A Qualitative Analysis of the Intersectional Socialization of NCAA Division I Student-Athletes Across Diverse Identities

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Abstract: Research has shown that while participation in college athletics has the potential to increase personal and social development skills (Cunningham, 2007), the socialization of student-athletes is often hindered by their time-demands and struggles with dual-identity formation (Clayton et al., 2015; Edwards, 1984; Lee, 2015; Rubin, 2016). This study explores the socialization of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I student-athletes through case study research methods to understand the influence of collegiate sport on interactions across intersectional identities, i.e., race, economic class, athletic identities, and social identities. Grounded in academic theories that relate to student-athlete socialization and intersectionality, this study addresses the following overarching question: What is the influence of NCAA athletic participation on the socialization of student-athletes? Interviews lasting 30-45 minutes were conducted with student-athletes (n=21) and athletic staff (n=4) associated with an NCAA Division I football program at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the southern United States. Results suggest that the socialization of student athletes is complicated by their diverse, intersectional identities and oftentimes requires them to fall into perceived situational identities depending on the social setting. Implications are discussed for higher education administrators, faculty, coaches, and athletic staff in order to improve the student-athlete experience and the overall campus climate.

Keywords: socialization, intersectionality, identity, student-athlete experience, intercollegiate athletics, NARP (non-athletic regular person)

Student-Athlete Socialization Factors on College Campuses

Higher education institutions in the United States are uniquely positioned in terms of the socialization of young adults (Newcomb, 1943; Weidman, 2006). In the critical collegiate years, students continue to act through the learned behaviors of their youth and create an independent identity for themselves in their transition to the adult world (Kaufman, 2014; Weidman et al., 1989). Intercollegiate athletics is just one example of the many activities that allow for student socialization during college. However, for student-athletes, athletic participation is central to not just their college career (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2016), but their social identity formation as a whole (Adler & Adler, 1991; Brewer et al., 1993; Cranmer, 2018; Wright, 2015). Student-athletes' social identity formation is strongly tied to the internal self-concept that athletes have about their participation in sport (Brewer et al., 1993; Stodolska et. al., 2013). However, this identity formation is also often nurtured from a young age by the attention and status that student-athletes receive for their athletic abilities (Adler & Adler, 1991; Chen et al., 2010),

creating a strong sense of athletic identity centrality that must be carried even while navigating non-athletic environments. For example, in some instances athletic identity formation can lead a student-athlete to rely on their athletic aggressions even in social situations, further isolating them from their peers (Adler & Adler, 1991).

In recent years, as colleges and universities have moved towards increasing diversity on campus (Franklin, 2013; Smith, 2015), the opportunity for cross-sectional socialization, particularly with student-athletes (Cunningham, 2007), is ample. However, a contrasting body of research suggests that one of the great detriments of participating in collegiate athletics has been a lack of opportunity for social and personal development (Readdy et al., 2013; Singer, 2009) due to time constraints and the struggle with the dual-identity of student and athlete (Clayton et al., 2015; Lee, 2015; Rubin, 2016). As a critical development stage in the life of young citizens, college is meant to provide resources and tools to help students form their identity and develop their voice in society (Kaufman, 2014; Weidman, 2006; Weidman et al., 1989). However, due to time-constraints and added pressures of athletic responsibilities, student-athletes express difficulty navigating this complex intersection of socio-personal development (Brewer et al., 1993; McFarlane, 2014), especially for athletes of color (Beamon, 2012; Comeaux, 2018; Czopp, 2010; Melendez, 2008).

Student-athletes have a strong presence on campus (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Hodge, 2015; McFarlane, 2014) despite their relatively small population as part of the student body. McFarlane (2014) explains the importance of understanding "[h]ow the integration of academic, athletic, and social experiences might impact the overall college student athlete experience," (p. 3) as well as their positioning as a part of campus. Therefore, an understanding of their socialization processes and experiences can be important to campus-wide initiatives to improve diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, as student-athletes often feel stretched thin between their athletic and academic obligations (Grandy et al., 2016; McFarlane, 2014), it begs the question as to whether they have the time or energy to engage in positive, intersectional socialization within the team and on campus as a whole.

This research examines the dualism of the current body of contrasting literature by looking specifically at the connection between athletic involvement and socialization. These factors are assessed within the team environment, campus environment, and as a function of the participants' overarching intersectional identities. The term *socialization* is defined in this context as "a process of learning and social development, which occurs as we interact with one another and become more familiar with the social world in which we live" (Coakley, 2009, p. 92). Student-athletes have a unique position on college campuses in terms of their time-demands, strong athlete identity, and learned social behaviors within a team environment (Beamon, 2012; Harper et al., 2013; Rubin, 2016). This study uses qualitative research methodology to give a voice to student-athletes typically categorized only by demographic descriptors such as race, position, and background. This mere quantitative and categorical classification disconnects student-athletes from society by reducing them to statistics and stereotypes (Melendez, 2008; Simiyu, 2012) rather than exemplifying them as young adults with a rich array of experiences, backgrounds, and opinions. Furthermore, an understanding of the student-athlete experience typified by primarily quantitative and statistical analyses—though useful for some surface-level demographic calculations—has the ability to perpetuate exploitation and mal-treatment (Beamon, 2008). For this reason, in part, sport researchers have identified a need for more qualitative research methods in the industry (Beamon,

2008; Sparkes & Smith, 2013). By giving a voice to these athletes, this research allows for a discussion and careful analysis of the student-athlete experience. Using case study methodology, this research lends support to the growing body of research concerning student-athlete socialization (Cranmer, 2018; Cunningham, 2007; Readdy et al., 2013; Singer, 2009) by looking specifically at the connection between athletic involvement, socialization habits, and interdisciplinary identities. Though a case study methodology renders these findings not necessarily generalizable to a larger population, the results instead provide an in-depth analysis of the student-athlete socialization experience at one institution that can highlight important themes and topics for further research and conversations. As an interdisciplinary study, this research applies foundational theories and methods from sociology, higher education practices, gender studies, race theory, and intersectionality research to examine the influence of athletic participation on the socialization of student-athletes across intersectional identities.

Literature Review

Research regarding the socialization of student-athletes in the sport industry has produced mixed results; while some studies have found improved opportunities and great benefits through athletic participation, others raise concerns. For instance, researchers have found that athletes are members of a valued social group (Wayment & Walters, 2016), are given opportunities for leadership (Weaver & Simet, 2015) and have the potential for self-esteem development through athletic team membership (Taylor, 1995; Weight et al., 2014). Participation in athletic programs has also been linked to increased academic success (Beamon & Bell, 2006; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Collegiate athletic programs have the potential to bring together students from the most diverse sectors of the United States as well as internationally (Cunningham, 2007). Team membership itself is a powerful identity highlighted by Brown et al. (2003b), who noted that student-athletes define themselves as athletes first rather than a member of a specific racial group. This strong athlete identity centrality can have major positive *or* negative impacts on social relationships and experiences, depending on a student-athletes' understanding and self-awareness of their own identity formation (Adler & Adler, 1991; Cornelius, 1995).

