Athletic Cheers and Academic Assists: Examining Black Male Basketball Players’ Social Relationships at a Division-I Institution and Their Effect on Academic Success

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

by

Porsha A. Boyd

August 2014
The Dissertation of Porsha A. Boyd is approved:

__________________________  ______________________
Dr. LaTonya Rease-Miles    Date

__________________________  ______________________
Dr. Dimpal Jain               Date

__________________________  ______________________
Dr. Jody Dunlap, Chair    Date

California State University, Northridge
Acknowledgements

Over the past 3 years, I have developed long-lasting relationships that will no doubt nurture and possibly enhance my professional career. More importantly, I have developed meaningful relationships that have allowed me to grow on a personal level. In addition, this process went far beyond the late night readings, hours of writing, endless research, and other such like academic tasks. The laughter, the deep discussions, the awkward moments, the disagreements, and the overall cohort comradery will forever remain memorable. In sum, there were a myriad of components that contributed to the completion of this body of work.

I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Jody Dunlap, for your expertise, professionalism, honesty, and overall spirited disposition. You allowed me to explore my ideas and often reeled me in when I veered off track. Your guidance and efficiency are greatly appreciated. Dr. Dimpal Jain, you have inspired me to continue researching in the field that I am passionate about, athletics. Your mentoring and support have allowed me to grow both personally and professionally. I admire your tenacious attitude and aspire to attain your work ethic. Dr. Rease-Miles, thank you for your honesty and overall faith in my vision. You saw the potential in this project and made sure that I worked toward my full potential to achieve my goal.

I would also like to thank the Kenwood University Men’s Basketball Team, coaches, and other athletic support staff. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my cohort, CC11, for your support and often interesting class sessions every week for the past 3 years. I learned and gained so much from each and every one of you. As a
result, I have added to my network of professional and personal contacts that are among
the best in our education field.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. First and foremost to my father and Pastor, Perry Boyd, words cannot begin to express the inspiration you have been and continue to be in every aspect of my life. You are the one who encouraged me to pursue this journey of higher education and have remained my biggest cheerleader, mentor, advisor, and support system throughout this often challenging process. For your wisdom, encouragement, jovialness, chastisement, love, and overall great example, I truly thank you. To his companion and my sister in God, Daphena Boyd, I will never forget the impromptu vocabulary lessons as a child. “Facetious” will forever be embedded in my brain. Your concern and care for me over the years have never gone unnoticed or unappreciated. I cherish your positive disposition and truly thank you for all that you have done for me over the years as well as during this process. Although my mother, Patricia Boyd, has since passed on, I can’t help but remember the many times she encouraged me to pursue my education with tenacity and fortitude. For her constant support and often offbeat cheering habits, I will forever be grateful. This dissertation is also dedicated to my brothers and sisters in God from whom I also draw an invaluable amount of support and encouragement. Whether it was a hug, a handshake, words of inspiration, a smile, or a simple “beautiful,” every word and/or action of endearment inspired me to continue toward my overall goal. For all of your love and support, I am truly appreciative and thankful. Lastly, I thank all of you for your unwavering belief in me during this process. I love you all and appreciate your continued support. “We all right shear!”
# Table of Contents

Copyright Page........................................................................................................... ii  
Signature Page ............................................................................................................ iii  
Acknowledgments ...................................................................................................... iv  
Dedication .................................................................................................................... vi  
List of Tables ............................................................................................................... x  
Abstract ...................................................................................................................... xi  

Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................. 1  
  Problem Statement ...................................................................................................... 10  
  Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................. 11  
  Significance of the Study .......................................................................................... 12  
  Research Question ..................................................................................................... 13  
  Definition of Terms .................................................................................................... 13  
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................. 15  
  Methodology ............................................................................................................. 17  
  Delimitations ............................................................................................................ 18  
  Limitations ................................................................................................................. 19  
  Organization of Study ............................................................................................... 19  

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature .............................................................................. 21  
  Introduction .............................................................................................................. 21  
  African American Males and Academics ................................................................. 23  
  African American Males in Higher Education ....................................................... 28  
  The NCAA ............................................................................................................... 34
African American Male Basketball Players and Academics ........................................44
Academic and Athletic Motivation ........................................................................46
The Student-Athlete-Faculty Relationship ...........................................................51
The Student-Athlete-Nonathlete Relationship .......................................................54
The Coach-Athlete Relationship ..........................................................................58
Summary ..............................................................................................................60
Chapter 3: Methodology ......................................................................................64
Research Purpose ...............................................................................................64
Research Question .............................................................................................64
Chapter Organization ..........................................................................................65
Research Design and Tradition ............................................................................65
Connection to Purpose and Questions ..................................................................67
Research Setting and Context .............................................................................67
Research Sample and Data Sources ....................................................................69
Instruments and Procedures .................................................................................73
Data Collection ....................................................................................................76
Data Analysis .......................................................................................................79
Role of the Researcher .........................................................................................80
Chapter 4: Findings and Results ..........................................................................85
Introduction ........................................................................................................85
Participant Profile ...............................................................................................86
Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire Results ....................87
Qualitative Findings ...........................................................................................90
List of Tables

Table 4.0: Study Participants ..........................................................86

Table 4.1: Results of the Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire......88
Abstract

Athletic Cheers and Academic Assists: Examining Black Male Basketball Players’ Social Relationships at a Division-I Institution and Their Effect on Academic Success

by

Porsha A. Boyd

Doctor of Education Degree

in Educational Leadership

Division-I Black male basketball players remain the overall lowest academic-achieving population in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), with a graduation success rate of 68% as compared to their White counterparts who had a graduation success rate of 86% for the 2006 cohort. Past researchers have examined cognitive and noncognitive variables as predictors of Black male student-athletes’ academic success in higher education. However, few researchers have examined those successes on a program level. In sum, although some scholarly works have examined Division-I Black male student-athletes and their academic successes on an individual basis, few of those studies have examined successful Division-I programs as a whole, specifically those that graduate a substantial number of Black male basketball players, and the potential influences that contribute to their academic success. Consequently, this study examined Black male basketball players’ social relationships with various institutional agents (e.g., academic advisors, coaches, faculty, and nonathletes) at a
private medium-sized university in order to understand to what extent, if any, those relationships influence academic success. This study utilized a qualitative approach to answer the research question and subquestions. The sample population for this study included 5 current Black male basketball players, 2 former Black male basketball players, 2 coaches, 1 academic advisor, 1 faculty member, and 1 athletic director, all who represent Kenwood University. Data for this study were obtained through semistructured interviews. This study found that the majority of the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University had positive, healthy relationships with both their academic advisors and professors. These relationships strongly influenced the players’ academic success. However, while the players’ personal relationships with the coaching staff varied, the majority agreed that the basketball coaches at Kenwood University placed a strong emphasis on academics, ultimately influencing the players’ academic success. Lastly, despite the players’ overall positive relationship with their nonathlete peers, this relationship did not have a strong influence on their academic success.
Chapter 1: Introduction

For decades, many African American males have been told that their athletic skills are a gateway to higher education (Hoberman, 2000; Petr & McArdle, 2012; Sailes, 1986). For Black males who reside in low socioeconomic communities, they oftentimes take on the demands of becoming the success (financially) when coming from an unsuccessful family structure (Beamon, 2009; Edwards, 2000; Rowley, Kurtz-Costes, Mistry, & Feagans, 2007). As a result, many of these young men use higher education as a springboard to launch their professional athletic careers, some neglecting to nurture their academic abilities (Beamon, 2009). Likewise, in most cases, the institutions that these athletes represent may be a detriment to their academic success by enforcing the urgency of athletic success over that of academic achievement (Beamon, 2008; Harrison, 2001). With big-time college athletics becoming increasingly professionalized, most National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions struggle to address the issue of student-athletes’ academic success versus athletic success (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Eitzen (2000), an expert in the sociology of sport, stated:

Not only do typical athletes in big-time sports enter at an academic disadvantage, they often encounter a diluted educational experience attending their schools. Coaches, under the intense pressure to win, tend to diminish the student side of their athletes by counseling them to take easy courses, choose easy majors, and enroll in courses given by faculty members friendly to the athletic department. (p. 30)

For this reason, among others, Black male athletes, specifically in the revenue-generating sports of football and basketball, continue to have the lowest graduation success rates
among all sports in the NCAA (Benson, 2000; Snyder, 1996). Revenue-generating sports are the intercollegiate sports in which institutions garner a monetary profit. In most cases, these sports are identified as Division-I men’s football and basketball (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Snyder, 1996). However, it is the Black male basketball player who has and continues to remain a member of the lowest academic-achieving group amongst his peers (Matheson, 2007; NCAA, 2014e).

In 1973, the NCAA divided its organization into three competitive sections, known as Divisions I, II, and III, on account of a growing and competitively diverse athletic population (NCAA, 2014b). Each division has its own unique set of rules, recruiting standards, eligibility requirements, and financial aid (NCAA, 2014b). To date, all NCAA intercollegiate sports must affiliate with one of these three divisions. Most student-athletes who compete for NCAA Division-I member institutions are offered the highest athletic financial aid in the intercollegiate arena (Matheson, 2007). However, student-athletes who compete at the Division-II level are offered limited athletic financial aid, while Division-III student-athletes receive no athletic financial aid to compete (Matheson, 2007; NCAA, 2014a). Fewer students who compete at the Division-II and III levels pursue professional careers in their respective sports as compared to Division-I athletes (Urban, 2000). Given that the Division-I level is the most competitive collegiate sector in the NCAA and over time is becoming more professionalized, student-athletes who usually compete at this level are more apt to strive toward a professional career in their respective sport as compared to athletes in other divisions, specifically those in revenue-generating sports (Urban, 2000).
For many years, the NCAA organization has struggled to remedy the ongoing issue of the lack of degree attainment among Division-I student-athletes participating in revenue-generating sports (Eitzen, 2000; Snyder, 1996). In order to remain in good academic standing, Division-I student-athletes are expected to maintain specific NCAA academic standards to ensure that they attain their degrees (NCAA, 2014d). However, a lack of positive academic performance has led to low graduation success rates among this particular population (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Snyder, 1996). Many critics have argued that Division-I revenue-generating sports are merely training hubs for professional sports and often serve the professional recruiting agencies rather than the student-athletes’ academic needs (Eitzen, 2000; Snyder, 1996). Despite statistics showing a low number of Division-I male football and basketball players succeeding at the professional level, some Black male student-athletes are influenced by their family (Edwards, 2000), community, the institution that they represent, and the media to make athletics a priority over academics (Beamon, 2008) in hopes of attaining a professional career (Snyder, 1996).

The growing concern by the NCAA organization, NCAA Division-I institutions, the federal government (LaForge & Hodge, 2011), university personnel (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007), and other athletic supporters over the lack of degree attainment among Division-I Black male basketball players continues to intensify as more basketball programs are becoming increasingly comprised of Black athletes (NCAA, 2014e). Moreover, higher education institutions are capitalizing off of revenue made by this population’s athletic prowess (Beamon, 2008), many times without the reciprocal exchange of Black male basketball players attaining a degree. Although the majority of Division-I programs struggle to aide in the persistence of this population of
students, there are a few notable Division-I institutions with a large African American population on their basketball teams that have consistently achieved successful graduation success rates over the past 4 years (NCAA, 2014e). The graduation success rate methodology is the standard index used to measure the degree attainment for all student-athletes at individual Division-I member institutions and are based on a 6-year cohort (NCAA, 2014e; Petr & Paskus, 2009). The methodology was implemented in 1990 in order to make significant academic policy changes within the NCAA organization in an attempt to positively affect all student-athletes (Petr & Paskus, 2009).

In addition to using the graduation success rate methodology as an academic measuring tool for all Division-I student-athletes, the NCAA also utilizes the academic progress rate (APR), a methodology that affords a real-time snapshot of student-athletes’ academic progress by individual sport and academic term (LaForge & Hodge, 2011). In addition, the APR system is used to ensure that Division-I student-athletes make continued progress toward degree attainment. Each individual Division-I team must achieve and maintain a certain APR in order to avoid specific NCAA sanctions and penalties (LaForge & Hodge, 2011).

Among those programs with a high graduation success rate is the highly publicized Duke University. Known for being a basketball powerhouse, Duke University’s basketball program has earned an 83% graduation success rate for the cohort year 2003 and a 100% graduation success rate for both the 2004 and 2005 cohort years (each entering freshman class is labeled a cohort; NCAA, 2013). In addition to those impressive statistics, Duke is known for its legendary leader, Coach Mike Krzyzewski (Coach K), and the foundation on which he establishes his successful program both on
the court and in the classroom. In his book, *Leading With the Heart: Coach K’s Successful Strategies for Basketball Business and Life*, Coach K highlighted the 12 foundational rules on which he structures his teams:

- Recruit great individuals who are willing to be part of a team and who are coachable.
- It’s important to begin using plural pronouns right away: “Our” instead of “my,” “we” instead of “I,” “us” instead of “me.” Remember that leadership on a team is not singular, it’s plural.
- Demonstrate the principle “we’re all important” by making sure that you are not the only one speaking at a meeting.
- Teach time management, not only as it relates to individuals, but as it pertains to a group.
- Stress honor in all things.
- Don’t be a team of “I got’cha’s.” Too many rules get in the way of leadership.
- Preserve the latitude to lead.
- Set up a family support system for your team. It’s like getting a shot to keep away jealousy.
- Hand out a laminated card with the telephone numbers of the players and staff. Remind them to call somebody when they’re in harm’s way.
- Believe in a handshake.
- Mutual commitment helps people overcome the fear of failure.
- Each team has to run its own race. (Krzyzewski & Phillips, 2010, p. 18)
Like many coaches, Coach K is dedicated to winning in his respective sport. However, he is equally invested in establishing a meaningful relationship with his players—one that will nurture their academic, athletic, and social well-being. With regard to Coach K’s “Handshake Deal” (Krzyzewski & Phillips, 2010, p. 14), which is highlighted among his 12 rules, he stated,

To each kid, I say: “I’m going to give you my best. I’m going to give you 100 percent. In return, I expect you to graduate. You’ll be coming to Duke for more than just basketball. If you don’t understand that, then don’t come to Duke. I want you to be passionate about basketball, but I also want you to obtain a great education.” (Krzyzewski & Phillips, 2010, p. 15)

Comparable to Duke University, there are other notable Division-I basketball programs with a large number of African Americans on their basketball rosters that achieve reputable graduation success rates. Though few in number, these Division-I institutions are also graduating their Black male basketball players at consistent rates (Lapchick, 2013; NCAA, 2013). Teams like the University of Kansas, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Michigan State, and the University of Notre Dame are institutions that have recorded graduation success rates above 89% over the past 5 years as compared to the overall NCAA men’s basketball graduation success rate of 72.9% (NCAA, 2013). However, it is important to note that the above-mentioned universities, with the exception of the University of Kansas, had 2011-2012 rosters almost equally comprised of White and Black basketball players (NCAA, 2013). The demographic makeup of the aforementioned teams may have affected the graduation success rates recorded by those particular universities.
This study examined the social relationships of Black male basketball players at Kenwood University (pseudonym). Kenwood University is a Division-I private, predominantly White institution. The majority of the Kenwood University men’s basketball team is African American. Over the past 5 years, Kenwood University has maintained an average graduation success rate of 83.6% (NCAA, 2013). This is well above the overall NCAA men’s basketball Division-I graduation success rate of 67.7% for the 2004 cohort, 74.1% for the 2005 cohort, and 72.9% for the 2006 cohort (NCAA, 2014e). While recording an average graduation success rate of 83.6% over the past 5 years, the percentage of African Americans on Kenwood University’s men’s basketball team over the past 5 years was as follows: (a) 2008-2009—69% African American, (b) 2009-2010—71% African American, (c) 2010-2011—74% African American, (d) 2011-2012—93% African American, and (e) 2012-2013—80% African American. With the graduation success of the Kenwood University men’s basketball program, it is important to explore what may contribute to academic success with regard to this particular program. There is little research exploring the social relationships of Black male basketball players and to what extent those social relationships may contribute to their academic success. For the purpose of this study, a social relationship is defined as the interaction between two or more individuals.

In regard to Black male college student-athletes’ low academic achievement, research has shown that a variety of factors are related to this population’s lack of degree attainment. For example, strained faculty-student-athlete relationships are one of the contributing factors to low academic achievement (Comeaux, 2008; Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995; Perlmutter, 2003; Sailes, 1993; Simons et al., 2007). According to
Perlmutter (2003), strained faculty-student-athlete relationships are usually the result of professors overlooking and cutting off student-athletes during class discussions, lowered expectations, intensified scrutiny, and negative comments by professors directed toward student-athletes. As a result, student-athletes are more likely to seek out mentorship from coaches, advisors, and/or peers for academic and/or personal help (Perlmutter, 2003).

Contrarily, a healthy faculty-student-athlete relationship could potentially aid in the successful academic achievement of student-athletes, specifically Black male student-athletes. Further, Comeaux (2008) asserted that it is the specifics of the faculty-player relationship that could potentially encourage Black male student-athletes to persist to degree attainment and even aspire to pursue graduate degrees.

In addition to student-athlete-faculty-relationships, the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship has also been shown to be a central aspect of Black male student-athletes’ college and social experiences and may have a negative or positive effect on Black male basketball players’ academic achievement depending on the nature of the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship (P. Adler & Adler, 1985; Harrison, 2001; Perlmutter, 2003; Simons et al., 2007). P. A. Adler and Adler (1991), in a pivotal study, examined the social experiences of Black male student-athletes at a Division-I university. P. A. Adler and Adler (1991) found that the athletes’ social relationships, or lack thereof, with other nonathlete students negatively affected their academic performance. One athlete elaborated on the separation of Black male student-athletes and nonathletes:

Athletes carry two images in they minds. One image is, “My momma send me to school to be a engineer, and in order to be a engineer I’ve got to go to class every day and study hard.” The other image is, “I come to school to play basketball, I
didn’t come to school to study that hard.” But Coach don’t want you thinking about your economics class. You’ve got to be thinking about North Carolina, if you was hangin’ out with a group of just regular students you goin’ to be more into reality than to have all these jocks over here dreaming in all they dream worlds. (P. A. Adler & Adler, 1991, p. 118)

In sum, Division-I Black male student-athletes oftentimes are placed in an environment that limits their social opportunities with nonathlete students. These types of environments include all athlete dormitories and a student-athletes’ demanding athletic schedule which causes them to become separated from nonathlete students. As a result, limiting student-athletes’ access to nonathlete students may impede their academic evolvement. Recent research has affirmed the work of P. A. Adler and Adler (1991), citing student-athlete-nonathlete interaction as vital to Black male student-athletes’ college experience, specifically those athletes who participate in revenue-generating sports (Harrison, 2001; Perlmutter, 2003).

The academic and athletic motivation of Black male student-athletes has also been of concern to researchers in the athletic collegiate field (Gaston-Gayles, 2004, 2005; Sellers, Chavous, & Brown, 2002; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008; Snyder, 1996; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). According to Gaston-Gayles (2005), academic and athletic motivation can be defined as student-athletes’ selected effort applied toward academics and/or their respective sport. Although limited research has been done regarding this topic, scholars have differed in their opinions regarding Black male student-athletes’ academic motivation. As noted by Sellers et al. (2002), some Black male student-athletes enter college academically less prepared than their White counterparts and are often labeled as
academically unmotivated rather than academically unprepared. However, other researchers have found that academic motivation is directly related to Black male student-athletes’ academic achievement (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

Lastly, there is a vital need to better understand the player-coach relationship and how that relationship affects the academic achievement of Black male student-athletes. Although limited, research has examined the player-coach relationship and how it has influenced athletes in general (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002) and, more specifically, student-athletes (P. A. Adler & Adler, 1991; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). However, there is little research examining the player-coach relationship and its effects on academic achievement, specifically among Black athletes who participate in revenue-generating sports. Researchers have asserted that coaches play a crucial role in the degree attainment of Black male athletes who participate in revenue-generating sports (P. A. Adler & Adler, 1991; Beamon, 2008; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Therefore, part of this study explored the player-coach relationship and the influence, if any, that relationship has on the academic success of Division-I Black male basketball student-athletes.

**Problem Statement**

Black male basketball players have remained the lowest academic-achieving sport population in the NCAA, specifically in Division-I athletics (Matheson, 2007; NCAA, 2014e). According to the NCAA (2014e), African American male basketball players’ graduation success rate was 46% for the 1995 cohort and peaked at 68% for the 2006 cohort. Moreover, the overall graduation success rate for all NCAA Division-I sports for the 2006 cohort was 82%, while the 2006 White basketball student-athlete cohort had a graduation success rate of 86% (NCAA, 2014e). These statistics are relevant in that
Black male basketball players’ graduation success rates are not equivalent to that of other student-athletes in NCAA Division-I athletics. Many African American male student-athletes continue to have lower rates of academic achievement than their White counterparts (Beamon & Bell, 2006; Hoberman, 2000).

Despite lower rates of degree attainment as compared to their peers among Black male basketball players, few academic victories are being achieved throughout Division-I institutions across the nation (Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010). Simply stated, while some Division-I institutions are sporadically graduating their Black male basketball players, some institutions manage to achieve the goal of graduating the majority of their Black male basketball players as a program. The problem herein lies with the frequency and consistency in which these institutions are graduating their players. With the majority of Division-I college basketball teams being comprised of primarily Black male athletes (NCAA, 2014e), it is questionable as to why basketball programs, as a whole, are not graduating more of their Black male basketball players on a consistent basis.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the social relationships of African American male basketball players at Kenwood University (pseudonym). Moreover, this study aimed to understand to what extent, if any, social relationships influence academic success among this population at Kenwood University. This study examined the relationships between Black male basketball student-athletes and institutional agents, such as coaches, faculty members, athletic support staff, and nonathletes, and how those relationships influence academic success. It is important to note that the terms African
American and Black will be used interchangeably throughout all five chapters of this study.

