on the researcher's personal computer, in password-protected file as well as in locked filing cabinets in her office. In short, only the researcher and the PI, Dr. Jennifer Turner, will have access to the study data. The data will remain with Pamela Segal for at least 10 years and then will subsequently be shredded, destroyed and removed from the computers hard drive.*
Medical Treatment	*The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.*
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Dr. Jennifer Turner, associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (EDCI), at the University of Maryland, College Park, 2234 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20743 (email) jdturner@umd.edu (telephone) 301-405-0433 and Pamela Segal,*

	(email) psegal@umd.edu.	
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* **University of Maryland College Park** **Institutional Review Board Office** **1204 Marie Mount** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Telephone: 301-405-0678** *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*	
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF SUBJECT [Please Print]**	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

Appendix VI: Dissertation Questionnaire

Initials or Jersey Number: _____

Questionnaire

Please check if applicable:

AEP: _____ Non-AEP: _____

Directions: *Please choose one of the answers for each of the questions below:*

1. **What position do you play?**
    a. Lineman (offensive or defensive)
    b. Wide Receiver
    c. Quarterback
    d. Tight End
    e. Running Back
    f. Kicker/ Punter
    g. Defensive Back
    h. Other: _____

2. **What year are you in college (based on credits)?**
    a. Sophomore
    b. Junior
    c. Senior
    d. 5th year Senior

3. **What is your major?**
    a. Communications
    b. American Studies
    c. Criminal Justice
    d. Family Science
    e. Other: _____

4. **How would you classify where you grew up?**
    a. Suburban
    b. Rural
    c. Urban

5. **What type of school did you attend for high school?**
    a. Private
    b. Public

6. **What race do you identify with?**
    a. White
    b. Black
    c. Hispanic
    d. Other: _____

7. **Do you read websites?**
    a. No
    b. Yes. If yes, which ones: _____

8. **Do you read blogs?**
    a. No
    b. Yes. If yes which ones: _____

9. **Do you read books?**
    a. No
    b. Yes. If yes, which ones: _____

10. **Do you follow people on twitter?**
    a. No
    b. Yes. If yes, who: _____

****

Directions: *Please circle the number that describes your feeling about each statement.*

11. I think gender affects literacy.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

Please explain your answer in 1 or 2 sentences:

_____

---

12. I think race affects literacy.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

Please explain your answer in 1 or 2 sentences:

_____

_____

13. I think literacy plays a role in football.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

Please explain your answer in 1 or 2 sentences:

_____

_____

****

Directions: *Please briefly answer the questions below.*

14. **How do you define literacy?** *Please explain your answer in 1 or 2 sentences:*

    _____

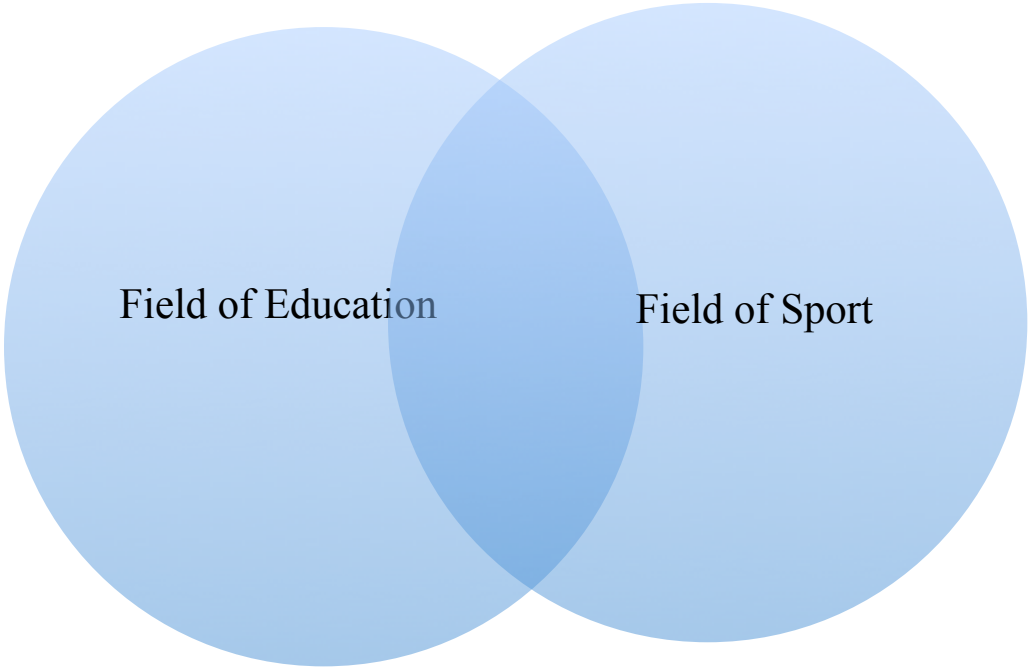
    _____

15. **How does literacy play a part in your college education?** *Please explain your answer in 1 or 2 sentences:*

    _____

    _____

Appendix VII: Dissertation Focus Group



Focus Group Questions

Activity One: Spaces

1. Ice Breaker – Fill in the following blank: If I didn't play football I would - _____.
2. What words and phrases come to mind when you see the words "education and sport" on the board?
3. Why did you choose those words? Please explain
4. Why did you choose those words for those specific spaces?
5. Do any of the words overlap? Which ones? Why?
6. Do the spaces overlap? If so, in what ways?
7. What activities take place in each one of these fields? Do any of these activities coincide and intertwine?
8. Does literacy take place in either of those circles? If so how? Or why not?
9. Where does football fit on the board? Explain your answer.
10. Does football connect to any of the words you chose to include? Why or why not?
11. What words associated with football should be on that board? Place them in another color.
12. Does a person's race play a role in the words on the board? Please explain your answer.
13. Which words on the board connect to gender? Are there words that you can think of that connect to gender that aren't already listed? Explain.
14. Would you say gender plays a role in these spaces? Explain.