These proposed benefits of sport are in contrast to research criticizing the sport industry. Jay Coakley's "The Great Sports Myth" (2015) suggests that there is an overestimation of the positive characteristics and benefits of sport, including intercollegiate athletics. Participation in college athletics has been shown to negatively impact student-athletes' social and personal development (Beamon, 2012; Singer, 2009) due to time constraints and the struggle with the dual-role of student and athlete (Clayton et al., 2015; Coakley, 2009; Coser, 1974; Lee, 2015; Rubin, 2016; Sack & Theil, 1985). In addition, male student-athletes commonly face strong stereotypes from peers, faculty, staff, and the general population based on their academic identity (Anderson, 2015; Edwards, 1984). Most notably, along racial lines, "dumb-jock" stereotypes can prove particularly detrimental to Black student-athletes in the classroom and among their non-athlete peers (Edwards, 1984; Rubin, 2016; Stone et al., 2012). Black male student-athletes suffer from a system of higher education and larger society that glorifies their athletic abilities and assumes academic mediocrity (Anthony & Swank, 2018; Beamon & Bell, 2006), creating an environment ripe for vulnerability, identity foreclosure, and systemic exploitation (Brewer et al., 1993; Edwards, 1984; Harper et al., 2013; Melendez, 2008; Njororai, 2012).

Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory has been used as a foundational theory to understand how involvement in athletics affects student-athletes' college experiences at private, public, and community colleges and universities (Gayles, 2014; Matthews, 2017; Otto et al., 2019). By analyzing the impact of institutionally-directed co-curricular involvement on student development, Astin found that a student's involvement has three distinct parts: (a) the "inputs," which contain a student's background and demographics; (b) the "environment," which includes all experiences the student has in college; and (c) the "outcomes," which delineates the psychological and philosophical understandings the student has about the world after graduating as a result of his or her experiences in college. The results of this research show that students have an inherently more positive college experience when involved in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities (Umbach et al., 2006).

Looking more specifically at student socialization, Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization explains the contexts in which undergraduate socialization occurs and by what methods. Weidman carefully delineates the types of socialization as they are affected by non-college reference groups, student backgrounds, and parental demographics. He also describes an important difference in quality between formal and informal socialization, establishing that informal socialization often happens through peer groups whereas formal socialization happens by the facilitation of faculty or staff. Weidman's model has been used to influence research pertaining to overall student success and engagement in college (Kuh, 2001; Trowler, 2010). Through Weidman's model, Kuh (2009) defined engagement as "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities," (p. 683). Padgett et al. (2010) expanded on Weidman's model to assess the influence of social class and race on undergraduate socialization. Finally, Weidman's model has been used to examine the social experiences of student-athletes on campus based on their athletic engagement (Sato et al., 2017; Symonds, 2009).

Relationships between teammates have been shown to positively benefit the personal development of collegiate student-athletes (Harper et al., 2013; Wright, 2015). Cranmer (2018) identified the strong effect of intra-team exchange relationships on student-athlete information acquisition (e.g., team goals, politics, and history), but not on the explicit social dynamics of the team or social development of student-athletes. Research indicates that sport may not be the best channel for diverse socialization, but rather encourages the opposite by funneling athletes into predetermined categories based on basic demographic identifiers (Delaney & Madigan, 2009; Hubbard, 1999; Singer, 2005). Though this type of classification proves worthwhile for primary socialization functions such as mentoring and initial identity formation (Bimper, 2015; Fuller et. al., 2020; Kelly & Dixon, 2014), it has a propensity for creating negative stereotypes along racial and gender lines (Beamon, 2010; Comeaux, 2018; Harrison et al., 2010; MacArthur & Shields, 2015) and identity foreclosure (Beamon, 2012; Brewer et al., 1993).

Recently, higher education institutions across the nation have shown a commitment to furthering intersectional diversity and inclusion on their campuses and within athletic programs (Nelson Laird, 2011; Smith, 2015). Intersectionality is a theory of thought that describes "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory (1989) is a foundational body of research that describes the processes and interactions involved between people of

intersecting identities and positions of race, class, and gender. Though the majority of Crenshaw's research focuses on intersectionality as it pertains to women of color, the foundations of intersectionality can be applied to *all* of the intersectional identities that a person may hold (McCall, 2005; Parent et al., 2013), including race and economic class as they are particularly related to this study. MacKinnon (2013) further explains the applicability of Intersectionality Theory: "On the simpler level of what it thinks about, intersectionality focuses awareness on people and experiences—hence, on social forces and dynamics—that, in monocular vision, are overlooked," (p. 1020). Researchers have assessed the impact of intersectionality on student-athletes and found the complex identity structure to significantly affect the student-athlete experience (Bimper, 2015; Comeaux, 2018: Donnor, 2005). For example, the Black male student-athlete must navigate how his racial, gender, *and* athletic identities relate to each other and to his academic and social development (Fuller et al., 2020; Harrison et al., 2010). This movement towards intersectionality has the potential to create opportunities for increased student-athlete socialization. Student-athletes' extremely high rate of athletic identity centrality complicates their pre-existing identities (Brown et al., 2003b). As such, current research examining the effect of extra-curricular involvement is needed (Weidman et al., 2014) specifically regarding the effect of athletic programs on student-athlete socialization (Withycombe, 2011).

The purpose of this research is to conduct an in-depth case study of a NCAA Division I football program and its influence on the socialization of student-athletes across intersectional identities. Specifically, this research poses the following overarching question: *What is the influence of NCAA athletic participation on the socialization of student-athletes across diverse identities?*

Methodology

A Case Study Approach

This research provides an in-depth understanding of the socialization of student-athletes at a single NCAA Division I institution through a qualitative case study approach. Case study research methods allow for a deeper understanding of student-athlete experiences at the target institution and therefore a more applicable analysis of themes that arise. The Division I NCAA collegiate athletic experience is one of immense time requirements and importance to the lives of student-athletes. Their environment within the team is inherently unique, detailed, and integral to their growth as a social being (Brown et al., 2003a). Sport researchers have voiced a need for more qualitative research methods in the industry (Beamon, 2008). By giving a voice to these athletes, the research allows for discussion and careful analysis of the college athlete experience. A case study approach allows for a deeper dive into the experiences of each athlete, more so than other types of research (Yin, 2003).

The focus of this case study is a NCAA Division I football program at a small, Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the southeast region of the United States. Although efforts to increase diversity at this institution have been ongoing, administration has put diversity and inclusion at the forefront of their most strategic plan for the 2010-2020 decade, as well as the current strategic plan for 2020-2030. This research assesses implications of these efforts as they relate to the experiences of one case: the football team. In this study, the researchers chose to collect data solely from one team in order to strengthen the case study philosophy and develop a

strong understanding of the social dynamics within a single team at a single school. Football was selected as the sport to study because the size of a football team—typically 85-110 athletes per roster (NCAA Bylaw 17.10.2.1.2) —provides a wider sample of participants with a more varied group of experiences, backgrounds, and opinions. This larger and broader participant group allows the researchers to develop an understanding of the overall socialization experiences of the student-athletes as members of a large team, as well as members of campus environments.