**Significance of the Study**

The goal of this study was to add to the body of existing literature in order to assist in increasing the graduation success rate of African American male basketball student-athletes in NCAA Division-I athletic programs. It was my hope that new and relevant information would emerge as a result of the data analysis in order to promote best practices among Division-I basketball programs and institutions. Most literature addressing Black male basketball players and academic success focuses primarily on cognitive factors in relation to academic achievement. However, this study fills the gap in the literature by examining non-cognitive factors such as social relationships and how those relationships influence academic success. Further, this study used Kenwood University as a model to examine the social relationships between Division-I Black male basketball players and institutional agents and to what extent those relationships influence academic success.

Lastly, it was hoped that this research would positively support Division-I Black male basketball student-athletes’ continued education and their pursuit for increased academic success and degree attainment. It is imperative that NCAA Division-I institutions be held accountable for their role in African American male student-athletes’ academic success. If this population continues to struggle to attain their degrees, colleges and universities will have failed to uphold the integrity of affording equal educational opportunities for all students.
This qualitative study proposed to better understand the relationships between Black male basketball student-athletes, institutional agents, and academic success. The following research question served as a guide to this study.

**Research Question**

1. To what extent do the social relationships of African American male basketball student-athletes influence their academic success at a Division-I private university?

**Subquestions:**

1. How does the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship influence academic success?
2. How does the student-athlete-faculty relationship influence academic success?
3. How does the player-coach relationship influence academic success?
4. How does the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship influence academic success?

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms associated with this study are defined as follows.

**National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).** “The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a membership-driven organization dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of student-athletes and equipping them with the skills to succeed on the playing field, in the classroom and throughout life. . . . NCAA members—mostly colleges and universities, but also conferences and affiliated groups—work together to create the framework of rules for fair and safe competition” (NCAA, 2014a, para. 2-3).

**Division-I.** “Among the three NCAA divisions, Division I schools generally have the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the most
generous number of scholarships. Schools who are members of Division I commit to maintaining a high academic standard for student-athletes in addition to a wide range of opportunities for athletics participation” (NCAA, 2014b, para. 1).

**Graduation success rate.** “A graduation-rate methodology developed by the NCAA that credits institutions for incoming transfers or midyear enrollees who graduate and does not penalize institutions for student-athletes who leave prior to graduation if they are in good academic standing at the time of their departure” (LaForge & Hodge, 2011, pp. 221-222).

**Predominantly White institution.** A college or university where the student demographic makeup is primarily White.

**Cohort.** A group that enters the institution at the same time.

**Revenue-generating sports.** Sports that generate revenue for a particular college or university, typically men’s Division-I football and basketball.

**Student-athlete.** “An enrolled student who participates in an organized competitive sport sponsored by the college/university in which he or she is enrolled. Student-athletes must balance the roles of being both a student and an athlete at their school” (Athlete Connections, 2012, para. 2).

**Achievement gap.** “Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their White counterparts” (National Governors’ Association, 2005, para. 3).

**Academic success.** A student-athlete’s continued ability to remain in academic compliance according to the NCAA’s Division-I student-athlete academic standards.
Furthermore, academic success is meant to ultimately influence a student-athlete’s degree attainment.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study utilized a social capital theoretical framework to better understand the various social relationships between Black male basketball players and institutional agents of the college community by examining to what extent those relationships influence successful academic outcomes. The social capital theory perspectives are drawn from various scholars (Bourdieu, 2010; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) and are used to further expound the social capital theory framework.

As defined by theorists, the premise of social capital is based on the give and take of social relationships, which allows individuals to achieve their respective goals (Bourdieu, 2010; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000). Within the framework, there are two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. According to Putnam (2000), bonding social capital is the notion that individuals share similar sociological experiences or niches, such as low socioeconomic status and/or a similar upbringing. As it relates to some of the population in this study, many Division-I Black male basketball student-athletes come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011; Howard, 2008), are raised in single-parent households, and often pursue professional athletic careers (Beamon, 2009).

Scholars have suggested that bonding relationships promotes individuals to work toward one common good rather than for the interest of an individual (Ishimaru, 2013). In a pivotal study conducted by P. A. Adler and Adler (1991), the social relationships of
Black male basketball players were examined as well as how those relationships affected the team as a whole. During their study, P. A. Adler and Adler (1991) observed the ongoing cycle of two senior players essentially mentoring and bonding with a pair of freshmen players. The cycle continued with the latter players repeating this cycle with two other freshmen players during their junior year. One of the players described his socializing experience saying, “Darian took Algebra and told us if we need help in the class we could come next door and he’d help us” (P. A. Adler & Adler, 1991, p. 114). P. A. Adler and Adler (1991) asserted that the relationship the players had which allowed for a certain trust and bond was held together by the players’ similar life experiences.

The second type of social capital is bridging social capital. Bridging social capital is the idea of establishing relationships with individuals who share contrasting backgrounds (Stanton-Salazar, 2001), such as Division-I Black male basketball players and faculty members, nonathlete students, coaches, and university administrators. According to scholars, bridging networks is a vital component of social capital, as individuals who engage in the bonding aspect of socializing most often are unable to institute change among mainstream institutions without establishing bridging social networks (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

This study examined Division-I Black male basketball student-athletes’ social relationships with various institutional agents through a social capital lens, specifically the bridging aspect of social capital, which includes relationships with those institutional agents in which Black male student-athletes most likely share contrasting backgrounds. Although the bonding aspect of social capital is predicated on establishing relationships with individuals from similar backgrounds (e.g., Division-I Black male student-athletes;
Putnam, 2000), this study examined the social relationships of Division-I Black male student-athletes with individuals (e.g., coaches, faculty members, academic advisors, athletic directors, and nonathlete students) who may have come from vastly different backgrounds (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to explore the social relationships of Black male basketball student-athletes and to what extent those relationships influenced academic success at Kenwood University (pseudonym). Relationships between Black male basketball student-athletes and institutional agents, such as coaches, academic advisors, nonathletes, and faculty members, were captured through qualitative methods.

The criterion sampling strategy was utilized to select 12 participants for this study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), this strategy is most useful when selecting participants with the intention of fulfilling specific criteria for research purposes. The criteria for this study were as follows:

1. Black male student-athletes had to be Black or African American, at least in their sophomore year, and meeting the NCAA Division-I eligibility requirements for student-athletes.

2. Coaches must have been a member of the Kenwood University men’s basketball program and have worked with the program for at least 2 years.

3. Athletic support members must have worked with four or more of the student-athletes on an academic level.

In addition, the criterion sampling strategy was utilized to select the research site. The criteria for the site selection were as follows:
1. The institution must have been a Division-I NCAA member school.

2. The institution’s men’s basketball program must have had consistently reputable graduation success rates over the past 5 years.

3. The institution must have had the majority of its men’s basketball program made up of African American males.

Participants’ experiences were documented through one-on-one interviews. Three separate interview protocols were designed for the participants—one to the Black male basketball players, one to the coaches, and one to the athletic supporting staff. All interviews were in-depth, semistructured interviews that lasted approximately one hour. Questions contained on the interview protocols were open ended, giving the participant an opportunity to guide the structure of the interview. The questions on all interview protocols addressed the social relationships and academic success of the Black male basketball student-athletes attending Kenwood University. In addition, questions pertaining to institutional practices as well as the student-athletes’ overall college experiences were asked.

In addition to semistructured interviews, a short survey was administered in order to explore precollege and demographic characteristics of the student-athletes, including SAT scores, high school grade point average (GPA), and parents’ socioeconomic status.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are “restrictions imposed by the design of your study” (Bryant, 2004, p. 58). As a result, delimitations limit a researcher from claiming his or her findings are accurate in any given situation (Bryant, 2004). A delimitation of this study is that the data analysis only included one Division-I private, predominantly White
institution as opposed to a public university or a community college. In addition, at this Division-I private, predominantly White institution, the participants were restricted to African American male basketball student-athletes and some supporting staff members (e.g., coaches, an academic advisor, an athletic director, and a faculty member).

**Limitations**

There are two potential limitations in relation to this study. The first is connected to the sampling strategy of the study, which is criterion sampling. This study is limited to the African American male basketball student-athletes on a particular Division-I university basketball team. In addition, support staff who were interviewed must also have been employed at this same Division-I university. The second potential limitation is in relation to the research site. This study’s findings will be from a medium-sized private, predominantly White institution in California, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Although the Kenwood University men’s basketball program has had high graduation success rates, this may not have been the result of institutional effort versus individual effort.

**Organization of Study**

This study has five chapters and is organized in the following manner. Chapter 1 introduces the statement of the problem. Chapter 2 reviews the literature of scholarly works pertinent to African American male student-athletes, their college experiences, and influences that may or may not influence their academic success. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth view of the methodology that was utilized in order to explore the social relationships of the student-athletes and the student-athlete supporting staff (e.g., coaches, an academic advisor, an athletic director, and a faculty member). Chapter 4 provides a
report of the study’s findings and results. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation and
discussion of the study’s findings and concludes with recommendations for future policy
and practice.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine scholarly works related to the issue of African American male basketball student-athletes and how their social relationships with institutional agents may or may not influence their academic success. Specifically, this review aims to understand how social relationships contribute to the graduation success rates of Black male basketball student-athletes. As previously mentioned, the terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably for the purposes of this study.

Among the NCAA organization, few Division-I member institutions achieve a respectable graduation success rate in the sport of men’s basketball (NCAA, 2013). Rather, Black male basketball players at these institutions graduate on an inconsistent basis. These few and far between academic victories are noted in the research for scholars, coaches, supporting personnel, and educators to reference as success for the Division-I Black male student-athlete (Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010). Nonetheless, the graduation success rate of this particular student population remains low.

For decades, groups such as the federal government, the NCAA (LaForge & Hodge, 2011), college and university presidents, educators, and athletic personnel have taken action toward improving Division-I Black male basketball players’ low graduation success rates (Gaston-Gayles, 2005; Snyder, 1996). The most alarming factor is that African American male basketball players often fail to attain their degrees when compared to White male basketball players (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000). Across the
nation, Black male athletes make up the majority of NCAA Division-I basketball teams (NCAA, 2014e).

With the NCAA organization and the federal government taking action to rectify the academic issues of this particular population (LaForge & Hodge, 2011), it is vital to understand what measures colleges and universities have taken to ensure their Black male basketball players attain their degrees. There is little research highlighting what makes basketball programs with large African American rosters successful with regard to effectively graduating Black male basketball student-athletes. This literature review will aid in better understanding what institutional agents, if any, influence academic success among Black male basketball student-athletes and the Division-I basketball programs that house these particular athletes.

In order to fully understand Black male athletes and how this population has been known to historically respond to the collegiate environment, the chapter begins with a brief overview of African American males and their place in the education system. Next, the chapter presents a brief history of the NCAA and how the organization’s recent reforms have affected athletes who participate in revenue-generating sports, specifically Black male basketball players. Then, the chapter examines the relationships between institutional agents (e.g., faculty, nonathletes, and coaches) and Black male basketball players that may or may not influence Black male basketball players’ academic success. In addition, student-athletes’ academic and athletic motivation will be explored. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a brief summary of the literature review.
African American Males and Academics

Underserved student minority groups such as Blacks and Latinos from low socioeconomic backgrounds have long struggled to achieve academic success (Cokley et al., 2011; Whiting, 2006b). Perhaps no subgroup has drawn greater negative attention than that of the African American population, specifically Black males (Cokley et al., 2011; Howard, 2008). Research has shown that Black males currently lead the nation in homicides, incarcerations, convictions, and arrest rates (Howard, 2008). The rate at which they are contracting HIV and AIDS is rising faster than any other population (Kunjufu, 2009). Statistics also show that Black males, when compared to other races, are less likely to be employed (Noguera, 2003). Noguera (2003) asserted that all of these negative factors seemingly coincide with the lack of academic achievement and opportunity among African American males.

The opportunity gap in education between African Americans and those of other races is still very apparent. According to Cokley et al. (2011), African Americans have a high school graduation rate of 60% compared to 80% for their White peers. Moreover, Black males’ success in the classroom has been shown to be more dismal than that of their female counterparts (Cokley et al., 2011). Black males are noticeably absent from advanced placement courses (Howard, 2008) and are more likely to be diagnosed with a learning disability and placed in special education programs (Kunjufu, 2009).

In the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) courses, males of different racial groups tend to excel. However, Black males’ achievement and participation have steadily declined in these courses, performing at the lowest levels (Noguera, 2003). In addition, suspension and expulsion rates are among the highest for
this group (Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2009). Overall, African American males from middle-class and low-income communities academically achieve lower in the classroom and on standardized tests compared to their White counterparts (Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2009; Noguera, 2003).

Some researchers have attributed this lack of academic achievement to demographic and psychological factors such as motivation, achievement values, and academic disidentification (Howard, 2008; Osborne, 1997; Steele, 1992). Cokley et al. (2011) examined academic disidentification, demographic factors, and psychological factors and how they relate to African American adolescent students’ academic achievement. Steele (1992) defined the term disidentification as a clear disconnect between the students’ academic self and global self. For example, a student who performs well academically experiences no rewarding feelings, while a student who performs poorly experiences no negative feelings (Osborne, 1997).

Research has shown that, historically, African American male adolescents are more likely to disidentify with academics more so than their female or White counterparts due to culturally inappropriate curriculum (Howard, 2008; Osborne, 1997; Steele, 1992). For example, according to Osborne (1997), “Steele and Aronson (1995) found that African American students decrease effort and performance in situations where their performance is threatening to confirm the negative racial stereotype but not when identical tasks are described as nondiagnostic” (p. 729). Research has also shown that Black males have feelings of hostility toward school due to a variety of negative experiences, such as frequent behavioral punishment, which can negatively affect Black males’ academic achievement in school (Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2009).
of this study was to identify participants’ precollege education characteristics in order to examine if those characteristics made an impact on their current college academic success.

Using Steele’s (1992) study as a springboard, Osborne (1997) examined data to explore if Black males remain disidentified throughout high school and found that African American boys were the only group to academically disidentify. Moreover, as this group disidentified with academics, they began to start identifying with sports and the attention most often associated with high profile sports (Osborne, 1997). These findings corroborated with the findings of Steele (1992) and Cokley et al. (2011). Osborne’s findings regarding African American boys’ quest for sports and popularity can potentially explain the attraction that some Black male students feel toward playing college-level sports and provide a rationale for academic disidentification.

Researchers have also explored racial identity and its relationship to academic achievement. Cokley et al. (2011) stated that “racial identity is the collective identity of a group of people who are socialized to think of themselves as a racial group” (p. 58). Thus, one’s personal connection to her or his own race is vital to one’s identity and sense of self (Wright, 2011). While some researchers have not found a connection between a healthy racial-ethnic identity and academic achievement (Awad, 2007; Guzmán, Santiago-Rivera, & Haase, 2005) among Black male adolescents and other minority groups, other researchers have found a positive correlation between a healthy racial-ethnic identity and academic achievement among Black males (Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003; Wright, 2011).
In their study, Cokley et al. (2011) found that African American males strongly disidentified with academics more than their female and White counterparts. They also found that racial identity was a negative predictor of Black male academic achievement. This indicates that some Black males may have an extreme racial identity which often includes a negative feeling toward White people or other dominant cultures that formulated due to their surrounding environment (e.g., family, school, neighborhood; Tatum, 2003). Cokley et al. asserted that because some Black males closely identify with their race, they may internalize negative stereotypes and messages often associated with being African American (Ogbu, 2004; Tatum, 2003). As a result, they may develop behaviors that are racially extreme and highly reactive (Tatum, 2003). These particular finding are consistent with that of Ogbu’s (2004) theory of resistance or oppositional identity.

A leading scholar in the fields of race and education, Ogbu (2004) explored collective identity and the burden of acting White and how it affects African American students’ academic achievement. He defined the term acting White as “learning to behave and talk like White people” (Ogbu, 2004, p. 6). Ogbu asserted that African American students usually portray one or more characteristics when coping with the burden of acting White; these traits include the following: (a) assimilation or emulation of Whites, (b) accommodation without assimilation, (c) ambivalence, (d) resistance or opposition, and (e) encapsulation.

Research has shown that Black students do not reject good grades because they associate academic achievement with being White (Ogbu, 2004). In fact, most Black students aspire to do well academically (Ogbu, 2004; Tatum, 2003). However, they do
reject the White attitudes needed to achieve academic success (Tatum, 2003). The attitudes they are rejecting include the use of standard English, having White friends, being enrolled in advanced placement and honors courses, and displaying knowledge during school lessons (Ogbru, 2004).

Other literature has refuted the notion that a healthy racial-ethnic identity has a negative impact on academic achievement among African American males (Whiting, 2006a; Wright, 2011). Wright (2011) explored racial-ethnic identity in African American males and how it affects their academic achievement. Contrary to Fordham and Ogbru’s (1986) oppositional behavior theory, which claims that African American males purposefully reject academic success in order to assert their racial-ethnic identity, Wright (2011) focused on Black males who contradicted that theory by achieving academic success while maintaining a healthy racial-ethnic identity.

Similar to Wright’s (2011) view on a healthy racial-ethnic identity among young Black males, Whiting (2006a) also held positive views about this population. Contrary to academic disidentification (Osborne, 1997; Steele, 1992), scholar identity is the notion that culturally diverse males have positive academic self-views. Whiting (2006a) defined scholar identity “as one in which culturally diverse males view themselves as academicians, as studious, as competent, and capable, and as intelligent or talented in school settings” (p. 48). He explained that many African American and Latino males lack academic confidence, motivation, and engagement. As a result, they seek self-satisfaction in other arenas like sports and entertainment. He also made recommendations for educators to promote scholar identity among Blacks and Latinos in school settings. The recommendations included more mentors and role models among faculty and staff,
multicultural counseling, academic school events, and multicultural education (Whiting, 2006a). Black males with a healthy racial-ethnic identity and a scholar identity may be more likely to persist. Therefore, it is important to discover what institutional influences will aid in Black male basketball players’ academic success, which is the focus of this study.

Despite historically having low academic achievement, Black adolescent males have consistently found ways to cope with the hardships experienced in society. Noguera (2003) asserted that African American males are historically disadvantaged in almost every aspect of society. Their lack of achievement is due largely in part to cultural and environmental factors such as Black male identity, socioeconomic background, and in-school placement and treatment. As a result, most Black males adopt the notion that they can only gain prosperity through sports and music, abandoning positive academic attainment (Noguera, 2003). For this reason, many young Black males have utilized higher education as a means to fulfill their athletic dreams (Beamon, 2008). Despite gaining access to higher education through athletics, few African American males are completing their education and attaining college degrees (Beamon, 2008). For this reason, it is important to further explore Black males and their involvement with Division-I athletics. However, it is important to first examine Black males and their overall place in higher education.

**African American Males in Higher Education**

Although this study focused on Division-I Black male basketball players and their academic success, it is important to examine African American males and their overall academic achievement in higher education. As previously mentioned, research has found
associations between young Black males and crime, violence, drugs, and poor academic achievement (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2009; Noguera, 2003). Similarly, Jackson and Moore (2008, as cited in Harper, 2009) stated, “Most discourse on Black male school achievement focuses on deficits and advances a ‘doom and gloom’ trajectory for these individuals in the educational enterprise” (p. 699). Bonner and Bailey (2006) stated, “Hence, the operating framework used by schools to interface with African American males is often constructed based on lists of perceived problems, using an approach that identifies pathologies instead of promoting promise” (p. 24). As a result, some Black males are often absent from the higher education population due to inequalities faced in K-12 education (Bonner & Bailey, 2006).

Harper (2009) postulated that many Black male students enter higher education psychologically stressed and often take longer to adjust to collegiate life than their White counterparts. Furthermore, many Black males enter their respective institutions academically underprepared and overwhelmed as a result of low K-12 expectations (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). Other factors that were found to negatively influence this population’s overall collegiate success were race and gender. Harper (2006) stated,

This college dropout dilemma is exacerbated by gender, as more than two-thirds (67.6%) of Black men who start college do not graduate within six years, which is the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education. (p. 700)

With regard to race, researchers have attributed being Black as a barrier to persistence, often hindering Black males from acclimating and integrating into college environments, specifically predominantly White institutions (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2009).
Despite the large amount of research emphasizing the negative academic outcomes regarding Black males in higher education, researchers have been constantly examining the factors that contribute to this population’s persistence. According to Cuyjet (2006), certain characteristics and circumstances correlate to degree attainment more so among the Black male population than their Black female or White male counterparts and therefore should be addressed more specifically. Some of these characteristics and circumstances include: (a) the academic climate and (b) activities and leadership (Cuyjet, 2006).

**Academic climate.** According to Bonner and Bailey (2006), there are five areas that can promote a healthy academic climate for African American males in higher education. The first area involves enhancing positive peer group influences among African American males. This is important as negative peer influences often equate Black males and academic success with acting White (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006). The second area involves family and the family’s emotional and psychological influences on Black males. According to Bonner and Bailey, college campuses should develop programs that continuously connect Black males and their respective family members throughout the academic year. This would ensure that family members remain informed with regard to the students’ personal and academic growth as well as college activities and other pertinent information (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006).