Activity Two: Videos and Communication

Robert Griffin the III:

http://espn.go.com/blog/big12/post/_/id/47666/video-grudens-qb-camp-rg3

Cam Newton:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Emc_mMGDYB0&feature=relmfu

1. What do you think of these videos? Please explain.
2. How well do they communicate? Explain your answer.
3. What types of stereotypes are associated with football? Can you list them?
4. Do these two players play into those stereotypes? How?
5. What are the stereotypes based on? Race? Gender? Sport?
6. Are these players literate? Why or why not?
7. How do the stereotypes affect how you or others view these individual's literacy? Explain.
8. Do those stereotypes affect the way others view you? Why or why not? To what extent?
9. Do the stereotypes affect how you view your own literacy? How? Why or why not?
10. Does race play a part in how people view the literacy of an individual?
11. Is race a factor in how you see your own literacy? In what way? If not why doesn't it?
12. Where would these athletes fit into the spaces in the earlier activity?
13. Can the words you brought up in the first activity apply to these athletes? How so?
14. Do you think how these athletes are viewed could be also because of their gender? Explain.
15. Does gender affect how we view these individuals as literate or illiterate? Why or why not?

Activity 3:

Picture 1: Skylar Diggins (http://www.complex.com/sports/2010/03/the-20-hottest-ncaa-womens-basketball-players/skylar-diggins)

*Picture 2***:** Trent Richardson (http://www.scardraft.com/images/TrentRichardson.jpg)

1. What types of books would each individual read? Why?
2. Do you believe that you view literacy a certain way because of your gender? Please explain your answer.
3. How do you view your own literacy as a male? Please explain.
4. Does them being a specific gender impact your view of what they read? Explain.
5. What types of things do you read? Please list some examples of websites, magazines, and books, etc?
6. What does what you read say about you? Explain your answer.
7. Do you view these athletes a certain way in term of what they read because they are black? Why or why not?
8. Would your ideas about the books these individuals be different if they were white? Asian? Why or why not?

9. If they were white female student-athlete what do you think they would read?
10. What if the students played another sport other than basketball or football? Would your answer be different about what they read and how you see their literacy? Explain.

Lastly, any other questions you want to ask or add?

Picture 1:

Picture #2:

Appendix VIII: Dissertation Interview Questions

Icebreaker questions:

Please tell me one interesting fact about yourself?

General

What position do you play on the field? Do you like that position?

What is your role on the field? How did you get into that position? Please explain.

Is there a stereotype that is associated with that position? Why?

What does being literate mean to you? Are there multiple definitions? Explain.

How do you think society defines literacy? Please explain.

How do professors see college football players? Explain.

How do fellow students see college football players? Explain.

How do fans see college football players? Explain.

Do you like to read? On a scale from 1-5 (1 being low and 5 being high) how much do you like the read? Please explain?

Do you read for pleasure or in your spare time outside of school? Do you read magazines? Books? Blogs? Facebook? Twitter?

What role does literacy play in your life? Explain.

School

How do you see literacy in high school? Please explain your answer.

What are the benefits of being literate in college? Why?

What aspects of college do you need to be literate for? Please explain.

How do your classmates view you and your literacy? Why?

How do your professors view you and your literacy? Tell me about that.

What are the expectations of your professors? Explain?

Have there been times in college when you do not feel literate (based on your original definition)?

In a semester how many hours do you read for school? Out of season how many hours do you read for school? Why or is it more than another?

Does reading take away from football? Tell me about that

What books, if any, have you read that you have found interesting or that inspire you?

What do you do with a book after the first day you get it? Textbook verses personal book of choice. What about when you were younger?

Is there a conflict between literacy in college (school) and football?

Gender

When you think of a reader, are they a boy or a girl?

Do you see yourself as a reader, as a male? Why or why not?

Are there other reading materials (e.g., blogs, websites, magazines) that speak to you as a male (white or black)? Explain your answer.

Does your gender matter is school? Explain.

Do professors see men and women differently? Please explain.

Are men and women seen differently when it comes to literacy? Why?

Does gender affect your perceptions of literacy? How so?

Does gender matter in sports and how people view you? Explain. What if you were female?

Explain.

Race

Is reading associated with a particular race? Explain.

Are there stereotypes that go along with particular races and literacy? Why or why not?

Such as?

Does race play a role in what someone reads? Why or why not?

Is race a factor in how you see your own literacy? In what way? If not why?

Does race affect how your literacy is perceived? Please explain.

As a black (white) male are there any books that speak to you? Why or why not?

Are literacy expectations at the college level based on your race? Explain.

Do your coaches' literacy expectations of you and your teammates depend of your race? Please explain.

Is football black and white? Explain your answer.

Football

Does literacy have a place in football? Explain.

Do you play into the stereotypes of football players?

What are the expectations of your coaches concerning your literacy? Explain**.**

What if an Asian plays football? Do people see them different with their literacy?

What does a football student-athlete need to be able to read? What about the playbook?

How thick is your playbook? What do you look at in there? Do you take notes? Expand.

How many times do you read it over the season?

What do you do to remember the playbook? Explain.

What motivates you during the season, both on and off the field?

What are your coaches' expectations of you on and off the field? Do they conflict with one another? Do they differ from your professors? Please explain. Tell me about that

Is there a conflict between literacy in college (school) and football? (I repeated this question because I am not sure where I want it).

What are the challenges of being a student-athlete? Please explain.

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