Participants

Students

A pool of participants was gathered through purposive and snowball sampling to recruit a group that represented diverse identities, including age, race, socio-economic class, position on the team, class year, and playing time. The first category used to create a diverse participant pool was race. Participants were purposively selected based on a stratification that matched the racial composition of NCAA revenue-producing sports (See Table 1).

Table 1

2018 NCAA Division I Football Demographics

Race	Number	Percentage
White	10,718	40.3%
Black	11,988	45.1%
Hispanic/Latino	850	3.2%
Asian	536	2%
Two or More Races	1,526	5.7%
Am. Indian/Alaska Native	101	0.4%
Nonresident Alien	152	0.6%
Other	864	0.3%
Total	26,583	100%

Note. Retrieved from NCAA (2018) Demographics database. Copyright 2018 by NCAA.

The final pool of participants included 21 male student-athletes currently or formerly on the roster of the institution's football team. The participants were composed of an appropriate mix of Black, White, and biracial students (see Table 2) based on the current NCAA and institutional racial demographics. Composition breakdown aligned more closely with the institution rather than the NCAA because of the available pool of potential participants.

Table 2

Participant Racial Demographics

Race	Number	Percentage
White	9	43%
Black	8	38%
Two or More Races	4	9%
Total	21	100%

Although the participant sample began with a racial stratification to match the NCAA racial makeup, through data collection, the participant sample expanded to include stratification for other forms of diversity, including socioeconomic class, class year, geographic hometown, and position group. The participants group had a higher percentage of senior (n=8) and junior (n=7) participants in order to garner a more experienced and storied perspective of their college experience. However, the research pool also included a mix of sophomores (n=4) and freshman (n=2) in order to account for any different opinions occurring during the early years of college. The majority of participants came from in-state (62%), which differs from the general student body of the institution where 17% of the students come from the state. This discrepancy is attributed to the general composition of the football team leaning towards regional areas (47% from in-state alone). Finally, the participant sample group was stratified for football position group in order to get a variety of perspectives. Fifty-seven percent of participants were offensive players (n=12), 38% were defensive players (n=8), and the final participant was a special teams position. In addition, the participant group was stratified for big and skill positions. Big positions (n=11) included linemen and hybrid players such as tight-ends, linebackers, and special teams players. Skill positions (n=10) included ball-handling players and defensive backs.

Coaches/Staff

In addition to student-athlete participation, interviews with coaches (n=2) and staff members (n=2) who work extensively with the football team were conducted to gather their perceptions of the socialization experiences of team members. The coach/staff participant pool varied in their number of years at the institution (M=5.5), but all have worked extensive hours with the football team and individual student-athletes. The coaches and staff were identified because of their knowledge of the football players both on and off the field. They had significant experience in understanding the student-athlete socialization experience and had the ability to observe behavior. The interviews with coaches/staff were used to triangulate themes uncovered in student-athlete interviews.

Data Collection

Observations

The researchers observed student-athlete interactions within the athletic facilities and on the broader campus in order to understand the patterns of student-athlete socialization experiences.

Due to the researchers' unique backgrounds working at various Division I institutions and current experiences mentoring student-athletes, they were provided an excellent opportunity to collect relevant preliminary data as it occurs in student-athletes' natural settings. Throughout the data analysis process, the researchers were able to refer back to these primary observations in order to better understand and contextualize the results.

Semi-structured Interviews

Data were also collected using semi-structured interviews with football team members, as well as coaches and staff that work closely with the team. Preliminary observations were triangulated with existing research about the student-athlete experience, as well as formal and informal conversations with experts in the fields of collegiate athletics, diversity, and higher education. These second sources were used in order to help form questions for the semi-structured interview guide. Andrew et al. (2011) suggest that semi- and unstructured interviews provide "the chance for the researcher to learn rich details about an interviewee or a segment of society without suggesting any priori categorization that would limit this research" (p. 96). For the purpose of this study, the interview guide focused on story-based questions in order to allow the researchers to follow the narrative of each participant (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003).

For example, the student-athlete interview guide consisted of a series of questions pertaining to student-athlete experiences of socialization within the athletic team and the broader campus: *Do you spend more of your free time with student-athletes or non-athlete students? Do you think there's a difference in these relationships? What kind of similarities and differences do you see between you and your friends? How have relationships with teammates affected your college career? How have relationships with non-teammates affected your college career?*

The coach and athletic staff interview guide focused on questions pertaining to their perception of student-athlete socialization experiences derived through their previous observations and conversations with student-athletes: *What is your perception of who your student-athletes spend their free time with? What is your perception of how your student-athletes make friends* within *the athletic facilities? What is your perception of how your student-athletes make friends* outside *the athletic facilities? What is your perception of the strength of relationships between your student-athletes and between your student-athletes and their non-athlete friends?*

The selected participants were contacted by one of the researchers and asked to voluntarily participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. Participants were required to sign a consent form prior to the interview, which informed them of their voluntary and anonymous participation in the study. At this time, participants were asked consent for audio recording and transcription. The questionnaire and data collection protocol were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and preliminarily analyzed throughout the data collection process so the researchers could assess emerging themes and adjust further direction of interviews accordingly. Through this preliminary analysis, researchers were able to conclude that theme saturation had been reached when successive participants failed to contribute new data

pertaining to emerging themes. At this point, the transcripts were sent back to the interview subjects as an opportunity for them to review the transcription and clarify or edit their answers. Member checking is a crucial step to validating data and themes (Creswell, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Once member checks were completed, thematic analysis was used to organize data into categories and uncover themes and ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). This process was conducted independently by two reviewers in order to ensure investigator reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In the first phase of data analysis, open coding was used to develop preliminary themes. Open coding is a process of identifying emerging codes in order to group "conceptually similar events/actions/interactions" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 12). The initial codes from the open coding process were organized and condensed into broader thematic categories, also known as axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Finally, selective coding was implemented to identify prominent themes (Creswell, 2007; Nowell et al., 2017).

Scholars suggest that the complexity of qualitative intersectional research can be managed using anti-categorical, inter-categorical, or intra-categorical organizational methods (McCall, 2005; Windsong, 2016). Though the complex identities and narrative nature of this research initially lent itself to using anti-categorical analysis methods, the researchers eventually chose to use an inter-categorical approach in order to "focus on the complexity of relationships 'among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories'" (McCall, 2005, p. 1786). The focus is not on the intersection of race, class, and gender within a particular group, but instead on "the relationships among groups defined by the entire set of groups constituting each category" (McCall, 2005, p. 1787). An inter-categorical methodology allowed for stronger organization and analysis of relevant themes.

The researchers used triangulation of data, which is defined by Creswell (2000) as "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories" (p. 126). The themes from student-athlete interviews were triangulated with coach and administrator interviews, as well as the observation notes gathered throughout data collection. This process allowed for validation of data and confirmation of themes. In addition, the research was peer-reviewed by academics within and external to the sport industry in order to "challenge the assumptions made by the researchers," and "enable the researchers to refine his or her methods" (Shenton, 2004, p. 67).