The third area of concern is the enhancement of the student-faculty relationship. Researchers have found that many Black males tend to avoid asking their professors for help (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006; Perlmutter, 2003). This is partially due to negative stigmas associated with Black males and academic achievement, a sense of
noninclusion experienced by Black males, and previous K-12 experiences (Harper, 2009). According to Bonner and Bailey (2006), Black males need to be taught how to ask for academic assistance from faculty as well as to disassociate the act of seeking academic help with that of being “unmanly” (p. 240). The fourth area of concern is Black males’ self-esteem, particularly as it pertains to academic success. According to Bonner and Bailey (2006), college personnel are aware that some Black males will enter higher education having had negative K-12 academic experiences. As a result, some Black males may have low academic expectations and low self-worth (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2009).

Lastly, the fifth area of concern centers on the overall academic climate of the institution and how that particular college campus perceives the African American students residing on its campus (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). It is important for this particular population to receive adequate academic support, and, moreover, it is imperative that negative stigmas are fought with regard to receiving academic assistance (Bonner & Bailey, 2006).

**Activities and leadership.** Among the various characteristics that are credited toward positive academic achievement among Black males in higher education, there remains a significant lack of participation by Black males in social activities and leadership roles, specifically at predominantly White institutions (Brown, 2006; Harper, 2006). According to Brown (2006), this lack of involvement is attributed to social isolation, negative stigmas, and self-doubt experienced by Black males. Research has shown that Black males are more apt to achieve academic success as well as acclimate to
their social environment when their respective institution is one that is nurturing and supportive (Brown, 2006).

In a study conducted by Brown (2006), he interviewed 25 African American male college students regarding their “social experiences, programs, activities, and facilities on campus that enabled them to successfully matriculate toward their degree” (p. 51). Each of the participants were full-time students and in good academic standing. Brown found that all of the participants credited out-of-classroom activities and/or relationships to their social survival at their institution. They identified the following campus organizations as important to their college success: (a) student government association, (b) intramural athletics and recreation, (c) the student union, (d) mentoring, and (e) peer relationships. Although the participants reported that they faced challenges as they persisted, participation in the institution’s social environment helped them cope with college life both academically and personally (Brown, 2006).

In addition, Harper (2003) conducted a study regarding African American male student involvement. As a result, the student participants of the study offered the following 10 approaches to increasing Black male out-of-class activity and leadership on campus:

- Work with African American men who are already involved to recruit their uninvolved same-race male peers.
- Systematically collect data from uninvolved African American men to determine how their out-of-class time is spent and why their participation in structured, university-sponsored activities and organizations is low.
Hold student organization leaders accountable for reaching out to underrepresented groups, including African American men.

Provide financial and advisory support for minority student organizations, as they provide a much-needed involvement pipeline for African American men.

Create and support groups specifically for African American men.

Encourage and support consciousness-raising programming, as it is likely to incite action.

Persuade emerging African American male students to seek leadership positions in student organizations.

Host an annual campus kickoff event for African American men.

Reach out to African American parents during new student orientation.

Form a coalition of collaborators who are interested in strengthening outcomes for African American undergraduate men. (Harper, 2006, pp. 85-90)

In sum, research has shown that Black males are more likely to positively thrive both academically and socially at their respective higher education institutions when they are involved in out-of-class activities and assume leadership roles in campus organizations (Harper, 2006). In addition, faculty and staff are urged to encourage Black males to become more involved in out-of-class activities while also mentoring them with regard to choosing how they spend their time outside of the classroom (Harper, 2006).

The characteristics previously explored were only some of the college aspects that substantially affect Black males’ overall social experiences and academic achievement in higher education. Research has shown that most Black males who are avid leaders on their respective campuses are involved in out-of-class activities and positively acclimate
themselves to their institution’s academic climate, in turn, experiencing academic and personal success (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Brown, 2006; Harper, 2003, 2006, 2009). Further, Messer (2006) discussed the important role African American male athletes play within the Black male culture in higher education. Messer stated, “The ability of African American male student athletes to successfully obtain a college degree is contingent on many factors” (p. 167). Therefore, this study explored the academic success of Division-I Black male basketball players by examining their social relationships with certain institutional agents. In order to examine the relationships between certain institutional agents and Black male basketball athletes, we must first understand the role of the NCAA in relation to the success of this population.

The NCAA

It is important to fully understand the current impact that the NCAA has on the sport of Division-I basketball and, specifically, how this organization impacts African American male basketball student-athletes. Through reform and legislation, the NCAA’s attempt to increase graduation success rates among this population has sparked long-lasting debates among those who are invested in both athletics and academics (Cross & Koball, 1991; Ferris, Finster, & McDonald, 2004; LaForge & Hodge, 2011; Mangold, Bean, & Adams, 2003). Due to college football’s brutal beginning, the NCAA was founded in 1906 to protect a student-athlete’s welfare (Crowley, 2006; Messer, 2006). As described in the book, The NCAA’s First Century: In the Arena, “Serious injuries abounded because of the absence of adequate protective padding, along with what seems to have been the individually optional use of insubstantial helmets” (Crowley, 2006, p. 3). However, since the NCAA’s foundation, legislation and reform have been put into
place to ensure not only the physical safety of student-athletes but also their degree attainment (LaForge & Hodge, 2011).

As a result, many of the NCAA’s sport programs continue to experience increased graduation success rates and most student-athletes continue to receive an overall holistic college experience, with their academic and athletic needs being met (Crowley, 2006; Lapchick, 2013). However, the NCAA organization has arrived at its current position through many reforms and trials. Some critics have argued that the student-athlete population most relevant to the NCAA’s revenue gain is the population gaining the least academically—African American male basketball student-athletes. These next three subsections will examine NCAA Propositions 48, 42, and 16. These propositions, handed down by the NCAA organization, have garnered the most controversy in regard to how they affect African American student-athletes, specifically African American male student-athletes (Crowley, 2006; Waller, 2003).

**Proposition 48.** During the late 1970s, the NCAA issued a barrage of infractions to different member institutions that included violations of recruitment practices, violations of financial aid distribution, unethical conduct, and academic fraud (Crowley, 2006). Out of the 96 major infractions, basketball and football shared a combined 54 infractions each. These infractions and other questionable practices with regard to entertainment, lodging, transportation, and regulations on tryouts committed by various members of the NCAA prompted leaders of the organization to establish Proposition 48 (Crowley, 2006; Edwards, 2000). Proposition 48 stated that a student-athlete entering college must have at least a 2.00 high school GPA in 11 core courses and a combined SAT score of 700 or a composite score of 17 on the ACT (Edwards, 2000; Price, 2010).
These requirements initially applied to Division-I student-athletes in 1986 but were later implemented at Division-II institutions in the 1988-1989 school year (Petr & Paskus, 2009; Price, 2010). Along with Proposition 48, additional legislation was approved for student-athletes who failed to meet all of the aforementioned requirements but succeeded in obtaining a 2.00 high school GPA only. These student-athletes were otherwise known as partial qualifiers and received athletic financial aid for all 4 years, but lost a year of athletic eligibility (Crowley, 2006).

Proposition 48 was initiated with controversy and contention (Edwards, 2000; Petr & McArdle, 2012). Many thought that the new reform was a form of racial discrimination against student-athletes from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, specifically minority students and more specifically African American students because of the standardized test requirement (Crowley, 2006; Edwards, 2000; Price, 2010). According to Edwards (2000), during the first 2 years of Proposition 48, “92 percent of all academically ineligible basketball players and 84 percent of academically ineligible football players were Black athletes” (p. 10). Delaware State President Luna Mishoe stated, “The SAT is a restraint that penalizes low-income students and does not indicate whether a student can perform college work” (Crowley, 2006, p. 65). Despite the opposition of many of the NCAA member presidents, Proposition 48 was passed with a majority vote (Crowley, 2006).

**Proposition 42.** Proposition 42 was a modification of Proposition 48 and was designed to strengthen the former proposition (Edwards, 2000). As previously noted, Proposition 48 stated that student-athletes entering college must have at least a 2.00 high school GPA in 11 core courses and a 700 SAT score or a composite score of 17 on the
ACT (Crowley, 2006; Edwards, 2000). Under Proposition 48, partial qualifiers (student-athletes who failed to meet all of the above stipulations) still received athletic financial aid for 4 years but lost their 1st year of athletic eligibility (Crowley, 2006). However, under Proposition 42, athletic financial aid for freshman partial qualifiers was no longer granted (Cross & Koball, 1991; Crowley, 2006; Edwards, 2000). Moreover, student-athletes were unable to retrieve their fourth year of athletic eligibility (Crowley, 2006). This meant that if a student-athlete entering college did not meet the requirements of a 2.00 high school GPA and a 700 SAT score or a composite score of 17 on the ACT, then that student-athlete could only be eligible for 3 years of athletic competition and athletic financial aid. In sum, any student-athlete who fell under the Proposition 42 category partial qualifier had to either support himself or herself financially their 1st year or forgo their college experience.

As expected, this proposal was also met with contention, as critics believed the modification was nothing more than an economic hindrance to those who resided in low-income communities, most often minority students who were unable to fund their own college education (Edwards, 2000). Due to the outcry of critics opposed to Proposition 42, modifications were introduced that stipulated partial qualifiers (student-athletes who either met the test requirements or the GPA requirements) could receive nonathletic, need-based financial aid during their freshman year (Edwards, 2000). However, student-athletes who failed to meet both the minimum GPA and test score requirements were deemed nonqualifiers and received no type of financial assistance (Edwards, 2000).

**Proposition 16.** By 1992, the NCAA was ready to mandate additional reform—Proposition 16—in order to rectify certain academic issues among college athletics.
According to Waller (2003), “Proposition 16 increased the number of core high school classes (from 11 to 13) in which a student-athlete must have a minimum GPA and established a formula for balancing a student’s GPA with his or her test score” (p. 193). Simply stated, the NCAA developed a sliding scale to which all student-athletes’ high school GPAs and standardized test scores were to be measured against—the higher a student-athlete’s GPA, the lower his or her test scores needed to be, and vice-versa (Crowley, 2006; Waller, 2003). Proposition 16 was implemented in 1996 (Waller, 2003).

The proposal and implementation of Proposition 16 caused a great deal of controversy among the athletic and academic communities (Crowley, 2006; Waller, 2003). The growing concern was that student-athletes from a lower socioeconomic status, specifically African American male athletes, would negatively suffer from the mandate because of its one-size-fits-all standard (Crowley, 2006; Waller, 2003). According to Waller (2003), since the inception of Proposition 16, statistics have shown that it disqualifies a large number of African American student-athletes from athletic eligibility. However, a modified version of the proposition that was disseminated in 2003 attempted to equally serve all student-athletes, specifically minorities (Petr & McArdle, 2012). According to Waller (2003), “The amended requirements extend the existing GPA/SAT scale to assist students with superior grades but poor test scores” (p. 194). The amendment also included an increase in the number of required high school core courses from 13 to 14 (Waller, 2003).

Research has shown that following the implementation of Proposition 16 college graduation success rates have increased among Division-I African American student-athletes, specifically African American male student-athletes (Petr & McArdle, 2012;
Price, 2010). However, due to the mandate’s higher academic eligibility standards, the percentage of Division-I Black male freshmen student-athletes decreased, while the percentage of Division-I Black male transfer student-athletes increased (Price, 2010). While this seemingly has had no effect on the overall increase of graduation success rates among Division-I Black male student-athletes, it did affect the percentage of minority males afforded the opportunity to obtain an athletic scholarship (Price, 2010).

**Future academic reform.** In an attempt “to find real solutions for improving student-athlete well-being; simplifying NCAA rules; ensuring accountability; and emphasizing fiscal sustainability in Division-I” (NCAA, 2014c, para. 3), the NCAA proposed yet more academic reforms that are set to take place August 1, 2016. According to representatives of the NCAA, these changes are vital in order “to protect the integrity of college athletics and the future success of our student-athletes” (NCAA, 2014c, para. 4). The proposed changes are centered on Division-I initial eligibility academic requirements. Under the new eligibility requirements, an entering athlete can be placed under one of the following three categories:

- **Full qualifier**—competition, athletics aid (scholarship), and practice the first year.
- **Academic redshirt**—athletics aid the first year, practice in first regular academic term (semester or quarter).
- **Nonqualifier**—no athletics aid, practice or competition the first year. (NCAA, n.d., p. 3)

Under the new eligibility requirements, the following changes were made in order to ensure that student-athletes were better prepared for college curriculum:

- Minimum core-course GPA of 2.300 required;
• Change in GPA/test score index (sliding scale); and
• Ten core courses required before beginning of senior year. (NCAA, n.d., p. 4)

If an incoming student meets all of the above requirements, he or she will be considered a full qualifier and will be cleared for athletic competition, athletics aid, and practice during his or her 1st year. In order to be deemed an academic redshirt, which will only allow a student-athlete to practice and receive athletics aid during his or her 1st year, a student must:

• Complete 16 core courses in the recommended areas;
• Have a minimum GPA of 2.00 in those 16 core courses; and
• Have a minimum ACT or SAT score on the academic redshirt sliding scale (NCAA, n.d.).

Lastly, if a student does not meet the requirements of either the full qualifier or the academic redshirt, he or she will be unable to compete, practice, or receive athletics aid from any Division-I college or university.

**Graduation success rate.** As intercollegiate sports began to evolve in the late 1990s, it became apparent that the intended amateurism of Division-I men’s basketball and football were beginning to mirror professional arenas (Eitzen, 2000). Many NCAA Division-I member institutions increasingly compromised the credibility of their athletic programs by participating in academic fraud, recruitment violations, and repeated violations committed by various coaches (Crowley, 2006). In an attempt to address these issues, Cedric Dempsey, former NCAA president, proposed the Will to Act Project in 2002 (Crowley, 2006). As noted by Crowley (2006), Dempsey captured the essence of his new project by stating the following:
Although there will be disagreements over the details, it is clear that college presidents at NCAA member institutions are frustrated and even embarrassed by too large a number of highly publicized issues that at best advertise a blatant hypocrisy and at a worst represent negligent contempt for the mission and good name of higher education. Low graduation rates among high-profile athletes, escalating salaries for the most elite of football and basketball coaches, the tension between the amateur status of student-athletes and the drive for commercial dollars are among the concerns that the public, media and university administrators all note when they describe the failure of intercollegiate athletics to live up to its values. All agree that serious attention to meaningful reform in a number of areas is required. (p. 164)

As a result of the Will to Act Project, members of the organization reconvened in order to reform and hold member institutions accountable for the academic success of their student-athletes (Crowley, 2006). Prior to this, student-athletes were only measured on their initial eligibility—how they performed in high school. However, the NCAA organization set out to measure a student-athlete’s academic progress after entering college (Petr & Paskus, 2009).

The graduation success rate methodology was implemented in 2003 and evolved from the measure known as the federal graduation rate (FGR) implemented in 2002 (Crowley, 2006; LaForge & Hodge, 2011). The FGR methodology needed improvement in regard to accuracy, thus resulting in the graduation success rate methodology (Crowley, 2006; LaForge & Hodge, 2011). In order to understand the importance and
effectiveness of the graduation success rate methodology, it is vital to briefly explain how the FGR is computed.

Among 4-year colleges and universities in the United States, the typical time a student takes to attain an undergraduate degree is 4 years (LaForge & Hodge, 2011). As a result, most U.S. institutions using the FGR methodology deem a 6-year completion as a success (LaForge & Hodge, 2011). Therefore, as stated by LaForge and Hodge (2011), “A simple statement of the FGR computation for student-athletes is the percent of student athletes initially enrolled in fall of year \( n \) who graduated by fall of year \( n + 6 \)” (p. 220).

As previously stated, the NCAA organization sought to improve the FGR model. Put into effect during the 2003-2004 academic year, the graduation success rate methodology allowed incoming transfers as well as mid-year enrollees, who ultimately graduate, to be included in the overall data collection (Petr & Paskus, 2009). In addition, institutions would not be penalized for student-athletes who leave without attaining a degree, provided they are in good academic standing upon leaving the institution (LaForge & Hodge, 2011). Each division has its own standards of remaining in good academic standing within the NCAA organization. Throughout their college tenure, Division-I student-athletes must maintain or complete the following to be considered in good academic standing:

- Complete 40 percent of the coursework required for a degree by the end of their second year.
- Complete 60 percent of the coursework required for a degree by the end of their third year.
• Complete 80 percent of the coursework required for a degree by the end of their fourth year.

• Student-athletes are allowed five years to graduate while receiving athletically related financial aid.

• All Division-I student-athletes must earn at least six credit hours each term to be eligible for the following term and must meet minimum grade-point average requirements that are related to an institution’s own GPA standards for graduation. (NCAA, 2014d, para. 3)

Unlike the FGR model, the graduation success rate methodology gave the NCAA and member institutions a more accurate way to measure student-athletes’ academic success (LaForge & Hodge, 2011; Petr & Paskus, 2009).

Data collection for graduation success rates began at the start of the 2003-2004 academic year. However, findings of the graduation success rate data show that Division-I Black male student-athletes, specifically in the sports of basketball and football, graduate at a far lower rate than student-athletes in other competing sports (Crowley, 2006; NCAA, 2014e).

The implementation of Propositions 48, 42, and 16 attempted to restore the original intent of the student-athlete versus the athlete-student. However, these reforms often hindered many academically disadvantaged students and their quest to achieve their athletic dreams. Despite the academic modifications implemented through Propositions 48, 42, and 16, most Division-I athletic rosters, specifically in the sports of football and basketball, are currently saturated with African American male athletes (NCAA, 2014e). Although more Black males are pursuing higher education by way of athletics, few are
experiencing academic success, specifically Division-I Black male basketball players. This next section examines the relationship between Black male basketball players and their academic achievement in higher education.

**African American Male Basketball Players and Academics**

Most athletes who participate in revenue-generating sports enter college with an optimistic and positive idea about their future academic goals (P. Adler & Adler, 1985). However, certain college experiences and precollege characteristics are associated with Black male basketball players’ negative approach towards academics soon after their freshman year (Ting, 2009). Some of these experiences and characteristics include the following: (a) athletic pressures, (b) social isolation, and (c) academic unpreparedness (Ting, 2009). Unfortunately, these experiences discourage some athletes academically, thus driving them to strive more for their athletic goals (P. Adler & Adler, 1985).

For decades, the African American male athlete has been the most academically underserved population in athletics (Beamon, 2008). Black football and basketball players have continued to score considerably lower on all standardized state testing (Fleming, 2002; Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005) and enter college less prepared than their White counterparts (Comeaux, 2005). They have lower graduation success rates and lack career maturity compared with White male athletes at both the secondary and postsecondary levels (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000). However, Black male athletes continue to generate a substantial amount of collegiate revenue for their respective schools (Beamon, 2008). Therefore, this creates a need for this specific student population (Beamon, 2008). Oftentimes, Black male student-athletes are exploited for
their athletic prowess but are considered incapable of performing academically (Beamon, 2008).

With high demands to win by Division-I institutions, the pressures of playing at the professional level often alter young Black male athletes’ overall perception of their future goals (Beamon, 2009). Research has shown that as early as the fourth grade, some young Black males feel that they hold an advantage in sports and music over their White peers (Rowley et al., 2007). These feelings are often encouraged by stereotypes found in sports within the African American community and are strongly embraced by their family and peers (Rowley et al., 2007). Furthermore, Black male college athletes often feel pressured by their family to use sports as a means to succeed (Beamon, 2009).

To date, Division-I Black male basketball student-athletes continue to make an impact athletically in the college arena. However, the institutions that they represent struggle to successfully assist many of these young men in attaining their degree (Comeaux, 2008). Despite recent reforms mandated by the NCAA to improve graduation success rates among athletes in revenue-generating sports (Comeaux, 2008), few Division-I basketball programs succeed in producing Black male basketball graduates, specifically at Division-I predominantly White institutions (NCAA, 2014e). This study explored the social relationships of Black male basketball student-athletes and to what extent those relationships may or may not influence academic success. It was my hope that this research could serve as a guide for best practices among NCAA Division-I member institutions in order to increase academic success and ultimately graduation success rates among African American male basketball players based on players’ social
relationships. The next section examines academic and athletic motivation among Division-I Black male student-athletes and how motivation can affect academic success.

**Academic and Athletic Motivation**

According to Woodruff and Schallert (2008), the term student-athlete is defined as “an individual who is being asked to manage and succeed at the tasks that make up two different realms of his or her life, athletics and academics” (p. 34). This unique responsibility, specifically at the college level, can become particularly difficult depending on the level and sport in which the student-athlete participates. Furthermore, the term motivation, as described by Gaston-Gayles (2005), “signifies an individual’s choice of and effort applied toward a task” (p. 319). Although limited, recent research has examined college athletes’ academic and athletic motivation (Gaston-Gayles, 2004, 2005; Sellers et al., 2002; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008; Snyder, 1996; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008).

While some researchers have asserted that student-athletes’ academic motivation is directly related to their academic achievement (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008), other researchers have suggested that most college athletes, specifically those who participate in revenue-generating sports, enter higher education less academically prepared than their nonathlete counterparts (Sellers et al., 2002). However, most researchers have asserted that be it lack of motivation or lack of academic preparedness, it is the African American male student-athlete who often struggles to achieve academic success (Gaston-Gayles, 2004, 2005; Sellers et al., 2002; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008; Snyder, 1996; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008).

In an attempt to examine Division-I student-athletes’ academic and athletic motivation, Gaston-Gayles (2004) conducted a study of eight varsity sports from a single
Gaston-Gayles (2004) defined academic motivation as “a student’s desire to excel in academic-related tasks” (p.77). Gaston-Gayles (2005) also asserted that “motivation signifies an individual’s choice of and effort applied toward a task” (p. 319). Therefore, athletic motivation can be defined as student-athletes’ choice of and effort applied toward their respective sport. According to Gaston-Gayles (2004), while previous research has focused on traditional variables such as high school GPA and standardized test scores to predict academic achievement, few studies have yet to research the effects of academic and athletic motivation on academic success.