Results

Through semi-structured interviews, participants discussed an in-depth portrait of their socialization experiences in athletic, academic, and social settings. Three prominent themes emerged from the data. Firstly, participants suggested that their socialization patterns were largely impacted by the social behaviors they had learned through youth and early-college experiences. These included family background, extra-curriculars, and involvement in team sport environments. Secondly, participants discussed a strong sense of differential socialization based on situations and perceived identity in those situations. As such, participants noted that they restricted or embellished certain aspects of their identity in order to attempt to "fit in" socially depending on the environment. Thirdly, results revealed strong perceptions that student-athletes have of non-athlete students, as well as perceptions of how non-athlete students perceive the

athletic community. This two-way street of perceptions and stereotypes strongly influences socialization of student participants. Data revealed the connotations and implications associated with the cohorting of football teammates, especially pertaining to social and personal development.

Learned Behavior

Pre-college experiences significantly affected participants' socialization patterns once they arrived on campus. Some found that the diversity of their high school experiences allowed them to learn how to socialize with the demographic of students they found at the case study school. Participant #13, a Black sophomore, explained that his high school was primarily White, so he was well prepared for arriving on a PWI campus. He had previously learned how to interact with people from different racial backgrounds from his own, as well as how to fit into his current environment in which he is a racial, gender and socio-economic minority. Participants reported learning about other forms of diversity in their lives including boy scouts (Participant #14, #21), the military family lifestyle (Participant #17), and family environment (Participant #11). Yet, the majority of student participants discussed their ability to adapt to different cultures because of previous youth and high school sport participation endeavors. Over half of the participants directly referenced sport as essential to their learned socialization patterns – especially with teammates holding identities different from their own. Their involvement in sport "has given them the ability to talk to anyone" (Participant # 17). Participant #4 explained that though he's a relatively reserved person, it has always been much easier for him to talk to people within the sport environment: "[Sports] is how I socialize." Participant #5 explained that this behavior was taught through the team sport environment. He described how he learned this lesson during his high school career:

> In high school our team was really separated; we had a bunch of different…groups. And one thing [my coach] told me to do is when we're chilling and show up early, get to know people you wouldn't usually talk to. So when you go and talk to other people, you get to know them and they have a sense of… they have more of a sense of trust with you and they have a relationship with you and that's the most important thing a teammate can be for me.

However, there were also students that discussed their struggles to integrate, or teammates' struggles, because of limited pre-college experiences. Participant #21, a Black junior, reported that because of his experience in Eagle Scouts, he didn't have a difficult time acclimating to this school's predominantly White campus. However, his roommate – also a Black student – did not have a similar experience: "he comes from a background where the whole school was majority Black. It's probably 60 White people in the school altogether. And for him, I didn't realize it at the time, he really struggled [during the first year]." Participant #23, a staff member, contextualized the phenomenon:

> You take that kid, that person, let's just say he's an African American kid. Okay, and you take that kid...out of one of those high schools, and you put him in one of these classrooms. To be blunt? He's never been around this many White people in his life.

Many participants cited a failure to feel connected with campus because of the contrast between their background and the general student demographic, specifically along socioeconomic

lines. Participant #9 explained that he felt that his family life was significantly different from the majority of his peers:

> My dad started out in construction. He's done very well now, but not a lot of guys' dads started out pounding nails, you know what I'm saying? I thought everyone did chores for their father all day on Sunday. I thought everyone split wood and all this stuff. But coming into that I had no idea how to act socially.

Though most participants discussed their difficulties socializing within the greater campus, they admitted that they were largely able to be "socially successful" because of the general socialization skills they had learned through sports.

Situational Socialization

Results indicated that participants changed their socialization habits based on their environment. They explained that this occurred because of their complex identities, including but not limited to their identity as a football player, their identity as a student-athlete, their race, and their economic class. Participants discussed how they had to alter their socialization habits primarily to combat pre-existing stereotypes. However, they also described the complex intersectionality of their identities that created expectations for how they should socialize to best fit in depending on the environment. The settings are broken up into three sections: athletic, academic, and social.

Athletic Settings

Participants described athletic settings—particularly those in the football realm—as environments where they are able to socialize most authentically. They attributed this to the critical first moments as an incoming freshman class, large amounts of time spent with teammates, the bond over a common objective, and the learned behavior of the importance of social connection to a team sport environment. These contributors allowed a space where participants felt as though they could be themselves around people from similar and different backgrounds to their own.

Several participants attributed their bond with teammates to their first summer on campus. A staff member explained that those critical first few moments between teammates often times are a catalyst for longer-lasting relationships. The organic nature of the first summer on campus creates a space in which student-athletes are seeking quick friendships, but also have the common identity of an athlete as a bonding force. Participants explained that because of the lack of non-athlete students on campus, they were forced to form relationships with their teammates. They talked about spending copious amounts of time together, both in and out of the football facility: "We did everything together. We went to eat together. 16 kids going to [the restaurant]. That's what we would do," Participant #14 explained.

The majority of participants voiced that they were able to be themselves around teammates in an honest, authentic manner. Participant #1, a senior, explained the common personalities they began to inherit over the years together: "90% of the football team are jokesters," he said. "That's what we do…We're all together. It's just laughing." One participant explained that this open environment allowed him to feel comfortable coming out of his shell more:

I don't know if I necessarily would have made it without [my teammates]… I'm kind of a socially awkward kid, especially when I first got here, gosh I was just so weird but it took me a while to open up and be more social. I think they brought it out of me… I was the quiet kid from [the Southeast] and then there's [my teammate], he was the loud mouth from the North, you know? It rubs on you so I started getting loud, you know, started being who I am. I think it definitely helped me grow up. (Participant #2)

Participants with sectional identities that contrasted the general student body found that the football team provided a comfort zone for them. Participant #8 explained that the kids on the team understood some of his own economic struggles, and vice versa: "those are the guys that are just like me." Participants explained that they felt more able to talk with their teammates about struggles because of those common experiences: "Real recognized real, type of thing" (Participant #11). Participants from a variety of backgrounds found that the football team allowed them to socialize across diverse identities. Some attributed that concept to the fact that, in some settings, their football identity superseded other identities such as race and class. Participant #4, a White freshman, explained:

Like [Teammate A], that's a kid that I probably wouldn't just go up and talk to if I was a normal kid. Just him as a person is not always the most inviting person, but I know him, I know I'm able to just be like "What's up, how you doing?" He's a very open person, while he has his flaws of course, but he's a very good person. He comes from a different environment than people. So I understand that. I'm definitely able to break down that racial barrier and I don't see it like "Oh, [Teammate A] is a Black person." [Instead], "[Teammate A] is a linebacker. [Teammate A] is my buddy."

Some perceived the identity of "football player" to reign stronger than other students' identities on campus. "Even if they don't look like me, even if they don't sound like me, even if they don't have the money I have or lack of money I have, we're still working towards the same thing," Participant #24, a staff member, explained of the student athletes she works with. They added: "They just identify so closely with [their athletic identity] versus other students on campus, they don't have those same [shared] identities." Participant #24 went on to explain that because of the size of the team, smaller groups or "cliques" inherently form, but that there is always crossover between the groups, regardless of group identity. Another staff member, Participant #23, summed it up as such: "I've seen rich kids and poor kids of all racial backgrounds. Football doesn't discriminate against anything. You got to want to play it. That's the biggest thing...That passion, it will supersede whatever your environment is at home."

However, some participants made it clear that the football team is not always a perfect microcosm of intersection. When asked about the presence of diversity issues within the football team, Participant #11 said:

I think [race and economic class] play an influential role in who hangs out with who more often… I don't think it's nearly on the level [of the rest of campus], but I do think it plays a part and I think you can definitely tell who hangs out with who.

Several participants described this as a natural tendency to gravitate towards people who have a similar background. Participant #21 explained that at workouts, on occasion, he'll notice that the team is divided on the field based on race. A staff member, Participant #22, explained:

> I have seen, to be blunt I guess, I have seen a White guy not quite understand the frustration that an African American male may have or have a hard time understanding why you as an African American are upset about something that happened...I think that's about as far as it goes. Maybe just a lack of understanding, but not necessarily an unwillingness to understand. I think it's just a matter of, "I just don't know what that's like."

After the participants discussed socialization within the athletic realm, oftentimes the conversation would move on to socialization on the broader campus, which presented a more challenging environment for student-athletes to socialize. Participants described a sense of a multi-layer identity that translated into their socialization patterns. The majority admitted to having one personality that they assumed in football settings (oftentimes their most authentic self), one in academic settings, and one in social settings.

Academic Settings

Participants listed several reasons for the different social interactions in the academic settings, including perceived academic strength, the influence of faculty, the large number of football players on campus, the intersection of football and racial identities, and the effect of winning vs. losing on the football field. Others explained that they refrain from socializing "normally" in academic spaces because of stereotypes of football players, particularly the machismo culture and the dumb-jock stereotypes.

Participants noted that academic strength (or lack thereof) affected their desire to socialize within the classroom. Participant #14 attributed it to frustration, explaining that student-athletes who aren't as academically strong get "frustrated and socially shut down in the classroom."

Some student-athletes attributed their socialization patterns in class to the influence of the professor. Participant #7 described his interactions in class:

> I don't know any of these kids. These kids don't know me. Nobody is talking to me. We just sit. We don't talk to each other unless the teacher is like, "Okay group, turn to the person on your left and work together." That's when we get time to be like "Oh, you're actually pretty cool." [We're] waiting on somebody to force [us] to do it.

Other participants reiterated this idea, explaining that although it was their natural tendency to work or talk with other student-athletes in their classes, when professors facilitated intermingling, they often enjoyed getting to know the other students in the classroom. However, this notion was always quickly followed by a clarification that relationships formed in the classroom rarely stick for the football players. Academic relationships are not given as much energy as football relationships. Participant #3 clarified: "I don't go to class to interact with other people. I mean it happens, but it's not my reason for going to class, so it doesn't matter to me too much."

Participants explained that part of their lack of motivation to socialize with non-athlete students on campus was attributed to the size of the football team. In classes, there's likely to be at least one teammate – if not multiple – to sit with. The large amount of football players to fall back on decreases the incentive to go out of their way to socialize with non-athlete students. Participant #17 compared his experience to his perception of non-football student-athletes:

> For other teams, it's easier for them [to meet people outside of their sport], they have less guys on the team. So, it's easier for them to reach out and talk to other people because they don't have that many people to hang out with. But I have like 96 people on the team. It's a ton of different interactions with a ton of different people that I can have every day.

A staff member described her impression of socialization between football players compared to other teams on campus:

> The [football] team is big enough to have whatever it is you identify with: the "country" kids, the kids who like to go hunt, the kids that like to go out on the weekends, the kids that are from a lower socioeconomic background, the kids that want to play video games... You're gonna be able to find it on a team of 100 people.

She echoed the student-athletes' reasoning; the large amount of football players to fall back on decreases the incentive to go out of their way to socialize with regular students.

Participants also discussed the influence of physical identifiers on their socialization on campus. Some discussed that clothing immediately identified them as a student-athlete because of the prominent logos of the school's football team. Participant #14 explained the effect this had on his presence in class from the very first day:

> I think wearing a [football shirt] coming in, [teachers] are like "Okay, this kid's an athlete. They're gonna be different in the classroom most likely than some of the other normal kids. And I kinda need to watch what they're doing."

Participants voiced a strong sense of feeling judged in the classroom, especially when that judgement was about their identity as a football player. Participant #24, a staff member, attributed that judgement to a number of identifiers including race, physical size, and clothing. Participants of racial minorities expressed that their racial background, as it is complicated by the intersection of their football identity, created even less incentive for them to socialize with regular students at a PWI. Participant #1, a Black senior, voiced that "everybody's more comfortable when you see people like you," in reference to his interactions with other Black football players.

Many participants discussed the common stereotype that football players are "intimidating." They explained that the way campus life is structured, the football persona is one of mystery to most faculty and students. Participant #2 discussed that the public pedestal he and his teammates are on can inherently separate them from non-athlete students. Other participants cited the nature of football equipment worn on the field. "In football you have the facemask," Participant #4 explained, "what I look like on the field is a completely different person from the way I look in the classroom." Multiple participants explained that their physical size further intimidated non-athlete students, especially when they sat together in a classroom. Participant #11

explained the social effects of the machismo identity he felt had been placed upon him as a football player:

> I feel like in football or athletics overall, we're creating these independent, self-motivated, determined killers almost, you know. We're creating these characteristics that are not great enablers of someone who can talk to somebody or meet new people… So I think the issue lies even deeper. As much as they are making us this [intimidating] person, they need to do the same thing to make us not that person, if we want to be able to say, "Yeah, I have friends from all different kinds of backgrounds."...You can't just put all the pressure on athletes and say, "Okay, go talk."

Conversations about academic settings often led to participants admitting that the reason they refrained from revealing their most authentic social self in campus settings was because they feared judgement along "football stereotypes." Participant #1 described his adapted social habits in class: "I learned a lot through my college career that I don't make jokes the first day in class... Sometimes people can't take a joke at times...people take that as one of the most famous words: 'obnoxious.' 'The football team is so obnoxious.'" In an effort to fight stereotypes of "obnoxious athlete" and "dumb jock," they ended up dampening their authentic social personalities.

Social Settings

Participants described associating mostly with fellow teammates in social settings, in part because of their own choice to do so, but also because of greater campus' stereotypes and preconceived judgements about them. Though some football players found social settings to be where they could most easily interact with non-athlete students, the vast majority instead explained that they felt ostracized from non-athlete students because of their own athletic, racial, gender, and socioeconomic identities. One student-athlete, Participant #21, explained the complexity of having intersecting identities of historically oppressed groups on a PWI campus in addition to his identity as a football player:

> Some [athletes] have a lot, like their family background have a lot of money. And then, some athletes, it's just scraping, they're struggling. Like if they didn't have a scholarship, they wouldn't be able to come here type stuff... And it's majority of the Black people are the ones on that end.