In her 2004 study, Gaston-Gayles collected data from 236 student-athletes and utilized the Student Athletes’ Motivation toward Sports and Academics Questionnaire. Gaston-Gayles (2004) found that academic motivation predicted academic performance. However, athletic motivation had no effect on student-athletes’ overall academic achievement (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). These findings contradicted the findings of Sellers et al. (2002)—that academic motivation and academic achievement were not related. Moreover, Gaston-Gayles’ (2004) study showed that ethnicity was a significant factor in the overall findings; White student-athletes with higher ACT scores and academic motivation earned higher college GPAs than minority student-athletes with lower ACT scores and academic motivation.

Contrarily, Sellers et al. (2002) asserted that academic motivation among student-athletes, specifically those who participate in revenue-generating sports, is not correlated with academic achievement. They argued that rather than a lack of academic motivation, most African American student-athletes are simply less prepared academically than their nonathlete peers; however, they are equally motivated to achieve academic success.
(Sellers et al., 2002). To support their claim, Sellers et al. referenced a 1986 study conducted by the American Institutes for Research which surveyed student-athletes at 42 Division-I universities regarding their overall college experiences. The results were that 95% of the athletes in revenue-generating sports reported that earning a college degree was of importance or major importance to them (Sellers et al., 2002). Therefore, Sellers et al. argued against the premise that most African American student-athletes are less academically motivated than their White and/or nonathlete counterparts. Rather, these students most often enter the higher education system less academically prepared as a result of poorer educational systems (Sellers et al., 2002).

Recent research has attempted to correlate the stigmatizing of student-athletes with academic motivation (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Division-I student-athletes, specifically those who participate in revenue-generating sports, are often perceived as dumb jocks by professors and their nonathlete peers (Comeaux, 2008; Harrison, 2001; Perlmutter, 2003; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). In response to a recent study where the majority of 538 Division-I student-athletes reported negative treatment from professors and their nonathlete peers, Sharp and Sheilley (2008) stated, “The comments made by professors and students reinforced the ‘dumb jock’ stereotype and served to stigmatize and alienate student athletes. Student athletes who buy in to this negative stereotype may disengage from their academic obligations” (p. 106). While existing studies, though limited, have attempted to show a relationship between academic motivation and influences such as student-athlete-faculty and student-athlete-nonathlete relationships, Woodruff and Schallert (2008) found a relationship between academic and athletic motivation and one’s sense of self.
The suggestion that student-athletes’ motivation is linked to the construct of self was the driving force of Woodruff and Schallert’s (2008) study. Woodruff and Schallert utilized Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan’s (1991) self-determination theory as a guide for their findings. According to Deci et al., the premise of self-determination theory is based on three inherent needs: (a) competence, (b) relatedness, and (c) autonomy. Competence refers to one’s understanding of various outcomes and how efficient he or she is in performing those outcomes, relatedness refers to building positive relationships with others in one’s social environment, and autonomy refers to one being self-determining over one’s own actions (Deci et al., 1991).

Utilizing self-determination theory as the study’s foundation, Woodruff and Schallert (2008) examined nine college student-athletes’ motivational sense of self in relation to academic and athletic motivation. A qualitative study was conducted at a Division-I institution in which several sports were represented as well as both male and female student-athletes (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). All nine athletes fell into one of five categories: (a) Stay to Play, (b) Best of Both, (c) The Student, (d) What Am I Doing Here? and (e) Sports Aren’t Everything (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). According to Woodruff and Schallert, the six students who fell into the categories of Stay to Play, Best of Both, and The Student exhibited constant levels of motivation and sense of self. However, some students’ motivation and sense of self levels were weaker than others. Nonetheless, these students discovered a balanced way of meeting their personal goals whether it was pursuing a professional athletic career or striving to maximize their academic potential (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008).
In contrast, the remaining three students fell into the categories of What Am I Doing Here? and Sports Aren’t Everything (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). According to Woodruff and Schallert (2008), these students failed at figuring out how to successfully balance the task of being both a student and an athlete. Woodruff and Schallert (2008) attributed their college experience to a lack of relatedness and competence. As described by Deci and Ryan (2002),

The need for relatedness to others is centrally important for internalization. . . . As well, people will need to feel competent with respect to behaviors valued by a significant other if they are to engage in and accept responsibility for those behaviors. (p. 19)

For two of the three student-athletes, neither relatedness nor competence was being fulfilled in both the academic and athletic realms, while the third student-athlete lacked competence in the athletic arena (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). Two of the three students attributed their poor academic success to a lack of teacher support (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008).

According to Comeaux (2008), in a response to the revenue-generating sports that have lured Black male student-athletes away from academics, it is imperative that institutions engage student-athletes in a way that will ensure their academic success. He further asserted that the student-athlete-faculty relationship is one institutional characteristic that will enhance Black male student-athletes’ academic achievement. The next section will examine that relationship and how it can potentially harm or support Black males’ academic achievement.
The Student-Athlete-Faculty Relationship

Research has shown that there are many institutional factors that contribute to the success of Black male basketball players’ academic achievement in higher education (P. Adler & Adler, 1985; P. A. Adler & Adler 1991; Beamon & Bell, 2006; Comeaux, 2005, 2008; Engstrom et al., 1995; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Martin, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2010; Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010; Ting, 2009; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). One of the most significant researched factors is the Black male student-athlete-faculty relationship and to what extent that relationship influences academic achievement (Comeaux, 2005, 2008; Engstrom et al., 1995; Martin, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2010; Perlmutter, 2003). However, before one can fully understand the Black male student-athlete-faculty relationship, it is important to explore the male student-athlete-faculty relationship.

Faculty attitudes toward male student-athletes, specifically in revenue-generating sports, contribute greatly to student-athletes’ own self-perception, including the perception they believe their student peers have of them (Engstrom et al., 1995), and, most importantly, their academic and career outcomes. Male student-athletes are often prejudged as being socially inept and separated from the realities of campus life norms (Engstrom et al., 1995). Most male student-athletes are provided with their own athletic academic advisor and separate living space and oftentimes struggle to develop connections with faculty, students, and staff (Engstrom et al., 1995; Jolly, 2008). This lack of social connections is due in part to their hectic practice and traveling schedules in addition to their academic responsibilities (Jolly, 2008). As a result, faculty members may outwardly express feelings of anger towards the athletes and become increasingly
agitated when the student-athletes are rewarded with fame and media attention in regard to their particular sport (Engstrom et al., 1995). Although this particular student population may be misunderstood by the faculty and college community, it is this same faculty and college community population that fills the stadium and arena seats at every big game (Engstrom et al., 1995).

While male student-athletes, as a whole, are grouped into the category of being socially inept and are seen as being given a free ride to college, it is the Black male athlete who is most affected by this injustice. Black male student-athletes are viewed by some faculty as no more than dumb jocks (Comeaux, 2008; Engstrom et al., 1995). Due to this preconceived notion, there is a noticeable disconnect between the Black male student-athlete and faculty (Comeaux, 2008), specifically White professors (Perlmutter, 2003).

According to Perlmutter (2003), there are many ways in which professors can knowingly or unknowingly distance themselves from Black male athletes. Professors may see this population solely as athletes and not as students. Therefore, they are often overlooked in the academic arena (Jolly, 2008). Professors also tend to have lower academic expectations and often make negative comments towards Black male athletes. All of these factors often discourage these students from reaching out to their professors. As a result, the Black athlete-professor relationship becomes one that is strained (Jolly, 2008; Person & LeNoir, 1997).

Perlmutter (2003) asserted that because a place like the classroom is not an area of certainty for most Black athletes, they are highly inclined to stay guarded, especially with professors, given their history. On the other hand, sports and entertainment are the two
areas where most African American males feel they can compete with the rest of society (Whiting, 2006b). There is the notion that, in these two fields, skin color and inequalities will not hinder them negatively (Perlmutter, 2003).

In contrast, Comeaux (2005) focused on a positive side of the student-athlete-faculty relationship. He examined environmental influences (e.g., college experiences) and their effects on Black male student-athletes’ academic achievement, specifically those in revenue-generating sports (Comeaux, 2005). According to Comeaux (2005), achievement among Black male student-athletes is affected by academic, demographic, and environmental characteristics as well as the student-athlete-faculty relationship. In a 2005 study, Comeaux found that when faculty assisted Black male student-athletes in achieving professional goals, their academic achievement increased. In summary, African American male basketball student-athletes who maintain healthy relationships with their professors, where the professor is also willing to engage in this healthy relationship, tend to achieve higher academically (Martin, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2010; Perlmutter, 2003).

Both of the aforementioned studies (Comeaux, 2005; Perlmutter, 2003) show the importance of positive faculty relationships with regard to Black male student-athletes, particularly those who participate in revenue-generating sports. Moreover, these studies also show the detriment of the student-athlete-faculty relationship and how it can hinder academic achievement among this particular population. In addition, the relationship between faculty and Division-I Black male basketball players is just one aspect of Black male student-athletes’ college and social experiences that may or may not influence academic success. This relationship is important to consider as this study focused on the various relationships of Black male basketball student-athletes and how those
relationships influence academic success. The next section will examine the relationship between student-athletes and their nonathlete peers. This relationship is vital to Black male student-athlete’s college and social experiences, as nonathletes often stigmatize Black student-athletes, which may result in negative academic outcomes (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

**The Student-Athlete-Nonathlete Relationship**

One of the most important relationships among Black male basketball student-athletes in regard to their college experience is the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship (Harrison, 2001). This means a relationship between athletes and fellow students who do not participate in NCAA collegiate sports. Harrison (2001) asserted that nonathlete students’ initial perceptions of Black male basketball players are crucial in regard to their overall experience in the college community. In addition to preconceived notions, media stereotypes greatly contribute to the way nonathlete students view Black male athletes. In a 2001 study conducted by Harrison, 202 students from a Midwestern university were shown a scene from the movie *The Program* in order to examine student narratives about the issues of recruiting high profile Black male athletes. The scene depicted a star football athlete being enticed by a Division-I institution. The athlete was greeted by girls and a personal tour guide and treated like royalty.

According to the narratives given by the nonathlete students, most felt that Black male athletes are “athleticated” and are “sex objects” (Harrison, 2001, p. 46). Harrison (2001) defined athleticated as an athlete who is made aware of what he would gain athletically, but not academically, on a recruiting trip. Most nonathlete students noted that Black male athletes are made to feel like royalty and that most Division-I institutions try
and sell athletics to them, leaving academics out of the conversation (Harrison, 2001). Students also noted that these persuasions often come with pretty girls, further perpetuating the stereotype that Black male athletes are hyper-sexual beings (Harrison, 2001). Students reported that this superstar-like treatment only enhances Black male athletes’ own destructive self-perception (Harrison, 2001), possibly causing them to set unrealistic athletic goals.

In regard to academics, Black male athletes were perceived merely as “jocks” with no educational drive by nonathlete students (Harrison, 2001, p. 47). Words like “moron,” “worthless,” and “tactless” were all used to describe the athletes (Harrison, 2001, p. 47). Seventy-four percent of the White student respondents felt that Black male athletes are not intellectually equipped to survive at a large college institution (Harrison, 2001). These negative stigmas could ultimately affect Black males’ academic motivation and self-confidence and could promote isolation on predominantly White campuses. This study explored the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship and the aspects of that relationship that may or may not influence academic success.

Similarly, Perlmutter (2003) noted that many nonathletes contribute to the negative college experiences Black male student-athletes have both in and out of the classroom. Perlmutter (2003) recalled an encounter he had with an African American athlete:

At one such campus, a Black athlete told me the story of a Black friend—an honors student and not an athlete—who was asked by some White students she had just met, “What game do you play?” Her answer of “Donkey Kong” was
received with surprise. Her grade-point average probably would have provoked equal amazement and further undercut the stereotype. (p. 4)

The assumption that an African American student attending a predominantly White institution must be involved in sports is indeed another stereotype of the Black athlete (Perlmutter, 2003).

The foundation on which Black male student-athletes and nonathletes are able to develop a relationship is often unstable. While most nonathletes revere Black male student-athletes on the court or field, that is usually the extent of their admiration (Simons et al., 2007). Perlmutter (2003) noted a comment made by a nonathlete at a predominantly White institution, “It’s funny, but you can cheer a guy on the court and still resent him sitting next to you in class” (p. 4).

Similarly, in a pivotal and often cited study in this field despite its dated nature, P. Adler and Adler (1985) discussed the social interactions between Division-I Black male athletes and their nonathlete counterparts. In a qualitative study conducted over a 4-year period, P. Adler and Adler (1985) researched a Division-I predominantly White medium-sized private university located in the mid-south-central area of the United States. They found that the student-athletes (mostly football and basketball players) in their study expected to develop friendships with both athletes and nonathletes while excelling in their respective sports. Unfortunately, the demands of playing a Division-I sport proved to be detrimental to both their academics and their relationships with nonathlete students (P. Adler & Adler, 1985). Student-athletes were housed in separate living quarters, away from their nonathlete peers, making it impossible to develop healthy relationships with anyone other than athletes (P. Adler & Adler, 1985).
Additionally, it was difficult for them to form relationships with nonathletes due to the unusual demands of practices, traveling, competition, study hall, and other athletic responsibilities (P. Adler & Adler, 1985). According to P. Adler and Adler (1985), the student-athletes in their study had few opportunities to engage with their nonathlete peers. As a result, they developed strong bonds with other Black male athletes. P. Adler and Adler (1985) noted that although these athletes formed strong bonds, the general everyday conversation centered on athletics and social interaction, which the authors labeled “anti-intellectual” (p. 246) conversation. One student-athlete in the study stated,

If a athlete was living in the dorm with just ordinary people, what do you think they’ll be talkin’ about? Ordinary things. But you got all athletes here. What are they goin’ be talkin about? It won’t be Reaganomics, believe me. It’ll definitely be *Sports Illustrated*. (P. Adler & Adler, 1985, p. 246)

The strain of the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship often stems from misconceptions due to stigmas concerning Black male basketball players (Simons et al., 2007). As a result, some Black male basketball players are reluctant to acclimate to the social climate of their institution (Simons et al., 2007). Nonathlete students often fail to realize the pressure of being a Division-I student-athlete, while athletes often remain in the comforts of their athletic realm, rarely exploring the college community that they represent (Perlmutter, 2003). In the next section, I will explore the coach-athlete relationship and how that relationship can positively or negatively influence academic outcomes.
The Coach-Athlete Relationship

Researchers have described the coach-athlete dyad as one of the more crucial aspects to a student-athlete’s college experience (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). In referencing her own work, Jowett (2005) stated, “The coach-athlete relationship is embedded in the dynamic and complex coaching process and provides the means by which coaches’ and athletes’ needs are expressed and fulfilled” (p. 412). This crucial dynamic shapes the culture of the athletic team, has the ability to influence many aspects of student-athletes’ lives, and often extends beyond the athletic arena (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). College athletes are particularly more affected by this relationship than the average athlete, as they are often influenced by the institutions that they represent (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Therefore, it is vital that a level of trust and transparency develop between the institution and the student-athletes, namely the coaches and players (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

There is research that has argued that a coach’s role should require more than just having an athletic relationship with student-athletes (P. A. Adler & Adler, 1991; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). In their article addressing the obligations institutions have toward college athletes, Sharp and Sheilley (2008) stated the following:

The influence of coaches on their student athletes is critical. It is very important that the culture of the athletic department stress the role that coaches can and should play in encouraging academic excellence by their student athletes. This must be more than lip service; coaches often perceive (and realistically so) that their livelihood depends on their won-lost record and is not related in any meaningful way to the academic achievement of their student athletes. (p. 108)
Sharp and Sheilley (2008) also discussed three ways in which coaches can make a positive impact on student-athletes’ academic achievement: (a) create balance between athletics and academics, (b) help athletes truly define their role as student-athletes and not just athletes, and (c) work in conjunction with academic support staff to ensure the success of student-athletes.

A positive player-coach relationship can help students successfully balance academics and athletics. In a pivotal study conducted by P. A. Adler and Adler (1991), a coach at a big-time Division-I university weighed in on his positive player-coach relationship:

I want to win worse than anybody else in the world, that’s one thing. But by the same token I want to win in all aspects. I want to win in the fact that my students are guys who go to class and work and try to get a degree. That to me is winning.

And when they get that piece of paper I’ve won again. (p. 128)

Although this particular coach began the year encouraging his athletes to strive for academic success equivalent to that of athletic achievement, his players got the sense that when the athletic season was over, academics was no longer a priority (P. A. Adler & Adler, 1991). Almost all of the athletes felt betrayed and used by this coach in terms of how their academic affairs were being handled. One athlete stated,

Now here I am, a second semester junior, I been takin’ classes every semester, and they tell me I’m 75 credits short of graduation. Nearly three years here and I ain’t got more than 45 credits toward my major. And I’m only a rec major. (P. A. Adler & Adler, 1991, p. 144)
The above coach’s behavior is similar to what Sharp and Sheilley (2008) described as “lip service” (p. 108), which compromises the trust between coach and player.

Similarly, in a more recent study conducted by Beamon (2008), 20 former Division-I African American male student-athletes were interviewed in order to gain their perspective on their past college experiences. In regard to the player-coach relationship, the majority of the athletes felt that coaches held athletics as a priority rather than academics (Beamon, 2008). One athlete stated:

I mean from the time that you get there, they tell ya, “you here for football, you got a scholarship.” It’s up to you to ya know put yourself in the right classes and to choose the right major. . . . Anything else dealing with academics that was up to you. Ya know what I mean. Whereas with football, they took care of all of that, as long as you was playing football, you was treated like a king or whatever. (Beamon, 2008, p. 357)

This sentiment was expressed by the majority of the sample interviewed. As a result of a strained player-coach relationship, student-athletes felt athletically exploited and, in turn, developed a sense of mistrust for their intended mentors (Beamon, 2008). These findings corroborated existing literature regarding the importance of the player-coach relationship (P. A. Adler & Adler, 1991; Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008), thus making this dynamic crucial to explore further.

**Summary**

The literature review has shown that Black male student-athletes, specifically those who participate in revenue-generating sports, are often entering college less academically prepared than their White counterparts (Comeaux, 2005). According to
Noguera (2003), Black males achieve dismal precollege success in the classroom as a result of their absence from STEM and advanced placement courses, excessive suspension and expulsion rates, and low-income status. Additionally, Steele (1992) and Osborne (1997) attributed this population’s lack of academic success to academic disidentification, a lack of being able to positively or negatively identify with academics. Rather, Black males often tend to identify with sports and/or entertainment (Noguera, 2003), relying on their physical abilities while using higher education as a gateway to possible professional athletic success (Beamon, 2008).

Although Black male student-athletes enter higher education less academically prepared than other athletes, they often start their academic career with an optimistic frame of mind (P. Adler & Adler, 1985). Despite the decline in academic success among Black male athletes, many Division-I institutions continue to have high athletic expectations for their players but do not have the same level of expectation with respect to academics (Beamon, 2008, 2009; Comeaux, 2008). In addition, key institutional factors were supported by the literature as being crucial to the overall positive college experience of Black male student-athletes and, more importantly, contributing to their academic success and ultimate degree attainment. Those factors included academic and athletic motivation, student-athlete-faculty relationships, student-athlete-nonathlete relationships, and coach-player relationships.

In reviewing the literature, researchers were found to differ on their position as to what is associated with academic motivation among Black male student-athletes. Some researchers asserted that Black male college athletes’ academic motivation is directly related to their current academic achievement (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Sharp & Sheilley,
2008), while other researchers argued that low achievement is often mistaken as a lack of academic motivation (Sellers et al., 2002). According to Sellers et al. (2002), Black male athletes, specifically those who participate in Division-I revenue-generating sports, often enter college less academically prepared than nonathletes. In addition, the literature review has shown that Black male college athletes are often affected by the negative stigmas held by their nonathlete counterparts and professors (Comeaux, 2008; Harrison, 2001; Perlmutter, 2003; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Negative perceptions and the dumb jock stereotype could result in Black male college student-athletes disengaging from academics (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

Research has shown that positive student-athlete-faculty relationships may be beneficial for Division-I Black male student-athletes (Comeaux, 2005; Perlmutter, 2003). Comeaux (2005) posited that Black male student-athletes’ academic success is contingent on positive student-athlete-faculty relationships. More specifically, when faculty members assist Black males in pursuing professional goals, their academic achievement improves (Comeaux, 2005). However, research has shown that due to negative preconceived notions of Division-I Black male student-athletes, the student-athlete-faculty relationship is often strained and nonexistent (Comeaux, 2008; Perlmutter, 2003).

In addition, the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship also emerged as a crucial dynamic in regard to Black male student-athletes’ overall college experience. The literature revealed that most Division-I student-athletes are perceived as privileged and academically inept (Harrison, 2001; Perlmutter, 2003). Moreover, there is a clear disconnect between Division-I male student-athletes, specifically Black males, and their nonathlete counterparts due to various factors. These factors include student-athlete
stereotypes (Harrison, 2001; Perlmutter, 2003), vastly different interests, the strain of a demanding athletic schedule, and the purposeful separation of student-athletes and nonathletes (P. Adler & Adler, 1985). Research has shown that integrating student-athletes and nonathletes positively influences academic success among Black male student-athletes (Mangold et al., 2003).

Lastly, in reviewing the literature, research has shown that the player-coach relationship has an effect on the overall college experience of student-athletes (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Research has also shown that Division-I coaches are being held more responsible for the academic achievement of their respective players (NCAA, 2014c; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Research has also shown that many coaches are more concerned with athletic success than academic success (P. Adler & Adler, 1985; P. A. Adler & Adler 1991; Beamon, 2008; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). As a result, players feel exploited and betrayed by their coaches, which ultimately results in a strained player-coach relationship. In light of the findings revealed in the literature, it is crucial to examine the positive aspects of the player-coach relationship and what effects, if any, that relationship has on academic success.