These identities – whether racial, economic, gender, athletic, or academic strength – created strong dissociations in the minds of participants between themselves and the rest of the student body.

Whereas participants earlier described being incredibly outgoing in football settings, most described a lack of interest in socializing with non-athlete students. Participant #3 – a self-described "social butterfly" in the athletic facilities – explained that if there were no football players in a dining hall when he went to eat, he would "throw on headphones and just chill." Another participant explained that he has actually made a lot of "regular student" friends in his classes, but often rejects their invitations to hang out outside of class in favor of spending time with his teammates. He paused, then clarified that usually this was attributed to wanting to have fun with his teammates rather than a disdain for non-athlete peers.

The team's success on the field also had a direct correlation to the participants' perceptions of socialization on campus. Multiple staff members explained that if the team was losing, the football players wouldn't want to interact on campus much, if at all. Participant #24 explained the desire to socialize only with teammates during tough times:

> You don't want people to see you. You don't want people to ask about it… it can be bad where I really have to feel like I have to hunker down with just [teammates] because they're the only people that know what I'm going through right now.

All of the participants discussed a divide between male student-athletes and male students, particularly those that were a part of Greek life on campus. Participants' perceptions were that this divide was attributed to Greek life students feeling threatened by football players – a reiteration of the "intimidating" qualities of their demeanor discussed in the academic setting. Participant #22, a staff member, believed that the tension stems from the male ego, citing a feeling of competition between Greek life and football players. Student-athlete participants confirmed this, explaining that they didn't notice a divide between female Greek life and female student-athletes. This divide created barriers among males on campus, forcing some student-athletes to "stick together." For instance, Participant #19 was clear that he only went out on the weekends with football players:

> Anything else would be trouble, probably. Just straying away from the football environment...it's probably not smart. I don't think any [football player] would try to purposefully piss [Greek life students] off, but for some reason they feel threatened by us.

The football identity was also complicated by racial identities in social settings. Participants, regardless of their race, explained that on a PWI campus, a team with a higher ratio of racial diversity feels at odds with the white-washed social scene. The majority of football players appreciated the difficulty that a minority football player would have in socializing outside of their football team. Participant #14, a White junior, explained the complex nature of intersectional identities of his teammates: "I think that the White kids on the football team get along with the White [students] a lot better than the Black kids on the football team are gonna get along with the White kids." Participant #7, a Black senior explained having to change his social habits to fit in:

> I feel like being African American and trying to go to a function with a "frat kid," it would look weird or be awkward... That caused me not to want to go out, not to want to be as outgoing as I used to be when I got here.

Some students across different identities voiced that they were able to meet non-athlete students in social settings on occasion. Though these relationships rarely manifested into anything more than an acquaintance, participants enjoyed the opportunity to get to know non-athlete students in a relaxed setting. Participant #7 explained his perception that non-athlete students felt more comfortable approaching him in social settings, where they might not have done so in the dining hall or classroom. Other participants indicated that they were able to find commonalities with non-athlete students in social settings, even if only on a superficial level such as taste in music, video games, or other leisure activities. Participant #6 addressed the deeper-rooted divide and voiced a call to action, noting that student-athletes could, in fact, do more to break down that barrier.

Perceptions of Each Other

Strong perceptions of "the other" exist between student-athletes and non-athlete students. Participants voiced that their sectional identities strongly contrasted those of normal students, who they perceived to be severely inhibiting socialization between the two groups. Participants explained strong perceptions of non-athlete students' judgements of *them*, while also discussing their own perceptions of the lifestyles and personalities of non-athlete students. Participants indicated the sense that socialization between them and non-athlete students would be worthless because of a perceived lack of common ground.

Many student-athlete participants felt that at least one aspect of their identity strongly contrasted with that of the general student body, to the extent that it inhibited or dissuaded them from socializing with non-athlete students. For some, this was simply the discrepancy in daily schedules that comes with the football identity. Participants cited having to work from sunrise to sundown every day, so they weren't afforded the social luxuries of their non-athlete peers, assuming that most students have a tremendous amount of free time. One junior, Participant #9, referenced the idea of having to cope with a multi-layer identity that other students did not: "I'm up from 6:00am to 9:00pm every day working… Not a lot of [regular] kids have to go through that when they're writing their Goldman Sachs application." Participant #17 described football players' responsibilities at school as inherently different from "regular" students:

> [Regular students] social network is the sororities and the fraternities and all of that, like, I don't know, I don't want to say this but… "high school-esque." And I'm on more of a work-like level. Like, I feel like I'm closer to real world stuff than they are, really… I have an academic advisor that I have to meet with all the time. A coach that I have to check in with who meets with me about academics. Yeah, I have a bunch of bosses. A bunch of people that I have to meet with and I have responsibilities that I have to take care of with them.

However, a staff member, Participant #23, described the differences in schedules as only a superficial explanation for the divide between non-athlete students and football players. He clarified that socialization (or lack thereof) has less to do with time demands and more to do with inherent differences in personal identities (race and socioeconomic class, in particular). He cited these cultural differences as a major inhibitor of socialization.

Participants explained that non-athlete students have strong perceptions of student-athletes, which complicates their ability to socialize together. Some participants discussed that non-athlete students perceive football players as intimidating. "[They're] either intimidated or they hate us," Participant #1 said of non-athlete students. Participants defended this idea by explaining that they appear intimidating because of their boisterous personalities together as well as their large size, but don't find validity in that stereotype. Many participants indicated that they felt the divide between general campus and football players was not self-imposed, but rather stemmed from perceptions held by the Greek life students. Participant #5 explained, "As much as I would like to interact with other kids on the campus, I don't feel like they're open to it." Participants established an understanding that perceptions of their identity as a football player were complicated by intersectionality issues on campus. Several participants talked about material goods, such as clothing or cars, as a physical indicator of the wealth discrepancy between them and their non-

athlete peers. This creates socialization barriers that are difficult to overcome: "I come to college to have the kind of cars people [here] are already driving," Participant #11 explained.

Another participant explained that non-athlete students have particularly strong negative perceptions of non-White student athletes. "I think a lot of the [regular students] have their attitudes towards the Black football players," he explained, "like how [football players] get to go to school for free here and how those kids are paying whatever the hell – $50,000, $45,000 or whatever it is to come here." Participant #21 described the struggle to understand if non-athlete students didn't like him because he was Black, because of where he grew-up, because he was on a full ride, or because he was a football player. Those identities were so interwoven in his eyes, that he said he couldn't tell if he was getting turned away from social gatherings because of one identity or the other.