Overall, the aforementioned relationships, student-athlete-faculty relationships, student-athlete-nonathlete relationships, and player-coach relationships, are all relationships that the literature has identified as beneficial to Division-I Black male student-athletes’ academic achievement. Therefore, it was my purpose to understand to what extent, if any, these relationships influence academic success among Black male basketball players at Kenwood University.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Purpose

The purpose of this grounded theory case study was to examine the social relationships of African American male basketball players at Kenwood University. Moreover, this study aimed to understand to what extent, if any, these social relationships influence academic success among this particular population. Through a grounded theory approach, I examined the social relationships between African American male basketball student-athletes and various institutional agents, such as faculty members, coaches, nonathlete peers, and academic advisors. I utilized in-depth, semistructured interviews in order to gain a firsthand account of participants’ views of the topic. As an African American female and former Division-I basketball student-athlete, I have taken a personal interest in the academic success of Division-I African American student-athletes (specifically African American males). Through this study, I hoped to identify institutional practices and procedures that would ultimately contribute to the graduation success rates of African American male basketball student-athletes at Division-I colleges and universities.

Research Questions

This study examined the following research question and subquestions:

1. To what extent do the social relationships of African American male basketball student-athletes influence their academic success at a Division-I private university?
Subquestions:

1. How does the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship influence academic success?

2. How does the student-athlete-faculty relationship influence academic success?

3. How does the player-coach relationship influence academic success?

4. How does the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship influence academic success?

Chapter Organization

This chapter continues with the description of the research approach used for this study. Next, I will describe the setting and my rationale for choosing the specific research site. In addition, I will describe the sample and data sources. I will also describe the instruments and procedures used to conduct this study. Finally, I will candidly disclose my own biases and assumptions in regard to this study. As an advocate of student-athletes (not athlete-students) and a former Division-I athlete, I sought to explore the social relationships of academically successful minority student-athletes (specifically males) and how those relationships may influence their academic success.

Research Design and Tradition

This study utilized a grounded theory case study approach. As noted by Merriam (2009), a case study is characterized by a bounded system, the specificity of a particular phenomenon (particularistic), a thick description in order to ensure the reader has a full understanding of the study (descriptive), and a heuristic outcome. The study I conducted encompassed all four of these characteristics.

This case study focused on the graduation success rate of African American male basketball student-athletes at a particular private university and to what extent their social
relationships may or may not influence their academic success. According to Merriam (2009), “The case, then, could be a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy” (p. 40). This study was particularistic, as it focused on Black male basketball student-athletes’ academic success. Moreover, it specifically focused on the social relationships that may or may not influence academic success among this particular population at one private university. The perceptions of student-athletes and athletic personnel via interviews were portrayed in rich, thick descriptive narratives in order to ensure the authenticity of the data collected. Lastly, because African American male basketball student-athletes are one of the lowest achieving populations in higher education, this study served as a heuristic part of the case study, illuminating and enhancing the reader’s knowledge (Merriam, 2009) about African American male basketball student-athletes’ academic success.

A grounded theory methodology was appropriate for this study because it focuses on and analyzes a process between people and events over a period of time in order to develop a theory supported by the data (Schram, 2006). I analyzed and compared all participant narratives derived from the in-depth, semistructured interviews as well as the Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire (see Appendix A) given to the Black male student-athlete basketball players. These data were analyzed and compared in order to allow for theories or explanations to emerge, which is the trend in grounded theory methodology (Schram, 2006). Throughout this study, multiple data collection methods were utilized.
In addition, grounded theory methodology has two orienting concepts: (a) conceptual density and (b) constant comparison (Schram, 2006). Conceptual density is “a theory that contains many relationships among concepts” (Schram, 2006, p. 75). Constant comparison is “a self-corrective process in which the researcher draws upon analysis of one set of data to guide analysis of the next set of data” (Schram, 2006, p. 75).

**Connection to Purpose and Questions**

This study focused on the academic success of a men’s basketball program at a particular Division-I private university. Utilizing a grounded theory methodology, this study examined the social relationships of Black male basketball student-athletes and to what extent those relationships influence academic success. Schram (2006) asserted that the premise of grounded theorists is reality driven; that is, reality remains a social interaction between humans that is constantly evolving. For this reason, I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with student-athletes from the men’s basketball team. This allowed for me to capture the participants’ reality with regard to the research topic. I also interviewed three support staff personnel as well as two of the basketball team’s coaches. This study also aimed to educate other Division-I basketball programs as well as athletic personnel and faculty so that they might better serve this particular population.

**Research Setting and Context**

**Site demographics.** I collected data at Kenwood University (pseudonym), a 142-acre bluff-top private university located in a large metropolitan area of California. Kenwood University is among the nation’s most beautiful and green campuses and is one of the first campuses in the state to recycle 100% of its green waste. Kenwood University is a medium-sized institution that serves approximately 10,000 undergraduate and
graduate students. Of this population, 52.4% are White, 20.7% are Hispanic/Latino, 9.6% are Asian, 7.5% are multirace, 5.6% are African American, 3.5% are international, 0.2% are American Indian/Alaska Native, and 0.2% are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

The university has seven academic schools. Within these colleges, Kenwood University offers 60 major and 57 minor degree programs to undergraduate students. Graduate students are offered 38 different master’s degree programs, one doctoral degree program, and 15 credential programs. Kenwood University employs over 500 full-time faculty. In addition, a combination of classified and unclassified staff, part-time faculty, and students fulfilling work study contribute to the everyday functioning of the institution.

Kenwood University is nestled in one of the most diverse and booming cities in the world. This large metropolitan city is the second largest city in the nation, with an estimated population of 4 million. With regard to diversity, this area houses the largest Latino population of any major U.S. city. In addition, there are also large Korean and Filipino populations, making this city the third most racially diverse city in the United States.

Economically, the city thrives off of its tourism, international trading practices, labor force, business management services, health services, apparel manufacturing, and entertainment industry. These industries combined afford this large metropolitan area its $300 plus billion gross revenue, making it one of the most economically thriving cities in the United States.

**Kenwood University men’s basketball program.** I specifically selected Kenwood University from which to collect data because, contrary to most Division-I
basketball programs today, the Kenwood University men’s basketball program is graduating their student-athletes at a highly consistent rate. Moreover, a majority of their players are Black males. This is relevant because Division-I Black male basketball student-athletes have the lowest graduation rates of all athletes in NCAA athletics (NCAA, 2014e). I examined one of the characteristics—social relationships—that may or may not contribute to the academic success of African American male basketball student-athletes at this private university in California.

**Site selection.** This site was chosen using a criterion sampling strategy. As noted by Miles and Huberman (1994), criterion sampling relies on the specific boundaries or criteria to which a case or multiple case sites must adhere. Since the purpose of the study was to specifically examine the social relationships of Black male basketball players at a Division-I university and how those relationships contribute to their academic success, it was imperative that I selected a site that met the following criteria: (a) the institution must have been a Division-I NCAA member school, (b) the institution’s men’s basketball program must have had consistently reputable graduation success rates over the past 5 years, and (c) the institution must have had the majority of its men’s basketball program made up of African American males. Kenwood University is an NCAA Division-I university that has a men’s basketball program with consistently high graduation success rates. Furthermore, the demographic makeup of the men’s basketball team is majority African American.

**Research Sample and Data Sources**

**Research sample.** The research sample included seven African American male basketball student-athletes from the men’s basketball program at Kenwood University.
Five of the players were current student-athletes at the time of the study, while two of the players were former student-athletes. The research sample also included two coaches, one athletic academic advisor, one athletic director, and one faculty member, all who represented Kenwood University.

**Data sources.** I used a combination of data sources that were most directly connected to this topic. Specifically, my data sources included Black male basketball student-athletes and athletic support staff. Collecting data from this combination of sources allowed for a more holistic understanding of the social relationships that may or may not contribute to the academic success of this population.

**Sampling strategy.** Before gaining access to participants, I first needed permission to conduct the study at Kenwood University. I attained permission by approaching a gatekeeper; I contacted Kenwood University’s athletic director via email, briefly informing him of my study and my intentions on working with the men’s basketball program. It was through this first attempt of communication that I developed a rapport with him which allowed me to gain access to coaches and the academic advisor. After initially contacting the athletic director, I then contacted him via telephone in an attempt to set up a face-to-face meeting with him. Shortly thereafter, I met with the athletic director at Kenwood University to discuss the specifics of my study. During this meeting, I further elaborated on my proposed study and gained permission to move forward with my research.

In order to identify participants for this study, I utilized the criterion sampling strategy in which all participants had to meet certain criteria to participate in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For basketball student-athlete participants, they had to meet
the criteria of being African American, being at least a sophomore, and currently meeting
the NCAA Division-I eligibility requirements for student-athletes. Likewise, former
basketball student-athletes had to also meet the criteria of being African American and, at
the time of college attendance, being in compliance of the NCAA eligibility requirements
for Division-I student-athletes. The criteria for coaches were being a member of the
Kenwood University men’s basketball program and having worked with the program for
at least 2 years. Lastly, the criterion for both the academic advisor and faculty member
were having worked with four or more of the members of the men’s basketball team on
an academic level.

My informant, who was the individual with whom I gained access to my
interviewees, identified my participants. She was also the Kenwood University men’s
basketball team’s academic advisor. This particular academic advisor had direct personal
contact with each potential participant who I desired to recruit for the study. Moreover,
she was also a possible participant for this study. I contacted her via email in order to
inform her of my research. I asked her to assist me in reaching out to the athletic director
and the coaching staff of the basketball program in order to set up meeting times with
each individual. My informant was also responsible for reviewing student-athletes’
am academic records and identifying participants who fit the specific criteria in order to
participate in this study. After all participants were identified, I emailed personal
invitations to all participants and outlined the details of my study.

**Connection to research purpose.** The criterion sampling strategy was
appropriate for my study because, given the topic of examining Black male basketball
student-athletes’ academic success and the specific aspects on which I chose to focus, it
was vital that I used explicit criteria for selecting participants. These criteria also coincided with the research question and subquestions. I specifically explored the student-athletes’ social relationships with various institutional agents that may or may not contribute to academic success.

**Historical contextual background.** African American male basketball student-athletes are the lowest performing student-athletes in NCAA Division-I college athletics (NCAA, 2014e). Moreover, recent NCAA reform and legislation have had minimal effects on rectifying the lack of degree attainment among this group. Historically, many African American male student-athletes have come from female-headed single homes (Madyun & Lee, 2010) and low socioeconomic backgrounds and have experienced a lack of academic preparedness (Noguera, 2003). Recently, Division-I colleges and universities have gained a tremendous amount of negative attention regarding their lack of accountability to African American male basketball student-athletes. The sport of basketball, for most Division-I institutions, is a revenue generator.

Despite the historical background of Division-I African American male basketball student-athletes, the Kenwood University men’s basketball program has maintained a successful graduation rate over the past 5 years. With a team makeup of majority African American, they are maintaining an 82% graduation success rate, equal to the overall 2006 cohort national rate of 82% and better than the overall 2006 cohort men’s basketball rate of 73% (NCAA, 2014e). For this reason, this study examined one of many possible influences that may or may not contribute to that success. This study examined the social relationships of Black male basketball student-athletes at a Division-I university and to what extent those relationships, if any, have on their academic success.
**Ethical issues.** An ethical issue related to this study included anonymity of the participants and the institution. Although this study aimed to highlight the positive aspects that contribute to African American male student-athletes, I took into consideration that, at any given time, a participant could disclose information that could compromise the integrity of both the student-athlete and the institution. For that reason, all participants received pseudonyms as well as the researched institution. Moreover, as a former Division-I college athlete, high school basketball coach, and current high school educator, I did not recruit any participants who were my former students, players, or friends. This was to ensure that my past experiences would not influence the participants’ data. I conducted all interviews on the campus of Kenwood University in a disclosed area to ensure the privacy of all participants.

Before beginning data collection, I submitted my research proposal to California State University, Northridge’s (CSUN) Institutional Review Board. This process ensured that I met all federal institutional regulations in order to conduct research at the specific institution. After approval from CSUN, I then sought approval from Kenwood University’s Institutional Review Board in order to move forward with the data collection.

**Instruments and Procedures**

**Introduction.** In order to effectively examine the social relationships that promote academic success among Black male basketball players at Kenwood University, I utilized one source of data collection. I conducted one-on-one interviews with five current basketball student-athletes, two former basketball student-athletes, two coaches, one athletic academic advisor, one athletic director, and one faculty member. The
interview protocols started with a brief introduction, explaining the purpose of the research study and reiterating the main points of the informed consent agreement. All interview protocols are located in Appendices C, D, and E.

**Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire.** A Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire was administered to all Black male basketball student-athlete participants before the start of the interview. The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore certain precollege and demographic information that may or may not have any influence on Black male basketball players’ academic success. Information gathered included the following cognitive and demographic variables: (a) participants’ age, (b) academic year, (c) ethnic identity, (d) scholarship status, (e) athletic eligibility status, (f) description of home town, (g) high school demographics, (h) high school GPA and SAT scores, (i) parents’ income, (j) parents’ education, (k) high school athletic participation, and (l) number of siblings. All information was used in combination with the findings from the student-athletes’ interviews in order to explore influences that contribute to academic success.

In a study conducted by Schwartz and Washington (2002), with a sample of 229 Black male freshmen college students at a historically Black college, the researchers found that the greatest predictors of academic achievement among Black male students entering college were: “(a) high school rank or GPA and (b) social adjustment to a college (a sense of fitting in)” (p. 365). Schwartz and Washington stated, “The use of cognitive predictors from high school combined with non-cognitive predictors can enhance the predictive power of the cognitive variables for academic performance and retention” (p. 365). It is important to note that the Pre-College and Demographic
Background Questionnaire was administered to the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University as a means to compliment the qualitative findings of this study.

**Student-athlete interview protocol.** I conducted one-on-one semistructured interviews with five current and two former participants from the Kenwood University men’s basketball team. Interviews were conducted in order to gain a firsthand account of their perception of what contributes to their academic success, including their relationships with faculty, coaches, academic advisors, and nonathlete peers. Semistructured interviewing is the act of two people engaging in dialogue while one presents the other with a set of written questions or a specific topic that is meant to be covered (Bernard, 1994).

The questions used in the interview protocol (see Appendix B) were designed to explore the research questions in order to determine possible influences to players’ academic success, which were analyzed during the data analysis. During the interview process, it was my goal to build upon the participants’ responses by asking clarifying and probing questions in order to allow for rich, thick descriptions.

**Coaches interview protocol.** The second interview protocol was conducted in the same manner as the first, but was used to interview two Division-I basketball coaches at Kenwood University (see Appendix C). Similar to the first interview protocol, the questions used to guide the interview were designed to explore the research question and subquestions. Again, during this interview process, it was my goal to build upon the participants’ responses by asking clarifying and probing questions. Interviews were conducted in a semistructured manner, lasting approximately 45 minutes. Coaches were questioned on their perceptions of the student-athletes’ overall academic success at
Kenwood University as well as their own relationships with the student-athletes and how they might influence the athletes’ academic success.

**Support staff interview protocol.** Lastly, I conducted my third and final interview protocol with support staff of the Kenwood University men’s basketball program (see Appendix D). These staff members included the team’s athletic academic advisor, the athletic director, and a faculty member. This semistructured interview also entailed questions designed to explore the study’s research question and subquestions. In addition, support staff members were asked to expound on the academic success of the student-athletes and what role they and the institution play in contributing to their academic success. I asked about their relationship with each of the players and to what extent that relationship may influence academic success. I further expanded upon the participants’ responses by using probing and follow-up questions.

**Data Collection**

I utilized a single data collection procedure in order to explore the social relationships of Black male basketball student-athletes at Kenwood University. I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with both African American student-athletes and athletic support staff. Both the student-athlete and the athletic support staff member participants were identified by using a criterion sampling strategy. I used my informant to make initial contact with all Black male basketball players, men’s basketball coaches, and other support staff members, informing them about my research. I then contacted all potential participants via email with a formal invitation letter as an attachment describing my study in a more thorough manner.


**Research invitation.** Although I used the Kenwood University men’s basketball program for my case study, it was vital that I selected players on the team who fit the criteria of my study. Since I examined academic success among this population, the participants selected must have met the following criteria; they must have been (a) at least a sophomore, (b) currently meeting the NCAA academic requirements, (c) in good academic standing with Kenwood University, and (d) on track to receive a baccalaureate degree within 5 years from the start date. The criteria for the student-athlete support staff was as follows: (a) they must have worked closely with the student-athletes either on or off the court and (b) they must have had 2 or more years of experience with the chosen student-athletes.

Identifying participants for my study was done in a succinct manner. Through the help of my informant, athletes on the team who fit the aforementioned criteria were notified via email and were given a brief description of the study by my informant. Coaches and other supporting staff who fit the criteria were also contacted through the same informant. Shortly after initial contact was made, my informant gave me the names of the participants who fit the criteria and I formally invited them to the study by emailing them an invitation with a description of the intended research along with a document explaining the confidentiality agreement and ethical issues involved in the research.

**Data collection.** Once all participants had been identified, I ensured them that a secure and comfortable interview area would be made available. The interviews took place in a room labeled *The Media Room* located in the Kenwood University Athletic Academic Center.
I utilized three separate interview protocols during data collection: one for student-athletes, one for coaches, and one for the athletic support staff. All sets of interview protocols started with a review of the consent form given to the participant to read and sign (see Appendices E, F, and G). I also briefly explained the purpose of my study and gave full disclosure of how I am personally connected to this topic of research. Each one-on-one semistructured interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. During the interviews with the Black male basketball players, I asked about their experiences as well as their social relationships with various intuitional agents. In addition, the coaches and athletic support staff were asked open-ended questions about the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University and what influenced their academic success. I elaborated on responses given by the participants by using probing questions.

**Member check guide.** After each interview was conducted, I conducted a member check with each participant. Conducting a member check ensured that the participant’s narrative was captured accurately and was portrayed in the manner he or she was satisfied with. Therefore, a copy of the transcribed interview was returned to each participant to review along with a member check guide. The member check guide consisted of the following questions:

1. Does the transcript accurately reflect the interview?
2. Does your voice and perspective emerge in the transcript?
3. Do you want to change, modify, or delete any part of the transcript?
4. Do you want to add anything to the transcript that you did not say during the interview?
After recording their responses, the participants had 3 weeks to return their member check guides back to me.

**Exiting the field.** At the close of each interview, I thanked each interviewee for his or her participation. I reminded the participants that their interview would be safely guarded and protected in my possession. Furthermore, I informed all participants that upon transcribing their interview, I would send them a copy of the transcription and they would have 3 weeks to make any changes to the interview that they felt necessary. I explained to them that if I did not hear from them in that time, I would move on as planned with the study.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis process consisted of three stages, which included (a) preliminary data analysis, (b) thematic data analysis, and (c) interpretation of results. Each of these stages allowed me to identify similar and contrasting themes among datasets, apply codes, interpret the data, and ultimately present the findings.

**Preliminary data analysis.** In reviewing the literature, common themes started to emerge regarding Division-I Black male athletes and the influences that contribute to their academic success. In addition, themes that related to the role institutional agents play in their overall academic success also began to emerge. Influences such as student-athlete-faculty relationships, student-athlete-coach relationships, and players’ social interaction were some of the common themes that could be associated with the success of Black male basketball players’ academic success. In closely reviewing the literature, I was able to develop an appropriate research question and four subquestions in order to effectively guide this study.
According to Glesne (2011), it is good practice for a researcher to keep a field log or write memos in order to record initial thoughts during one-on-one interviews.

Capturing my thoughts during the actual interview, rather than waiting until after the interview, allowed me to include data that may have otherwise been forgotten. My goal was to begin data collection in the summer of 2013 and complete it within 1-2 months.

**Thematic data analysis.** The interview guide was organized thematically. The questions that were given to the participants were preclustered according to the research question and subquestions. After all interviews had been conducted, the files were transcribed by a professional transcriber. After receiving the transcribed files, I analyzed and applied codes to each interview using the computer program ATLAS.ti. During this process, I discovered common themes throughout the interviews.

**Interpretation of results.** After gathering and analyzing the data and thematically analyzing and coding the transcriptions, the final process in the data analysis was to interpret the data that were collected. Since this study utilized a grounded theory approach, I anticipated the findings to result in a theory that was grounded in the data. In addition, a copy of the transcribed interview was given to each participant in order to ensure that his or her story was accurate.

**Role of the Researcher**

As a former Division-I college basketball student-athlete, high school educator, former basketball coach, and close friend of many African American male athletes, I innately brought to this study biases that could have compromised the integrity of my study. While in these roles, I have witnessed academic injustices to the African American male student-athlete population that ultimately sparked my passion for advocacy. While
competing on the collegiate level, I often watched while my Black male student-athlete peers were athletically used only to walk away from the university without a degree. As a current high school educator, I have constantly witnessed young Black male student-athletes being enrolled into meaningless courses in order to ensure their athletic eligibility throughout the athletic season. Lastly, as a former high school girls’ basketball coach, I saw the same negative injustices that were being placed on young Black males starting to infiltrate girls’ basketball in urban communities.

When making the decision to research African American male basketball student-athletes at Division-I colleges and universities, I became aware of my subjectivity as a current and future researcher. I chose this particular topic to investigate because of the personal connections I share with this population along with the academic injustices often experienced by Division-I Black male student-athletes, such as not being held academically accountable. During my tenure as a college athlete, I unfortunately watched a lot of African American male student-athletes misuse their college education. Instead of focusing on building their academic future, they were often encouraged (by coaches, athletic personnel, and outside influences) to focus more on their athletic endeavors. I believe that most Division-I African American male student-athletes who participate in revenue-generating sports are academically underserved. I also believe that African American male student-athletes (specifically in revenue-generating sports) are often athletically exploited. However, I believe some African American male student-athletes are undereducated and could benefit from guidance from former student-athletes who have experienced academic injustices.
What I did not take into consideration was the difficult task of controlling my own subjectivity in order to let the data emerge on its own. It was not until I conducted my first interview and observation during a pilot study that I found it hard to tame my subjective expressions, feelings, and comments. A concern with these feelings was how my subjective expressions would influence my interviewee and how he or she would respond during the interview process. However, Peshkin (1988) noted that an investigator’s subjectivity to his or her own research should be embraced. One should seek out areas of subjectivity during the research process as to avoid stumbling upon them during the data analysis (Peshkin 1988). Therefore, I attempted to remain forthcoming regarding my subjectivity throughout the research process in order to avoid skewing the data analysis.

As an educator, I am first and foremost dedicated to the position of equity among all students. Moreover, as a former high school basketball coach, I continue to advocate for the academic rights of student-athletes. My multiple roles as a former student-athlete, coach, and educator drive me passionately to seek out effective ways to academically serve our student-athlete population, specifically the African American male population.

I collected data for this study in the fall of 2013. The site in which I did my study was a private Division-I university which had no direct personal connection to me. Therefore, it did not hinder my data collection. This aspect was especially important as I began to collect the data. Not having previous ties to the research site or the participants allowed me to remain as objective as possible during the interview process and ultimately during the data analysis.
In an effort to gain the trust of the participants, I disclosed my role as a former Division-I college basketball student-athlete. With such a potentially sensitive topic being discussed, offering my personal background as a former college athlete hopefully encouraged the student-athletes to share their stories knowing they were in a safe environment. However, I was careful not to impose my opinions regarding this study or what may have occurred in my past as a student-athlete. I believed that the participants would be more inclined to speak open and honestly with me knowing that I had gone through similar experiences. None of the participants involved were any of my former or current students, student-athletes, teammates, or friends.

During the data analysis, I conducted member checks with my fellow colleagues to ensure that I stayed guarded against my own biases. To do that, I shared each transcribed interview with a colleague to make sure that I did not lead any interview with biased questions. Furthermore, to ensure the accuracy of the interviews, I had every participant review his or her transcript for accuracy of the data.

In order to mitigate subject effects, triangulation was utilized throughout this study (Denzin, 1978). I collected data from a variety of sources, including basketball student-athletes, coaches, an academic advisor, a faculty member, and the university athletic director. Lastly, I utilized colleagues to member check field notes and coding methods in order to guard against my own biases.

It is important that I, as the principal investigator, capture the essence of what was being portrayed through the data rather than infiltrate the study with my own experiences and position. By identifying biases and actively mitigating them, I allowed for this study
to emerge into a scholarly work that holds the integrity needed to positively contribute to other Division-I college basketball programs.
Chapter 4: Findings and Results

Introduction

This qualitative study examined the social relationships of Division-I Black male basketball student-athletes at Kenwood University and to what extent, if any, those relationships influenced academic success. Although much research has concluded that Division-I Black male basketball student-athletes are the lowest academic-achieving population in the NCAA, few scholarly works offer insight into the aspects that contribute to those Black male basketball players who achieve academic success. Moreover, few academically successful Division-I basketball programs (that graduate a reputable number of Black male basketball players) are highlighted with regard to what factors influence their programs’ degree attainment. As a result, this study examined Division-I Black male basketball players’ social relationships through a social capital lens. By examining Black male basketball players’ social relationships with faculty members, academic advisors, coaches, and nonathlete peers, we will be able to better understand how certain relationships with institutional agents influenced this particular population’s academic success.

This chapter opens with a participant profile in order to familiarize the reader with each participant who is involved in the study. Next, the results of the Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire completed by the male basketball players of Kenwood University are discussed. This questionnaire was given in order to describe the precollege characteristics of the student-athlete participants. The results of the questionnaire are followed by the study’s qualitative findings.
Participant Profile

This study’s participants sample included seven Black male basketball players from Kenwood University (see Table 4.0). Five of the players were current student-athletes at the time of the study, while two of the players were former student-athletes. The participant sample also included two coaches, one athletic director, one faculty member, and one academic advisor, all who, at the time of the study, represented Kenwood University (see Table 1).

Table 4.0

Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach Williams</td>
<td>Basketball Coach</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach Malcolm</td>
<td>Basketball Coach</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Athletic Director</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>Faculty Member</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Athletic Academic Advisor</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tremaine</td>
<td>Former Basketball Player</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>Basketball Player</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashad</td>
<td>Former Basketball Player</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Basketball Player</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Basketball Player</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Basketball Player</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Basketball Player</td>
<td>Kenwood University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire Results

The results of the Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire are reported in Table 4.1. Ages of the participants in this study ranged from 20 to 24 years. Most of the participants (n = 5) were in their senior year. Most of the participants reported their ethnic identity as African American (n = 4) or African (n = 2). All participants except one (n = 6) were on a full athletic scholarship. All seven participants were academically eligible at the time of the study. Most of the participants (n = 4) were born in the United States. The majority of the participants (n = 6) were raised in an urban town. Three of the seven participants attended a predominantly White high school, while two attended a multiethnic high school. The participants’ high school GPAs ranged from 2.5 to 3.75.

Two of the participants’ parents earned an income under $20,000, while the other participants’ parents’ income varied. Three of the participants reported that their mother’s highest level of education was some college, while two reported that their mother’s highest level of education was high school. Similarly, three of the participants reported that their father’s highest level of education was some college, while two reported that their father’s highest level of education was a bachelor’s degree.

All of the participants reported that they played basketball on their high school’s team. The majority of the participants (n = 6) reported that they played all 4 years. Three of the participants reported having two siblings, while the number of siblings among the other participants varied. Three of the participants reported that they had a sibling who attended college and also played basketball for their respective colleges. It is important to
note that although the Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire requested the athletes to

Table 4.1

*Results of the Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (n = 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Year (n = 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Identity (n = 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship Status (n = 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Partial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Full</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Scholarships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Eligibility Status (n = 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically Eligible</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Birth (n = 6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pori, Finland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles, California</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasadena, California</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos, Nigeria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Home Town (n = 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Makeup of High School (n = 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtually All White (over 93%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly White (over 75% or more)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>( f )</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiethnic (Inclusive of Blacks, Whites, Latinos, etc.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtually All Black (over 93%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>( f )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School GPA ((n = 7))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.01-3.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.01-4.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>( f )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/Parent’s Income ((n = 6))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $20,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000-39,999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000-59,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000-79,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000-99,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>( f )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Highest Education Attained ((n = 7))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>( f )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father’s Highest Education Attained ((n = 7))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>( f )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During High School Did You Play on Your High School’s Basketball Team? ((n = 7))</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>( f )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If Yes, How Many Years Did You Play on Your High School’s Basketball Team? ((n = 7))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 4 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>( f )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Siblings ((n = 7))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Many Are Attending or Have Attended College? \((n = 6)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(f)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>(f)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If Your Sibling Attended College, Do They Play a Sport in College? ((n = 6))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If Yes, What Sport? ((n = 6))</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Sports</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

report their highest SAT scores, the majority of the players stated that they failed to remember their scores. Moreover, Kenwood University refused to disclose the student-athletes’ test scores.

**Qualitative Findings**

This qualitative study included five current Black male basketball student-athletes, two former Black male basketball student-athletes, one athletic director, one athletic academic advisor, two coaches, and one faculty member, all who represent Kenwood University. The study was guided by the following research question and subquestions:

1. To what extent do the social relationships of African American male basketball student-athletes influence their academic success at a Division-I private university?

**Subquestions:**

1. How does the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship influence academic success?
2. How does the student-athlete-faculty relationship influence academic success?

3. How does the player-coach relationship influence academic success?

4. How does the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship influence academic success?

Pseudonyms were issued to all participants in order to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality. Three separate interview protocols were used for the student-athletes, coaches, and athletic support staff (e.g., academic advisor, faculty member, and athletic director) to answer the study’s research question and subquestions.

As a result of the research question and subquestions, four areas of social relationships that potentially influenced Black male basketball players’ academic success were examined during the data analysis. These included the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship, the student-athlete-faculty relationship, the player-coach relationship, and the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship.

The data from this study were examined through a social capital lens. According to Lin (1999), “Social capital can be defined as resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions” (p. 35). As a result, the premise of social capital focuses on the following elements: “resources embedded in a social structure; accessibility to such social resources by individuals; and use or mobilization of such social resources by individuals in purposive actions” (Lin, 1999, p. 35). In this study, the Black male basketball players supported the premise of social capital because they utilized and built strong relationships with institutional resources, such as the athletic academic advisor, the faculty member, and nonathlete students, to strengthen their academic success.
The student-athlete-academic advisor relationship. Ting (2009) postulated that academic advisors, counselors, and/or instructors are vital in regard to assisting student-athletes with establishing their academic goals. While conducting interviews with the participants, it became apparent that the Black male basketball players attributed much of their academic success to their academic advisor, Mary. Mary shared her initial perceptions of Division-I Black male student-athletes:

I think I’m more of an optimist, so I don’t really look at the stereotypes of people. I try to give people the benefit of the doubt to let me know who they are, what type of person they are, before I put any stereotypes on them, so I try not to follow the crowd per se. When you say, “Oh, this is an African American basketball player. Oh, he smokes weed. He doesn’t go to class. He’s just trying to go to the NBA . . .” I try not to buy into those stereotypes until, if that’s what they let me know that they are, then that’s what I have to believe of them. I don’t like to conduct meetings or work one on one with people with stereotypes in mind because it puts a wall up or a blinder up that you really can’t get to know that person, if you buy into those types of stereotypes.

Mary recalled her earlier days working with another university as the athletic academic advisor:

There was a football player who was an excellent student, worked hard on the field, and was a Math major. That’s not typical. [laughs] He’s playing in the NFL now, today. He has his degree. He worked hard. Now, he’s a family man. People don’t expect that to be of an African American football player. It’s just situations
like that make you realize you can’t stereotype people just because they’re a football player, they’re Black, or they’re an athlete because you never know. Mary delved deeper into the relationship that she had with the basketball players on the team and how her role was more like that of a “mother figure.”

I feel like that “mother figure” because I care about them personally. I care about them academically, and I care about them athletically. I go sit and watch practice. They come talk to me about how coach is getting on their nerves. We talk about class. We talk about the future, like, what are your plans? What steps are you taking? I care about them more than just a graduation rate or a number. They’re people to me.

Black male basketball players of the Kenwood University men’s basketball team expressed these same sentiments. Martin, Harrison, and Bukstein (2010) defined mentoring as “the process of engagement in which an inexperienced person is guided by one of experience and expertise, and as a result a committed relationship forms that facilitates the achievement of specific goals” (p. 87). In some instances, mentors can assist Black male athletes in areas beyond the classroom (Martin, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2010). In this case, George, a current Kenwood University men’s basketball player, recalled going through a tough family issue and having the assistance of his academic advisor:

I lost my dad last year and a month after that I had to undergo surgery. And when those days I missed classes and everything . . . when I came back, she [Mary] was like on hand for me. She contacted my professors on my behalf, got all the notes for me, and all I should have to prepare for the exams. She was right there
for me. When I took the exams and everything, I was so proud that I did absolutely good.

Dallas, another basketball player, expressed similar sentiments:

Yeah, like, whatever I would always need, I would go to my counselor. Whether it’s a class problem or outside-the-classroom problem, she was just, you know, that was my key.

Although Mary stated that she always remained open-minded when initially working with student-athletes, specifically Black male student-athletes, she commented on her expectations of the basketball players at Kenwood University:

We have a good group, but it’s just a matter of . . . sometimes it depends on who they are . . . if they come in lazy because they’ve had things handed to them. They’re not used to doing things on their own. So we have to establish a new way of learning and helping them to understand this is how you take care of this. This is the protocol. This is the steps because they haven’t been taught. Because 9 times out of 10, they’ve been passed through because they are great athletes, which is a disservice to them. Myself and my boss, we always talk about we want them to be prepared for life after basketball. I’m fine with you having a dream of you hooping overseas or you hooping in the NBA. That’s fine, but when you’re 30 or 35, the ball is going stop bouncing. What is your plan?

As a result of some male student-athletes, specifically those who participate in revenue generating sports, entering higher education as Mary describes, “lazy because they’ve had things handed to them”, they often find it hard to find the balance between academics and athletics. “The majority of student-athletes report that the demands of
intercollegiate athletic competition have prevented them from devoting as much time to the student side of their lives as they would like” (Jolly, 2008, p. 147). For this reason, among others, the role of the academic advisor is heavily relied upon by the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University. Dallas expressed the importance of Mary with regard to gaining access to academic resources:

When I have a problem, the first person I go to is my counselor. [Mary], yeah, she’s been here for a while. She knows all the resources that are available to me. She was the one that got me the tutor that I needed. I didn’t know that it was possible. And I thought . . . my whole perception of having a tutor was completely different from what it actually was. I thought it was something to be, like, embarrassed about. Like, “Oh, I go see the tutor.” But that was really helpful.

Similarly, John, a basketball player, stated:

Any time I have a problem, I just speak to the lady that’s in charge of our team. Her name is [Mary]. I just speak to her, tell her, uh, “[Mary], I need an accounting tutor.” She’ll make the call and let me know who’s available. So whatever you need, they have it for you.

Rashad, a former Kenwood University men’s basketball player, recalled the assistance he received from Mary and how she utilized former athletes to assist him in his studies:

[Mary] did a fantastic job. They tell you when there’s tutoring sessions here and university hall on Tuesday nights. Even they would use former athletes who are above me, who had maybe a similar major, or cause it’s such a small community with athletes. I had people who had like . . . because I did engineering . . . there was some other engineering student who was like a rower, and he was like two
classes above me. They hooked it up. They was like, “You know what? This
guy’s gonna be here for this time. He can help you out.”

When asked if he felt the academic assistance he was receiving was helping him toward
degree attainment, Dallas stated the following regarding Mary:

Yeah, I think so. I can only imagine how hard it would be if I had a counselor that
wasn’t as, you know, committed, or, you know, engaged in helping us, and
actually engaging in their job, and helping us get to where we wanna be in our
academic goals.

Mary talked about how she encouraged the basketball players to be self-sufficient and
seek outside academic assistance:

If there isn’t anything study specific that we have, we always encourage them to
go to office hours and talk to the professors because it’s such a small campus to
where professors know who they are and 9 times out of 10 they’re always willing
to help them understand, especially when they’re engaged and want to learn the
material. I’m not tryin’ to brag or boast, but I think the support system that we
have in place has helped them to be successful. We as an academic department
staff, we hold them responsible for if they miss meetings, if they don’t go to
tutoring, if they don’t come to study hall. We do hold them accountable, but it’s
hard for us to implement punishment or consequences when they don’t, so if the
coaches don’t back us and say, “Oh, you have to run, or you can’t play,” then
that’s kind of a barrier for us.

Similarly, Coach Williams expanded on the effort to promote self-sufficiency
among his players:
We want them to become self-sufficient. Now we have to help them sometimes obviously, but we aren’t doing work for them. We try to point them to the academic resource center. We have [Mary] . . . we have people that are on board and they know how important it is.

According to the Black male basketball players, the Academic Resource Center was available for all student-athletes with regard to their academic needs. Likewise, each athletic team at Kenwood University is afforded an athletic academic advisor to work with on a more personal level. Although teams at the university are afforded this luxury, it is still the individual athlete’s responsibility to utilize the resources that are afforded him or her. The Black male basketball players at Kenwood University recognized Mary as a viable resource and used her to their benefit. They all agreed that their academic success was partly due to the personal connection they had with Mary. Moreover, the players were bridging a relationship with someone who may be an asset to them in their futures.

The student-athlete-faculty relationship. According to Comeaux (2008), “With respect to environmental findings, Black athletes in the revenue-producing sports of men’s basketball and football academic success is to some extent contingent upon the specific nature of their interaction with faculty” (p. 8). Furthermore, in a previous study conducted by Comeaux (2005), he concluded that it is the “nature and quality of interactions between student athlete and faculty” (p. 8) that affects the outcome of the relationship. The Black male athletes in this study supported the findings of Comeaux (2005) with regard to the player-faculty relationships they had developed. Furthermore,
these relationships were contingent upon the athletes’ desire to achieve academic success.

George described his method for getting to know his professors:

For me, it’s not about just what they talk in class. To me, it’s developing like a personal relationship with them. You’re not going to like get along with every professor that you take class with, but, for the most part, like after I’m done with them and every semester, I still go to the office hours. I still go talk to them. Some of them, I share my personal experience with them, my family issues with them. So it’s not just me taking their class; it’s me developing that cordial friendship with them afterwards.

Rashad, a former Kenwood University men’s basketball player, described how he took the initiative of explaining to his professors how his athletic commitments may conflict with his academic schedule:

Literally, I remember one of the first days after I met with . . . ’cause, you know, they give you the syllabus after class, I would be all like, “Hey, my name is Rashad, and I play basketball. I just want to say I am going to have some conflicts with this.” And, honestly, like from day one, they were like, “You know what, I understand, I really understand, just you know, just come to me early, and we’ll work with you, we’ll make it work.” It honestly worked. My sophomore year, we had practice the same time I had a lab, and, honestly, I don’t think that I went to a lab, maybe once? I told the professor, “You know I’m gonna have practice?” and sometimes we were traveling. He was like, “It’s all right, you know all you gotta do is just talk to your group members, and you’re gonna end up write a paper afterwards instead of actually doing it.” That’s all I had to. Especially like when
we traveled, you know as long as I told them, you know, I’m traveling at this
time, on this date, can I either turn it in early, or can I turn it in during, or can I
turn it in afterwards? As long as I let them know at a reasonable time that I was
going to be missing something, they were like, you know, all right, we
understand. I don’t think they liked the fact that I missed, but they understood.

In a study conducted by Martin, Harrison, and Bukstein (2010), they examined 27
participants’ relationships with family members, faculty, and coaches and found that all
of the participants held healthy relationships with faculty members at their respective
campuses. Martin, Harrison, and Bukstein (2010) attributed these healthy relationships to
the participants’ “eagerness and zeal to learn new concepts, explore different
philosophies, and challenge themselves academically . . . they all expounded on the
importance of proving to professors that performing well in their classes was a priority”
(p. 94). Similarly, John, a current Kenwood University men’s basketball player,
expressed his concern to be seen not only as an athlete but as a student as well by his
professors:

I’ll say depends on the class. I try to at least go to their office hours once in a
while because at least that shows that you’re not just an athlete. That shows that
you’re really concerned about your grades . . . at least they know me, my
professors, at least they know my name, on a name basis, they notice me, and,
like, whenever I have to travel for games, I give them papers so they know when
I’m not here. And sometimes you’re lucky. Some of the professors like
basketball, so they come to your games, so they’re actually familiar with you.
You might go to class the next day; they’d be like, “Man, that was a tough loss,”
so stuff like that. So my professors, I would say I’m kind of close to them, but not too close at all, but just close enough where I go to their office hours, and they actually know me on name-to-name basis.

Similar to John, Kyle, also a member of the men’s basketball team, described how he expressed to his professors that he was here for more than athletics:

I’ve had a great experience with all my professors. I spoke to a lot of ’em personally, and let them know, “I’m here. I want you to know I’m here for not only the basketball aspect but also the academic aspect” . . . and they’ll say to me “Oh, I like your personality, I like how you talk, and I like how you came and approached me,” and then they’re always there. Here I just felt I’ve gained that . . . the ability to speak to people and just talk to ’em like, “Hey, if I need your help, I, like.” They’ll tell you what their office hours are, and you can come by appointment. Just email ’em and they’ll do anything to help you.

Tremaine, a former Kenwood University men’s basketball player, described his method of communication with his professors when he attended Kenwood University:

I learned a long time ago to shoot emails to my teachers, probably like that first day. I just want to give them a heads up like “Hey!” If I don’t talk to them after class my first day and let them know who I am, I play on the basketball team, I’ll shoot them an email. Basically, on like an assignment or something, say, “Hey, I just want to let you know.” If I’m having trouble with something, I shoot them an email. “I’m having trouble with this assignment. I want to know if you can help me.” They’re more than . . . they’re happy. “Oh, yes. Come in.” You know? But our relationship with our teachers is great.
However, Tremaine did not always practice this fluid level of communication with his professors. He recalled a conversation with his coach during his freshman year regarding his low academic achievement:

He was like, “Oh. Have you been to the office hours?” I was like, “No.” He asked me for my teachers’ names. This is about 5, 7 weeks in, and I didn’t even know what my teachers’ names were. He got mad and I had to do pushups because of that. But he told me that if I build a relationship with my teachers, they probably could help me out, give me some extra credit or something. He advised me to go to their office hours and see what I could do. I did that. I started going. I went to office hours and things like that. I did do a little better in my classes. After one of my classes . . . I had a class that was 3 hours long. I came to the teacher, I scheduled office hours with him, and I said, “I know I failed the midterm. I failed the paper.” I was like, “Can I do anything to pass?” He was like, “Basically, no, but if you come to my office hours.” He stayed. He told me, he said, “Look, come to office hours after class. We’ll talk about it. We’ll go over everything that happened in class.” It’s a 3-hour class. After every class . . . this is once a week . . . after every class, I would take notes and show him, “This is what I wrote down,” and we had to go over everything in the class, so I did that for another hour. I probably got out of there about 11. That was how that teacher helped me. Then the final came . . . I think I got like a C+, C in the class.