The participants also had strong perceptions and stereotypes of non-athlete students. "There's just no point in my day that it is necessary to interact with people who aren't student-athletes," Participant #11 concluded. He continued to describe a student from a much different background than his own: "I can't relate to him. There's nothing...no part of my life that would be the same. Like actually no aspect. I just can't relate." This perspective of worthless socialization was pervasive to the football community. While most participants attributed their negative perceptions of non-athlete students to cultural identity differences, others justified why they tend to socialize only with athletes based on their athletic responsibilities:

> Being an athlete, you have more to lose than somebody else who doesn't really do anything. He just goes to school. They could get in trouble and get a slap on the wrist and be in class the next day, but I can lose my scholarship if I do something stupid and that's the reason I'm here. It forces me to stay away from any type of situation. (Participant #7)

Some participants acknowledged their strong stereotypes of non-athlete students. They explained that along with their teammates, they're sometimes too quick to judge. "It's just the perception of what they give off," Participant #4 explained of his tendency to judge non-athlete students. Participant #21 reflected on his surprise when he gets along with non-athlete students, "Cause a lot of them, you wouldn't think some of them would share the same values as you."

Language used between both parties indicated a strong sense of "us vs. them." Participants explained the use of the term Non-Athletic Regular Person (NARP) in reference to non-athletes. Multiple participants used the term in interviews when referencing people that were not a part of their immediate community. Participant #24 explained that the term isn't necessarily derogatory, but instead is used simply as a descriptor, in the same way one might describe a girl as a brunette. "I mean I don't have any problem with NARP's, they're good people," Participant #2 explained. "The more ingrained you are, the more you have an identity in the group and you're not just a NARP," Participant #24 clarified. NARP became a term used to describe non-athlete students that didn't have pre-existing identities in the athlete community.

Most participants held fast to the perception that negative stereotypes were placed unfairly on them. However, some participants acknowledged that both parties stereotyped each other. "At times, it can be hard to see the other person's point of view," Participant #3 explained. Another football player, Participant #2, discussed the root of misunderstanding between him and non-

athlete students. "I didn't pay for school, which I'm blessed. I'm so happy, degree for free but you know, I get that kind of look like 'At least you don't have to take out loans,' this and that, [but I'm like] 'Okay, well my body feels like I'm 30.'" Another participant explained that the misunderstanding stems from stereotypes rooted in the male experience:

> I honestly think it's like a dominance thing. Personally, I could care less. I don't care about all that mess. But I think a lot of regular people think that we might think we're better, and I think that we think that they are privileged. So, I think it's bad preconceived notions on both parts of people that would just take effort to fix. (Participant #11)

Through conversations with other participants, it became clear that these aforementioned preconceived notions were deeply rooted in the isolated nature of athletics from campus and would require significant contributions by faculty, university administrators, and athletic staff to help facilitate inter-student interactions.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative case study to examine the influence of participation in a NCAA Division I football program on the socialization of student-athletes across intersectional identities. While previous research has examined the overall socialization of student-athletes, this study aimed to expand upon the current understanding by using an intersectionality lens. The results of this study indicate that the socialization of student-athletes is affected by their behaviors learned through sport, their situational socialization and identities depending on the setting, and the strong perceptions of student-athletes toward non-athlete students.

Results of this study reveal that student-athletes formed strong socialization habits through their past experiences, including their participation in sport. Research has shown that intra-team exchange relationships affect student-athlete information acquisition (Cranmer, 2018), but this study supports the significant impact that sport can have on social development. These findings support both Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory and Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization by demonstrating a strong correlation between extra-curricular involvement and socialization habits. The results of this study provide qualitative support to all three parts of Astin's theory by tangibly demonstrating the perceived "input" of student-athletes' backgrounds in sport, analyzing the "environment" of athletic participation in the undergraduate years, and discussing the impact, or "outcomes" of these experiences on the student-athlete's perception of self and the world around him. Participants of this study discussed that their participation in youth and college football teams allowed them to learn how to socialize with people whose sectional identities were different from their own. These findings contribute to the body of literature by examining the impact of interracial relationships on "perceptions of discrimination among student-athletes," as called for by Brown et al. (2003b, p. 176). Participants of majority racial and economic groups suggested that their cultural competency had been expanded because of their increased exposure to students from less privileged backgrounds. Other participants, particularly those from minority racial or economic groups, expressed that the football team provided them with a comfort zone in which they could interact with people whose identities felt "familiar" compared to the general student body. This notion expands upon the research that commends sport for being positive to student-athlete development, particularly socially (Feldman

& Matjasko, 2005; Harper et al., 2013; Wright, 2015), and complicates the criticism that sport inhibits student-athletes socially (Beamon, 2010; 2012; Singer, 2009).

Another strong contribution to the literature is the discussion of socialization habits as they are affected by student-athletes' various identities and perceptions of stereotypes imposed upon them in athletic, academic, and social settings. These findings support Crenshaw's (1989) Intersectionality Theory by showing how the intersection of the various identities that one holds can have a significant impact on his/her social experiences. More specifically, the intersection of athletic and racial identities has proven to be a significant contributor to student athlete socialization (Brewer et al., 1993; Edwards, 1984; Harper et al., 2013; Melendez, 2008; Njororai, 2012) as "Black college student-athletes constantly negotiate the salience of their multiple identities on college campuses" (Anthony & Swank, 2018, p. 180). The present study allows for a unique discussion of the influence of these intersectional identities on student-athlete socialization.

The results expand upon Brown et al. (2003b), who introduced the idea that the centrality of athletic identity decreases the centrality of racial identity, particularly for Black student-athletes. In many instances, the results of this study indicate that participants' athletic identity reigned stronger than their racial identity. This can be attributed in part to the sheer number of hours spent with teammates, which has increased to 34 hours per week in previous years (NCAA, 2016), but also suggests an ability for football relationships to help student-athletes cross societally-imposed barriers of race and economic class. This study also built on previous research about the dual-role of student and athlete (Clayton, 2015; Coakley, 2009; Coser, 1974; Lee, 2015; Rubin, 2016; Sack & Theil, 1985) by looking specifically at the social experiences of student-athletes in the classroom. In academic environments, participants indicated that they primarily felt the negative impact of athletic stereotypes, complicated by their racial and economic identities on a wealthy PWI campus.

Finally, this study developed a unique understanding of relations between male student-athletes and other social circles, such as Greek life students. Themes of masculinity appeared corrosive to the inter-student socialization experience. The vast majority of participants noted that their athletic, racial, masculine, *and* economic identities were in contrast with other male students, particular members of Greek life. Even for those whose own personal identities were not much different from the majority of the student body, their relationships with teammates precluded them from wanting to form strong relationships with White male students perceived as upper class and/or fraternity members based on clothing and physical indicators. This ally structure created an even stronger team identity on a campus with a large Greek life presence.