As previously mentioned, Comeaux (2005) asserted that the student-athlete-faculty relationship is somewhat contingent on the quality and type of relationship experienced by student and faculty. Not only did the Black male basketball players seek
to establish a rapport with their professors, they most often developed a long-lasting and trusting relationship. Jason, a member of the basketball team, recalled a sensitive academic issue he experienced:

When I first got here, I had an English poetry class. And, writing papers have always been my hardest thing, besides math. And, I guess I used too many. . . . It was plagiarism; I got in trouble for plagiarism. And I didn’t really know how serious it was. I didn’t know that I was actually doing it. I took somebody else’s idea, and he . . . instead of . . . “Aww he’s an athlete, trying to get by.” He called me, he called our advisor, we met with him, and he let me redo the whole paper, with him. So, that even helped me now. Now, I know the structure of papers. Which, I didn’t know before.

When asked about a specific time or incident when a professor encouraged him academically, George, a current Kenwood University men’s basketball player, recalled a time when he connected with a particular professor:

My sophomore year, I took an econ class. And, you know, I was kind of like struggling in his class and I went to his office hours and we kind of like talked a little bit and he kind of drafted a way that, you know, I can like get all the information that I need in order for me to do good in his class. And after following those procedures that he gave me, you know, I kind of like, you know, opened up with him where we talked and he explained to me, he, himself, is not like an American. He moved from India to America and the transition from India to America was like tough for him at the first stage. But he kind of like, you know, seeing me coming from Nigeria, he understood my own position as well.
So for me he was like, “I could like help guide you . . . find your path, and you move from there.” Since then like we kind of like developed that closeness.

John described how a professor encouraged him to get through a tough class:

I had a history teacher . . . because I hate history, and I don’t like reading; that’s why I do business because I just like numbers and stuff like that, but when it comes to like, OK, go read 40 pages, it’s like, it bugs me. With history, I talked to the lady. I let her know that if I have to read, I’ll read, I’ll pass your class if I have to do it by myself, I’ll do that, but I just don’t like reading. She was like, she understands, so she actually encouraged me, showed me how to go about it, told me to read it in segments. They really want to help you pass. The professors, if you need help and you’re sure you need help, they’ll give you all the help you need.

Similarly, Kyle recalled a professor complementing and encouraging him on his speaking abilities:

Uh, I had this class last year . . . this debate and communications class . . . and my teacher was ecstatic with the way that I delivered my speeches on whatever topic it may be. And so he actually had came and told me, like, “Hey, come to my office so we can talk about some debates here and there and then I can talk about how I can help you from a further standpoint.” And he actually came there and told me, “You did a great job. I love the way you speak. I love the way you do this.” And he just gave me a lot more help on how to better my . . . then told me, “All right, the next speech you have, type it up. Get it outlined. Let me see it first. I’ll go through it, and anything I can do that I see that is a problem, I’ll fix it.” . . .
Better my speeches, better everything. And he also helped me, saying, “I have another class next semester that you should take that I know you’ll be way better at.”

While interviewing Tim, a faculty member who teaches at Kenwood University, he described a relationship he established with one of the players and the importance of developing a connection:

My most recent experience is that midway through this last semester I was asked to help an African American basketball player with mathematics. It was very fascinating working with this person. It was almost like one of my most important things was to say, “You can really do this stuff.” That’s a whole another issue about how people get turned off to math when they don’t think they can do math. That’s way down in the third grade when those teachers are telling you, “Oh no, you can’t do this.” Anyway, so we got to working on it and we made a connection. I think connections are really important in this whole thing. Connections . . . in other words, it’s not just teacher/student or whoever it is. It’s actually trying to let that person know that you really do care about them and that’s extremely important I think in breaking through some of these barriers. This was very challenging because they were playing all of these games away from home. They had one game right before finals and another one right after finals. It was a little stressful for me and for them.

Research has shown that many Division-I Black male student-athletes, specifically those in the revenue-generating sports of basketball and football, often experience negative stereotypes and stigmas from professors that may hinder academic
achievement (Comeaux, 2008; Engstrom et al., 1995; Jolly, 2008; Perlmutter, 2003).

When asked if he had ever had a negative experience or had been discouraged by any of his professors, George stated:

I wouldn’t say discouraged me, but it’s more like a tough love. You know, sometimes you think you can do something and you try, try, try, and they see that you can’t really do it. They’re kind of like, “Maybe this is not something you should do.” I took a math class. I can’t remember the teacher’s name. And I just, for some reason, I just couldn’t understand the concept, you know, because I missed a lot of class. And even going for office hours didn’t really help. And she kind of like sat me down. She was like, “You know, you’ve missed a lot of class and there’s no way you’re going to pass this class if you’re missing all these classes and you can’t make up all the tests” because they don’t give like extra credit tests. So there’s no way I can make up. And she sat me down like, “It’s better for you to drop this class and do something else than you wasting your time trying to take this class again and again and again knowing your schedule.” I need you to like be there all the time.

Initially, I was mad that she said that, but after going back and reflecting upon what she said, I was like, “She actually wanted me to do good.” If it was somebody else, they would be like, “You know what? I don’t care. Just, the university is paying me. You know, I’m just offering the service. If you do good . . . you don’t do good, I don’t care.” But for her to like think of me and like give me that advice, you know, I was like, “I appreciate what she said.” The human side of me was like mad, but when I thought about it, I was like you know what, I
shouldn’t be mad at her. She was trying to help me out. And I still see her every day and when I see her, we smile, we talk, and, you know, that’s the way life is.

Jason, a current Kenwood University men’s basketball player, expressed his feelings concerning some professors who were not sympathetic to student-athletes’ needs:

Not every professor is big on talking. Some professors are really distant. If it’s a 50-minute class, they’re just in and out; they leave. They’re packing, while they’re saying the last word. A lot of the times it’s like that. Some of my teachers are really intimidating. I’ve had some teachers that I was afraid to talk to in office hours. You know, they don’t know how hard we work. We have to do their academic work on top of what we have to do with the rest of our school stuff and then our personal life. They don’t have to get up for the running and all that type of stuff. So they don’t know that balance.

Similarly, John expressed the same sentiments:

I’m a senior now, you know what I mean? So you will come across one or two, three professors that don’t care if you’re a basketball player or not. You know, they don’t care if you have to travel or not. They’ll let you know it’s your job, whatever you miss, you have to study it. But some will just let you know, “I don’t care,” you just have to man up and get the information. Like I can’t remember, but I think a teacher, one or two have penalized me for not even being there, and I gave them my signed basketball [sheet], or whatever, that I’m traveling. But I still, at the end of the day, got penalized for a couple absences, which . . . I dealt
with it because I passed the class. I would have wanted an A, but that was like, you know.

Although the Black male basketball players had had an overall good experience with developing positive relationships with faculty, Coach Williams recalled a time when a professor at Kenwood University stereotyped his players:

I did have one example 2 or 3 years ago. . . . an African American professor who didn’t want African American students in his class. I can’t name the person. I think he felt it was embarrassing to him because they were not up to snuff and that it reflected on him. It’s a problem that he had.

The Black male basketball players benefited from building relationships with faculty members at Kenwood University. Some of the players expressed their desire to be seen not only as an athlete but as a student striving for academic excellence as well. As a result, many of them initiated conversations with faculty members, informing them of their athletic schedules and their desire to achieve academic success. In addition, many of the players developed positive connections with faculty members that extended beyond the classroom. These connections have the potential to benefit the student-athletes’ professional and social future. Although most of the players found support within the Kenwood University faculty community, one player felt many of the professors were uninterested in supporting student-athletes.

The player-coach relationship. There are a few researchers who have examined the athlete-coach relationship in the college arena and its effect on the athletes’ overall performance (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). However, there is less research examining the athlete-coach relationship among Division-
I Black male student-athletes, specifically those who participate in revenue-generating sports, and how that relationship influences academic achievement. Part of this study examined the relationships between Kenwood University’s Black male basketball players and their coaches in order to explore the level of influence those relationships have on degree attainment. When asked about his relationship with the players on his team, Coach Malcolm responded with the following:

I think I have a great relationship with my players. I try to think that it’s, you know, a professional relationship that provides love and nurturing and friendship and like a big brother but enough of an old enough big brother that the lines are very clear when it comes to discipline. I think my players respect the fact that I hold them accountable for a lot of things. I think that for so long we have misconceived things. We think that young people want less discipline. They want less structure. They want less responsibility. And the reality is they want more. And the problem is when you give them less is when they have times where they act out, or rebel, or do things that test the limits, but when you give them more, you know, you find out how they respond more.

Jowett (2005) described a positive coach-athlete relationship as one that has “empathy, understanding, honesty, support, liking, acceptance, responsiveness, friendliness, cooperation, caring, respect and positive regard” (p. 412). Many of the Black male basketball players identified with some of these characteristics with regard to their relationship with their coaches. Tremaine a former Kenwood University men’s basketball player, recounted a time when the coaches supported him on a personal level:
I feel like my coaches really care about me as an individual person. You know, they show all of us a good amount of attention, but it’s like they care. You know? Yeah. Like, my mom passed away during my season, and they made sure things were taken care of and organized in a proper manner. So they really helped out for that. The coaches made sure I was taken care of like, emotionally. They just made me feel like I was their son. They are always checking up with us, seeing how class was, seeing how my family was. I love like . . . one thing that I used to always get happy was when I used to go home. My coaches talked to my grandmother. Naturally, it really brightened up her day. Like, “Oh, the coach talked to me.” You know? And they would do that. I’m like, “Hey!” I’d call them on purpose like, “Can you talk to my grandma?” because I knew that would make her happy.

John, a current Kenwood University men’s basketball player, talked about how he admired the work one of the coaches did in his home town:

The associated coach [Coach Malcom] that recruited me I was actually close to him. He had done some camps in Africa. So I met him out there . . . I like how he did . . . he actually used to always come back every year and try to just give back. I was invited to a couple camps in South Africa and I met him out there. And you know I like the way, I just like the way he handled things, you know I felt like I could trust him so I just went from there. And, uh, that was one of the main reasons why I chose [this university] because I felt like I could actually trust him.

Kyle, a current Kenwood University men’s basketball player, commented on the coaches being there under any circumstance for the players:
I think the coaches are always there for you no matter what. They always talk about it. They don’t care if you’re in trouble . . . if it’s five in the morning, you need someone to call, call me. I’ll come and get you. I’ll be mad at you, I’ll yell at you, but I’ll come and get you. Cuz that’s the type of people they are, and they’re real men like that.

Research has shown that academic support programs are vital for Black male athletes’ academic and personal growth (Singer, 2005). Likewise, coaches are often mentors and role models for many Division-I student-athletes, particularly Black male student-athletes. Oftentimes, coaches are called on to address personal issues among their players. Coach Malcolm recounted how his players came to him for a wide variety of things. He specifically recalled a time when he advised a player regarding his future endeavors:

Well, I think players, you know, will often come to me for a wide variety of things to just seeking general advice and general feedback, trying to balance things off, you know. I think one example is a young man had an opportunity to sign two contracts overseas after he finished his senior year and came to me and was really in a real dilemma, you know. Like, “I always wanted to play ball, I’ve always wanted to be a professional, and here’s my opportunity to be a professional, but I’m also sitting with this opportunity to move on to graduate school and to receive a scholarship to get that paid and the window on that may be closing a lot quicker if I chase a dream of going overseas and come back, that window of getting a continuing free education may be gone.” And, you know, he came to me with that advice and I told him very clearly what I thought that the
best thing you can invest in your life is your education and, if you got a chance, whether it’s 1 year or 2 years to get a master’s degree and still come out debt free from that, that it’s really a no brainer, that you got to do that, and if you do that and you finish at 24 or 25 and you still have the bug, you know, definitely, still a very tender age to continue to play professional basketball, if that’s what you want. But, for me, it’s about the education. So I think he really trusted that, and for our people to dream of making money playing the game and that opportunity comes, you know, I think, maybe, if he hadn’t had a different sounding board, you know, he may have just went over there and maybe lost an opportunity to further his education.

Although most of the players had developed a trusting relationship with their coaches, they admitted that the relationship was not always picture perfect. John expressed these sentiments by stating the following:

The head coach is pretty tough, and, sometimes I mean, it’s normal. Even with your parents, sometimes with me with the coach, sometimes I get mad. Like, you know? I mean, even with your parents it’s not everything they do that you feel is right. You know? So sometimes you are like, “Man, we didn’t have to do all that,” or “You didn’t have to go off like that,” or, you know, “I feel I should have played more in this game and that game.” So I mean, it’s just normal, but there is nothing that has been crazy, but sometimes I will tell you it’s not always smooth. That’s all. I’ll let you know that.

George, a current Kenwood University men’s basketball player, expressed a similar sentiment with regard to his own player-coach relationship:
I’m not afraid to say this; I’m a black sheep in every organization I go to because I always ask questions, “Why? Why am I doing this?” Sometimes it might rub people the wrong way and they’re like, “Who are you to question the system?” Because I don’t want to commit myself to something that at the end of the day I’ll have regrets, “Why did I do this? Why didn’t I stand up for myself?” It’s kind of like a bittersweet situation. Sometimes, you know, we get along. Sometimes we argue. I mean, like I said, one of the reasons why I came here is because, you know, I knew the coach back home; we’ve developed that relationship. No matter what I do, even if I bump heads with him, I’m still in safe hands.

Kyle also expressed his ups and downs with the coaching staff:

You always have your ups and downs with coaches, you know. They lose faith in you, or whether they don’t, just, don’t know what your capabilities are anymore. But then you just, that’s when you, well, personally, like I put it in your mindset like, OK, lemme show him what I’m capable, lemme show them I’m here for a reason. And that’s when you just double up and work harder.

Coach Williams somewhat corroborated the statements of his players; however, he assured himself that his actions were in the best interest of all of his players:

I’m sure they think I’m loud, profane, get on them excessively at times, but I think down deep they know that I care about each one of them. If they don’t, they lied to you. I guarantee it. The reality of it is for us to stay here and keep providing. I think we’re providing a valuable service because we’re trying to develop men and adults. We’re not trying to decode them, or sit on them, or be the police on them all the time. We want them to be respected because they are
respectful. We want them to be respected because they do go to class. We want them to be respected because they don’t think they’re better than the other students.

It is apparent from the players’ interviews that many of them had established an overall healthy and positive relationship with their coaches. Even when the relationship was tested, players still seemed to trust their coaches and had come to develop a respect for them.

In their 2010 study, Martin, Harrison, and Bukstein examined the social relationships of 27 participants with their coaches and found that all of the athletes felt they had no academic support from their coaches. Further, “the participants referred to high graduation rates as being all about the bonus” (Martin, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2010, p. 96). The majority of players in Martin, Harrison, and Bukstein’s (2010) study believed the coaches were driven to encourage their players to succeed academically purely for self-gain rather than a genuine concern for their players’ academic achievement.

Although many of the players on the Kenwood University men’s basketball team did not feel that the coaching staff encouraged the team to achieve academic success purely for the coaches’ self-gain, one player, however, had a contrasting opinion. Jason, a current Kenwood University men’s basketball player, described his relationship with his coaches in the following statement:

My relationship with the coaches has been distant, really distant. They don’t really care about anything but basketball and school. And only school because the basketball . . . if you’re not performing on the court, they don’t care about your grades. If you’re not performing in the class, they don’t care about you on the
court. Distant is definitely the word. We only talk when . . . they don’t need anything from me, but it’s when they need me to bring my effort the next day, they give me a call, but, no, we don’t have a personal relationship. You don’t know when they’re for you or against you. So I keep my distance and just play. Although Jason had a negative experience with his coaches, he admitted that he was partially responsible for the lack of communication and negative relationship due to his inability to trust others. He stated:

I’ve been screwed over a lot by a lot of adults. I’ve got to get over that. But I just see them as they’re all about business. Even my favorite coach last year left . . . I came in one day for our individual; he’s just not working us out. They didn’t even tell me. We talk every day in the gym. He works us out, but he couldn’t tell me that. I’ve been working on just trusting people, not being afraid of being let down because that’s been huge for me. I put up a wall for the past 5 years; I trust nobody at all. That affected my relationship with my coaches.

Although not as severe, Dallas, a current Kenwood University men’s basketball player, also had some reservations regarding the coaching staff. He stated:

Everybody has their own . . . and now I understand that people have their own coaching style so they say different things or do certain things to, you know, try to inspire the team to get those wins. You know, and I really didn’t understand why they played certain people, why we ran certain plays, why we play a certain way, why we practice a certain way. And like some coaches yell more than others . . . I really didn’t understand it. Now I realize that it’s all coaching. Everybody has their own approach to coaching, and they’re just trying to get wins. It’s about the
wins, and you’re gonna encourage and enthuse about books ’cause you need your players to be bigger than the books to be on the court so you can get those wins. I know sometimes they might say that, “Oh we love you and we want you to get this degree so 20 years down the road you’re banking.” I believe that, that’s true. But then there’s the whole self-preservation that it looks good on them also.

Despite his reservations, Dallas stated:

I trust them. I trust them ’cause we have the same, on the by, we have the same wants as wanting to win. How we get those wins, our philosophies may differ.

Although the player-coach relationship among the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University varied, most of them had a healthy and positive relationship with the coaching staff. However, this study further examined to what extent, if any, the player-coach relationship influences academic achievement, ultimately leading to degree attainment. The following excerpts are a testament to the emphasis that the coaches of Kenwood University placed on academics with regard to their players.

In his book Leading With the Heart: Coach K’s Successful Strategies for Basketball, Business, and Life (Krzyzewski & Phillips, 2010), Coach K expressed his views regarding academics versus athletics. He stated:

As teachers and coaches, we should remember that when mere winning is our only goal, we are doomed to disappointment and failure. But when our goal is to try to do our best, when our focus is on preparation and sacrifice and effort—instead of on numbers on the scoreboard—we will never lose. (p. 216)

Similarly, Coach Williams shared his thoughts on maintaining a good athletic program as well as academically motivating student-athletes:
We tell our players every single week, at least two or three times, “You’ve got to get your degree.” I would rather lose and have them all graduate than win and have one third of them graduate. Fortunately, I think you can do both; they aren’t mutually exclusive. You can do both. That doesn’t mean you’ve got to have one or the other . . . you’ve got to have bad graduation rates and a good team.

Coach Malcolm shared his own journey through the education process and often used that as a way to inspire his players:

I think when I got to college and realized that I had the freedom and I actually enjoyed the learning process . . . it was a combination of that and getting on the dean’s list the first semester as a scholarship athlete, and everyone made such a big deal over it, that I was kind of like, well, I can get this kind of attention like this. All I really got to do is really be myself and I’m enjoying learning what I’m learning and it just kinda caught on as a bug for me from there. My college teammates nicknamed me “The Professor.” Yeah, I think, my main approach is to get them [players] to understand. I think the more you try to force people to do something, without them understanding the critical reason why they are doing something, you know, the higher risk you have to fail. And so, for me, what I wanted to do was to have a paradigm switch to let them see that the world is not made of instant gratification, that the real foundation that you need to build for yourself is the education that you are going to get and what you are going to walk away from here.

Although the players’ perceptions differed with regard to the coaching staff’s genuine concern for their personal well-being, the majority of the players agreed that the
coaches placed a large emphasis on academic achievement. Messer (2006) asserted that coaches who serve as mentors and set high academic expectations can positively assist Black male athletes in persisting. Tremaine shared his thoughts regarding his coaches emphasizing the importance of education:

Yeah, my coach, he definitely drove me academically. He just kept being persistent, and just . . . he kept emphasizing the importance of each class and what passing each class would do for myself and also my family. He illustrated a lot of times that I would be the first one to do something. I was the first one to do something, which is go to college, but did I also want to be the first one to drop out or be the first one to graduate?

John elaborated on the academic expectations set by the coaching staff. He recounted the consistent graduation rate the basketball program had at Kenwood University:

They let you know, even while in practice, if you missed a study hall and we’re all about to run sprints, they let you know. “We have 15 seniors. We’ve graduated 15 so don’t think you’re gonna ruin this.” You know? I respect that because they hold that as a standard. So even you be like, man, I don’t want to be the first one to break this chain. Do you know what I mean? So they actually let you know, like, “We’ve had 17 seniors and all of those 17 have graduated during our time, and every single one of you seniors are going to graduate.” So I respect that.

George expressed similar sentiments:

“You don’t do good [academically], you don’t play. It’s plain and simple.” He said it to us he was like, “you know, if you go to [Kenwood University], you’re
going to graduate.” He said, “You’re not just coming here to play basketball. You’re coming here to get your degree as well. So in order for you to play basketball, if you don’t want to be denied the opportunity of playing basketball, you have to go to class and do what you have to do to graduate.”

Coach Malcolm continued to recall his own educational journey and used that as a teaching point for his players:

And I think that everyone that has ever attended college or been in school knows that there’s something more you could’ve done, there’s something more you could’ve learned, there’s something more you could’ve done probably on each and every day, whether it be studying a little bit more, paying attention more, asking another question in class so that you could really understand something that wasn’t clear to you, but you didn’t want to ask it. So, by letting them understand how valuable it can be to them and what wisdom they can get from people that have been successful in their own lives, then they’ll start to understand and make, what I call, “self-professed behavior change,” and say, not because coach says I need to learn this, but because I see the value in the education process, that’s why I’m doing this. Not because coach says you have to study all at this time, but because I don’t want to be the village idiot. That’s the kind of term I tell my guys all the time, “You’re not going to be the village idiot on my watch.” Now you may be mad, you may, you know, struggle and fight against the process, but my main goal is to let them understand the value of it so that they can participate in it themselves.
Although all of the players agreed that the coaches strongly emphasized academics and the importance of graduation among the Kenwood University basketball players, two of the players differed on their opinions regarding the coaches’ true intentions. Dallas shared his thoughts regarding the coaches’ reasons for promoting academic achievement:

They put a lot because it’s a, it’s a badge of honor. First, fundamentally, you need them to do good in class, so they excel on the court to get those wins. But on top of that, it’s like a badge of honor, if your kids are excelling in class, and they’re doing good on the court, so it’s like, oh, we’re the best of all the rest. We’ve got a student and we’ve got us a ballplayer. And it’s something they love to put out there, to put towards the [athletic director] and the [athletic director] loves to put towards visitors of the school and on their own websites or on telecast, it’s like, oh, they graduated 15 to 15 seniors, that’s impressive. And they’re Black and they’re athletes, so you know it’s double impressive.