Extensive research has been conducted on the stereotypes and perceptions of student-athletes by non-athlete students (Anderson, 2015; Comeaux, 2018; Czopp, 2010), but little research has been conducted on student-athletes' perceptions of non-athletes. This study provides an understanding of how student-athletes perceive non-athletes, particularly as it relates to socialization outside of the athlete community. Student-athletes use linguistic descriptions to distinguish themselves from non-athletes, such as the commonly referenced "Non-Athletic Regular Person" (NARP). This seems to act as a counter to the labeling of student-athletes, whose athletic identity follows them even in academic settings (Stone et al., 2012). Though most participants describe the use of the term "NARP" as a simple description – without negative connotations – it still creates a sense of "us" and "them," inherently separating student-athletes

from non-athlete students. Labels have a tendency to create divides between groups of people, making it more difficult to connect and find commonalities (Darley & Gross, 1983; Eberhardt et al., 2003). In addition, participants noted a general perception that socialization with non-athlete students would be "worthless." They indicated that either non-athlete students had nothing to offer them or that their sectional identities contrasted so much that neither group desired to make a meaningful connection. This significantly contributes to the literature by expanding upon research about experiences of student-athletes on PWI campuses (Bernhard, 2014; Bimper, 2015; Bourke, 2010; Hodge, 2015; Sato et al., 2017) through a specific socio-relational lens.

Overall, participants emphasized that they felt they were able to be their most authentic selves within athletic environments and develop positively because of teammate relationships. Though research on college student social development frequently emphasizes the importance of involvement in extracurricular activities (Astin, 1984; Kim & Bastedo, 2016; Strapp & Farr, 2010), cohorting of athletes in particular has been criticized (Beamon, 2012; Singer, 2009). The present study indicates some of the proposed benefits of inter-athlete socialization, such as personal development through strong teammate relationships, increased comfort participating in academic environments, and expansion of social skills through interactions with a diverse student-athlete population.

Thirty one percent of NCAA Division I football players indicate that *all* of their closest friends from college are also teammates and 90% credit their athletic experience as having a positive impact on their college career (NCAA, 2016). The present study discusses those relationships in depth to reveal that participants had a perception of a strong football brotherhood, contributing to research on the positive impact of athletic involvement on personal development (Harper et al., 2013; Wright, 2015).

The findings of this study support the current body of research arguing that athletic identity is extremely strong for student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1991; Brown et al., 2003b; Cornelius, 1995). However, this study also addresses the discrepancy between two current bodies of thought: student-athletes are hindered socially (Beamon, 2012; Delaney & Madigan, 2009; Singer, 2005) and student-athlete social and personal development is improved by relationships with their teammates (Harper et al., 2013; Simmons & Childers, 2013; Weight et al., 2004; Wright, 2015). This study clarifies that athletic involvement increases social development within the athletic realm but hinders socialization with non-athlete students. In addition, existing literature argues that athletics is not the best avenue for diverse socialization because it funnels athletes into demographic categories (Delaney & Magidan, 2009; Singer, 2005), but this study emphasizes that athletics has the ability to create relationships between people whose sectional identities are not similar; however those relationships are typically developed only within the team environment. These findings contribute to the current understanding of student-athlete identity on campus and provide essential insight to how student-athletes socialize within and external to their athlete cohort.

Limitations

Case Study

As a case study, this research is not generalizable to a larger NCAA student-athlete population. The focus of this study assessed only the male student-athlete experience, so it cannot be generalized to other genders. In addition, the researchers did not require that participants explicitly define their socioeconomic class for demographic data, but interview results revealed inherent differences in socioeconomic class between participants. Finally, the focus of this case study only explored the socialization of football student-athletes at one NCAA Division I institution, so the results cannot be generalized to a larger Division I football population.

Researcher Positionality

The researchers approached this study with their own biases and backgrounds. One position is that, as a female, the primary researcher's identity was inherently different from the main body of research participants. However, professionals have voiced that although female researchers can face unique challenges in a male dominated field such as sport, they often have an ability to garner respect and trust from subjects (Gurney, 1985). The researchers had both experienced prolonged involvement in the field and engagement with the environment of study before data collection began. These circumstances allowed for increased trust between researchers and participants, as well as a pre-existing objective understanding of the environment (Erlandson et al., 1993). Finally, the researchers engaged in researcher reflexivity, defined by Creswell (2000) as "the process whereby researchers report on personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry" (p. 127). This allowed the researchers to assess the potential effects of their biases and develop methods (i.e., member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of data) to ensure validity of the results.

Future Research

The results of this study contribute to the dichotomy of research pertaining to student-athlete socialization, and also surface emerging themes that require further research. One area of research to investigate concerns the socialization of female student-athletes as compared to male student-athletes. Many participants perceived their female counterparts to have an easier time socializing, in part attributed to the lack of machismo culture that is found in male athletic and social environments (Harris & Struve, 2009; MacArthur & Shields, 2015). Previous studies have assessed female student-athlete socialization in general (Marx et al., 2008), but further research could assess the inherent differences between male and female socialization and identity development in order to understand how gender identity affects or complicates the student-athlete social experience.

Specifically, research is needed on the socialization patterns of student-athletes with faculty, academic staff, coaches, and athletic staff. Participants of this study indicated that they socialized differently with coaches and athletic staff depending on several factors, including age of staff member, relatability, compatibility of identities, and the sheer amount of time spent together. Staff participants also picked up on this emerging theme, discussing that they perceived student-athletes to be more comfortable with athletic training and strength and conditioning staff

as opposed to position and head coaches. Previous research has examined the business relationship between student-athletes and their university (Gurdus, 2001; Vine, 2013; Yasser, 1984), but few studies have looked specifically at socialization habits within professional athletic relationships. In addition, participants noted that they had trouble socializing with professors and faculty because of the perceived academic stereotypes. For this reason, a more detailed study that builds off of the current understanding of this topic could contribute to the growing body of literature by illuminating the influence of student-athlete perceptions of faculty, coaches, and staff on their ability to socialize with these staff members effectively.

Conclusion

Coaches and athletic staff can have important conversations with their student-athletes pertaining to social development and integration within and external to the team environment. In addition, the results of this study begin an important conversation concerning steps to improve the student-athlete experience in the classroom and on campus. Academic faculty and staff should work more closely with athletic administrators to understand the social needs of student-athletes and the potential benefits of cohorting student-athletes, at least initially, and then increase interactions between student-athletes and non-athlete students in the classroom. Finally, higher education administrators have the ability to institute programs for student development and success across various student identities and groups. Based on previous research that suggests student-athletes have a strong presence on campus (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Hodge, 2015; McFarlane, 2014), and the findings of the current study that imply student-athletes currently perceive a divide between themselves and non-student athletes, there is ample room for conversation about actionable steps to improve the experience for a more cohesive campus environment. Though many participants described the word "NARP" as simply a term used for quick reference of non-athlete students rather than one of negative connotations, they also expressed a general aversion to initiating interactions with non-athlete students. Many participants suggested that professors and administrators could help facilitate these interactions through academic projects, on-campus events, and organizations dedicated to increasing inter-student interactions. The strong perceptions that student-athletes and non-athlete students have of each other indicates a need for more conversation between athletic campuses and non-athletic campuses in order to find inherent similarities among the student population. Emphasis on the part of higher education staff is needed to help break down the athlete identity and understand the student-athlete socialization experience as a part of campus culture.

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