Peter, the athletic director, somewhat corroborated Dallas’ claim by stating the following:

I think for our basketball stuff, they [the coaches] are very cognizant of the importance of making sure that their student-athletes do well academically for a number of reasons. One is it doesn’t do you any good to invest in a student-athlete for a year on a $55,000 scholarship and have that kid flunk out of it after a year or not do well academically. Two, there are scores that are posted. They’re called graduation success rate and APR, academic progress rate. Those are published and they can keep teams from participating in post play if they fall below certain
levels. We use it as an academic recruiting tool force because ours are very good and high. So it again sort of sets a standard for an incoming student about what their expectation is. So, for our coaches, they realize that, and it is a part of their evaluation at the end of the year. So it’s not just about winning or losing, but it’s about the academics as well.

Singer (2005) argued that the relationship between athletic personnel, university administration, and Black male student-athletes must be addressed in order to improve the low graduation rates of this particular population. He stated,

In many cases, however, forging this type of relationship has been difficult because often times the bottom line of academic support services (i.e., human development) is contrary to that of the coaching staff and athletic department (i.e., winning games and putting fans in the seats). (Singer, 2005, p. 380)

Similarly, Jason shared his own thoughts regarding the coaches’ approach to enforcing academic achievement:

The biggest thing they do is just check your class, see if you’re there. Even, you know, [the athletic director] he’s even come up to me in the summer, “You’re going to get a C right? Are you going to pass?” That’s all they really expect. So that’s all I give. Then I direct all the rest of my energy to basketball. The whole class period I’m just visioning myself like dunking from my half court, unrealistic stuff. I’m still getting over this hump growing up and thinking why am I learning this? My dad went to college and he can’t help me with this work when I bring it home. It goes in one ear and out the other. So, if they didn’t check my class, I don’t even know if I would go, only just to do tests and then enough to pass.
However, Peter, the athletic director, shared a slightly different view of the academic expectations among the basketball players at Kenwood University:

We tell them that our goal is to get you graduated in 4 years. If you get injured, or you have a redshirt year, where the coach decides to sit you down so that you have a year to develop, that 5th year, you’re working on a graduate degree. We’ve actually had students in their 5th year graduate with a master’s degree. So that’s part of the investment that we talked about in here. To get into a graduate program, you’ve got to have something usually around the 3.0 or better. We’re looking for people who want to excel in the classroom as much as they want to excel on the basketball court. If you get somebody who’s going to go ahead and give you a half-hearted effort on the basketball court, they’re going to give you a half-hearted effort in the classroom. Those kinds of personal traits and characteristics carry over into all facets of life. It’s that discipline and dedication that we want to see in all levels of a person’s life when they come here at [Kenwood University]. That’s how they maximize the collegiate experience. Otherwise, they’re cheating themselves.

When asked why he believed his coaches checked his classes if he thought they did not care about his academic well-being, Jason responded:

Probably to show that they care, but I don’t really feel like they do, not at all. They always say it will be practice day before road trip, we’re leaving day before we play, 2 days . . . they’ll say alright we are going to have study hall times on the buses and planes . . . Never. Maybe one time since I’ve been here . . . it’s all about
you and your stuff and what you do. Even the working out, here it’s 80% what you do on your own.

Although Jason disagreed with the coaching staff’s approach to emphasizing academics among their players, Coach Williams justified Jason’s claims by allowing his players a certain amount of autonomy:

We check classes. I had a really good player that 3 years ago we heard he was missing class. We don’t have time to run and check every class, I mean that’s maniacal. Plus, I believe in having the kind of people around that do the right thing when nobody’s watching . . . that you don’t have to be vigilant on everybody, on everything they do. Nevertheless, teachers will report back and then we check. I had a kid that was missing class and he had the audacity to be upset when we checked him. “No, no, wait a minute. You’ve got this in reverse; if you’d done what you were supposed to, we wouldn’t have to check you . . . and I’m going to check you again tomorrow. Ahead of time, I’m telling you, and we’re going to keep checking you until you show the kind of maturity that you can deal with this.”

Rashad, a former player, agreed that the coaches provided players with the academic tools but left it to them to strive for academic success:

They said “most likely maybe one of you is gonna play professional.” They had classroom checks. They put emphasis when they brought [Mary] along a bunch of times when we travelled and made an emphasis on it. They did a pretty good job, but it wasn’t like “you get these grades, or you’re done.” If you didn’t do well at school like they wanted you to, they gave you the opportunities, but left it to your
own discretion. There were some players who had 0.5 GPA, and when I say 0.5, I mean 0.5 GPAs on the team. They ended up being ineligible, but only after three semesters, or four semesters. They gave you the tools to do everything, but it wasn’t like they forced you to do it. They left it at your own discretion.

The players’ overall relationship with the coaching staff varied. Likewise, the coaches themselves had their own view on how their relationship stood with their players. Overall, whether the players believed that the coaches emphasized academics due to a genuine concern for their future well-being or merely as a means to glorify themselves and the status of the college, the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University were persisting partly due to the efforts of their coaches. It is important to note that while members of the coaching staff were consistently promoting the importance of academics among their Black male basketball players, one coach in particular, Coach Malcolm, used his ethnicity as a Black male and his educational accomplishments as a model for his players. Singer (2005) asserted that institutions should have personnel in leadership positions more culturally representative of Black male athletes. To that end, Coach Malcolm stated:

All we think about is these young men and how can we get them to be successful, move through, graduate, and show people that African American basketball players can be student-athletes and scholars as well. It’s like I tell guys all of the time, “I can’t sit here with three degrees, two undergraduate degrees and a juris doctorate, and tell you that education is not important. I see what it’s gotten me in my life and I see the foundation that it’s built for me in my life.” That’s how I look at it as I know that I can help them build a foundation that allows them to
go. I never would’ve graduated from law school, Summa Cum Laude. I never would’ve been the first African American president at [my university’s] law school because I would’ve been told academically this is who I am. I think you have to believe in the will and the spirit of a person to grow, learn, and develop. I think for us that we’ve been very successful with a group of kids that other people would term high risk. Yet, we bring them to a much higher academic system and show people that we can still graduate them because their test score or high school GPA is not a measurement of their self-worth.

**The student-athlete-nonathlete relationship.** Lastly, this study examined the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship and how that relationship potentially influences degree attainment. In a pivotal study conducted by P. A. Adler and Adler (1991), with a predominantly Black basketball team at a predominantly White institution, the researchers concluded that:

> When lower class and Black players attained success in their social lives on campus it was usually for one of three reasons. First, students of all kinds were captivated by them. Second, they were able to interact comfortably and make friends in a largely White environment. Third, lower class Black players’ social lives turned on whether they played a pivotal role on the team. (p. 109)

The following excerpts from the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University were seemingly similar to these findings. However, the players’ social experiences with nonathlete students varied. Tremaine recalled how he was perceived when he first arrived at the university:
I had never went to a school with a White person until I got here. I just felt like I didn’t belong here. People were like real standoffish. They could tell like I had a whole different demeanor about myself. It was hard for me to make friends here because I had no interest with other kids. They wanted to drink. I didn’t drink. I didn’t do nothing. I just felt like I didn’t belong here. I didn’t make many friends, so I would just go to the gym all day.

Rashad also described how he was perceived as a Black male basketball player:

I didn’t look like a basketball player, like I’m not tall. I don’t look like super jacked, or whatever. And you know none of my teammates took really any of the classes, they might have taken core classes with me. But they didn’t take any of my engineering classes so I don’t know if a lot of people initially knew I played. Especially my freshman year ’cause I hurt myself actually, so I didn’t even play; it’s not like people would’ve seen me play, you know. I was just like in a suit and tie and some slacks every game, pretty much. So I think people just looked at me as a regular student initially. But then it changed, if I was with my teammates you know, if I’m with people who are 6’7”, 6’8,” whatever, or African American, sorry if it’s stereotypical, but that’s how it usually is, and we were walking around . . . I don’t think it was a negative . . . I think people were more, especially when we were doing rather well, people were pretty happy, or had kind of like a positive outlook. But then, of course, there were people who kinda looked at it in a negative way, were like, “Oh, those are basketball players; they think they are entitled to everything.”

However, among the students in his major, Rashad was perceived differently:
In engineering, I think they just looked at me like a regular student. They might ask, you know, “That was a good game, congrats, or tough luck, tough game.” I don’t think they looked at me in any other way.

Simons et al. (2007) postulated that some Division-I student-athletes, Black male student-athletes in particular, often fall victim to being stigmatized and stereotyped. Those stigmas include receiving special amenities, being privileged, being admitted to the institution with lower test scores, and having an overall disinterest in academics (Simons et al., 2007). Although the following excerpts from the Kenwood University men’s basketball team do not fully corroborate the negative findings from past research, they do, however, share some similarities with regard to nonathlete students perceiving them as privileged. George elaborated on how the basketball players at Kenwood University are treated in comparison to other students on campus:

Being that [Kenwood University] is a small school and we don’t have a football team, basketball is like the big sport here and the male basketball team kind of brings like the school’s pride and glory. So any time they see someone from the basketball team, there’s this certain respect they give to you because you’re on the basketball team. I mean, sometimes it can get a little annoying, when people are like, “Oh, because you think you’re a basketball player, you think you can get away with everything.” But, yeah, I think, I kind of get this. A little bit more respect than everyone else.

John echoed these same sentiments:

There is no football team so basketball is pretty much the biggest sport here. I mean, you do get a lot of people that will be like, “Hey!” You just see them walk
in and go, “Hey! Nice game. Are you guys going to be good this year?” Like stuff they are not going to ask regular students because I mean, I’m not going to lie. There are some sports that regular students don’t even go to here, you know, but basketball you get more fans than any other sport. So I mean, it’s only right, if I’m more popular than you, people act nicer to me. I just saw Dwayne Wade today in the gym and I was like, I don’t ever get star struck and I see a lot of basketball players, but Dwayne Wade just walked by me and I was star struck. I’m like, “You don’t expect me to treat you the way I would treat Dwayne Wade.” It is what it is. I’m not saying I’m Dwayne Wade, but I’m just saying if I am more popular than you, I’ll get more love.

Dallas recalled how he was first perceived by nonathlete students:

I think I’m perceived as very lucky. I remember when I was a freshman, everybody would always have all these questions about what we do and how we do it, and . . . the only thing I have remembered the most, and even now I can see it in their eyes, how it was just, like, a little bit envious ’cause of the tuition thing. ’Cause they thought, like, the tuition is pretty high, so it was just, like, “You guys get to be here and learn the same thing I’m learning for free. That’s crazy. You guys are really lucky.”

Dallas admitted that nonathlete students were still envious of his current scholarship position:

It’s pretty similar, still. Like, “Oh, you guys are on scholarship.” And now that I’m a 5th year, it’s like they, my peers that have graduated, are like, “Oh, you’re still there?” And, like, I’m like, “Yeah.” And they’re like, “Oh, you’re still on
scholarship?” I’m like, “Yeah.” They’re like, “Man . . .” They’re envious. They wish they could continue learning at an institution like this and not have to pay as much.

George echoed the same sentiments:

Sometimes, if something happened, maybe we get early registration. And because we get early registration, and they [regular student] don’t have all their classes in time . . . they’ll be like, “because you’re on the basketball team, you just get first class everything.” You don’t want them to see you like that. It’s not something that . . . you didn’t make the system to be like that, it was just like when it was handed to you and you just go and then you go with the flow. And for them to like perceive you like that because you’re on the basketball team you think you can get whatever you want, you know . . . Sometimes, you know, it kind of like gets annoying and you don’t want them to perceive you like that.

Researchers agree that student-athletes spend an overwhelming amount of time practicing, conditioning, and traveling (Messer, 2006) in addition to attempting to balance their academic responsibilities. Moreover, Black male student-athletes, specifically those who participate in revenue-generating sports, may experience emotional pressures to succeed athletically (Ting, 2009). Often, nonathlete students fail to recognize the pressures placed on student-athletes in general and Black male student-athletes specifically. Kyle described the misconceptions he faced as a basketball player at Kenwood University:

A lot of people discriminate or don’t give people chances . . . are just, you know, like, “Oh, you got it set, you don’t have to pay, you don’t have to do anything,
just play your sport.” And I’m like “No, it’s a lot harder than that.” We have to play our sport. We still have things to do. We’re still up just as late as the people studying. You know, right after practice, right after a game, I have homework. I have stuff to do to prepare for the next day.

John also recalled facing some of the stereotypes (e.g., dumb jock) and preconceived notions that came with being a basketball player at a Division-I university. When asked how he was first perceived by his nonathlete peers, he stated:

Just a basketball player. Some people like to hang out with you. Some people might just hate you because they feel you just get more stuff than they do. Some people will see you as you’re just a basketball player . . . you are not smart. I’ve had a couple of people when they would find out my GPA is above a 3.0, they were like, “Oh, OK, you got an A in that class? Oh, wow!” I’m like, “What did you expect? You know, because I play basketball?” I’ll say that stereotype is strong. “You guys are basketball players . . . Oh, you guys get all you want . . . You guys get all the gear . . . You guys don’t like no schoolwork. You guys are like communication majors,” and stuff like that. I’ll just tell them that’s not the case with me.

In a rare account among the excerpts of what seemed to be racial stereotyping, Jason recalled an incident where he felt the basketball team was being perceived in a negative way:

Like today, walking to the locker room to get dressed, one of the White volleyball girls said something to one of my teammates about her bike being stolen. And she just kept saying, “You guys. You guys.” Like the whole basketball team was just
one person. You know what I’m saying? And my teammate said, “Stop putting us all in the same group. We’re all individuals. You know what I’m saying?” And that happens a lot up here with these regular students. Students who aren’t in athletics or anything like that, they just . . . especially when they pay to go here . . . it’s definitely a different type of relationship. I think that they saw me as definitely distant. I really didn’t go to anything except for basketball stuff. I was afraid, at first.

Despite the varied recollections regarding how the basketball players were perceived among their nonathlete peers, Coach Malcolm stated the following with regard to how he thought his players were perceived among the general student population:

On this campus, I think they’re, you know, because we don’t have football on this campus and men’s basketball’s the number one sport, I think they’re looked on very highly, you know, for their athletic prowess and how they represent the school and their ability to play Division I athletics. I think they’re looked at just as general students, part of the student body here, because we hold them to the same accountability of any other student that would be here in terms of the academic side of it. I think they’re received very well on this campus.

Although most of the Black male basketball players felt that they were perceived by their nonathlete peers as “privileged” or merely athletes rather than students, most of them stated that, overtime, they integrated with the nonathletes and the overall college experience at Kenwood University. Messer (2006) found that institutional social integration was vital in the persistence of Black male student-athletes. Tremaine described how he put forth the effort to socialize more with his peers:
I just started to branch out in order to be more involved, so to say. I started reaching out to my peers, so then I felt like, “Oh!” Like, basically when I started to go back home . . . like, I started like the more time I spent here, like the more I started to realize that this is kind of like a better situation for me. I need to like give it a chance . . . so I started to branch out more, but I started to branch out more to my peers. I used to ask them like, “Hey!” Did they want to study together? A lot of them was like, “Yeah, we’ll study with you.” And I started to go out with them, go to certain events on campus with them, like eat with them. I’d be hanging out with them and then I’d played video games, go to some parties with them. Just things like that. That’s what really like helped, you know, helped the situation. I would branch out more and give everything a chance. I was just accepted.

When asked if he felt that his relationship with his nonathlete peers contributed to his academic success, Tremaine stated:

I feel like if I didn’t do all of that, things would be a lot different. You know, I probably wouldn’t have passed as many classes [laughs] and things like that. I wouldn’t have had as many friends.

Likewise, Dallas echoed these same sentiments:

Junior year, fall semester, I had some of the toughest classes in the major. And I had them, like, back to back, because I had to take them all in one semester. Because the following semester, our schedule is more intense, and I would miss more classes. These are tough classes you definitely gotta be in class for, so . . . I took ’em, and they were tough so I had to get a tutor. She was a grade above me.
Like, I remember the next year, she ended up going to, like, Oxford to study, to continue studying economics. She was really helpful. She really connected the dots for me.

Jason described how he made more of an effort to connect on a social level with his nonathlete peers:

I’ve been a lot more open. I go to more free things around here. There’s comedy shows. I helped out with the church a little bit and got to know some of them people . . . just trying to show my face everywhere. It’s definitely a work in progress. I don’t know if there would be just a day of victory where I’m just looked at as just that athlete, that basketball player, but I don’t try to make myself that.

George talked about his current relationship with nonathlete students:

I can be social. I mean, for the most part, I don’t talk that much. But when I talk, like when I’m comfortable with somebody, I just go aloud, I talk, I get loud, I get wild, but for the most . . . because I try to like understand people before I start talking to them. Sometimes I walk around campus, I just see people randomly and like “Hey, what’s up?” And you know, so I’m kind of like, you know, out there. Likewise, John talked about his current relationship with nonathlete students:

I have a lot of friends that are cool that I just hang out with that are not basketball players, which are always cool. They are happy to see me whenever I see them. People that know me, they actually see that, you know what, he actually don’t play around with academics. But I mean, people that don’t know you they’ll still
have that perception of you that people have had since freshman year. “Oh, he’s just a basketball player. He’s lucky. He gets this and that.”

Most of the players acknowledged that acclimating to Kenwood University’s social environment proved to be difficult at the start. They expressed the difficulty of being perceived in a negative way while trying to live down certain stereotypes and stigmas. Many of the players expressed that they were afraid and felt unwanted by nonathlete students due to a difference in culture. However, most of the athletes were encouraged by their coaches and academic advisor to socialize more with their nonathlete peers in order to gain a more enriched college experience. As a result, many of the players began to attend social gatherings and reached out to their peers academically. However, the study did find a strong correlation between student-athlete -nonathlete relationships and academic achievement.

**Summary**

Overall, the findings suggested that the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University are dedicated toward investing in certain social relationships that can contribute toward their academic success. This academic success ultimately leads to degree attainment. Most of the players attributed part of their academic success to the fluid and positive relationship they had with their academic advisor. They stated that it was through this advisor that they were able to gain most of their academic resources. Furthermore, most of the players shared that they had established more than just an academic advisor-student-athlete relationship. In many instances, she had acted like a family member, offering many of the players sound advice with regard to their social, academic, and professional well-being.
Conversely, the athletes varied on their perceptions of the player-coach relationship. While some of the players described a coaching staff that desired and kept an open line of communication between the players and coaches, others described a coaching staff only interested in gaining self-recognition. Although many of the players differed on their opinions with regard to why the coaching staff placed an extreme emphasis on academics, it is difficult to refute that the coaches were partly responsible for influencing the players’ academic achievement.

As previously mentioned in the literature review, the student-athlete-faculty relationship is one of the most influential relationships with regard to Division-I Black male athletes and academic achievement. Furthermore, it is the specifics of the relationship, such as student-athletes and faculty members connecting on a personal level, that tend to positively influence Black male student-athletes to achieve more academically. In this study, all Black male basketball players except one had positive experiences with their professors. Although for some players communicating with their professors was a learned behavior (through their academic advisor and coaches) and for others it was more of a natural characteristic, the ability to build the student-athlete-faculty relationship was beneficial. Many of the players stated that they had established both long-lasting professional and personal connections with some of their professors. Moreover, the players reported to these professors assisted and encouraged them both academically and socially.

Lastly, the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University had a difficult time establishing relationships with their nonathlete peers. Although many of the players expressed being perceived as merely athletes rather than scholars by their peers, a
majority of the players quickly found a way to acclimate to the school’s culture. Many stated that they reached out to their fellow peers by joining study groups, going to public events, and simply initiating healthy conversation. It is important to note that some of the players were encouraged to socialize with their nonathlete peers by their coaches and academic advisors. Although most of the players, overall, had positive social relationships with their nonathlete peers, the findings indicated that their relationships with nonathletic peers did not have a strong influence on the players’ academic success.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the study. Next, findings from Chapter 4 are analyzed in the discussion section. After the discussion, implications for policy and practice are shared. Following implications for policy and practice, recommendations for future research are discussed. Lastly, the chapter ends with a concluding statement.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the problem. Division-I Black male basketball players remain the lowest persisting student-athletes among their athlete counterparts, with an overall graduation success rate of 68% (NCAA, 2014e). Despite many Division-I basketball teams having a large population of Black male players, institutions struggle to assist this population toward degree attainment. Moreover, many Division-I basketball programs struggle to collectively graduate their Black male players on a consistent basis.

Purpose statement. The purpose of this study was to examine the social relationships between Black male basketball players and certain institutional agents (e.g., faculty, athletic personnel, coaches, and nonathlete students) at Kenwood University. Moreover, this study aimed to understand to what extent, if any, these social relationships influence academic success among the players at Kenwood University.

Research question and subquestions. This grounded theory study examined the influence certain institutional agents have on Black male basketball players’ academic success. The following research question served as a guide to this study:
1. To what extent do the social relationships of African American male basketball student-athletes influence their academic success at a Division-I private university?

**Subquestions:**

1. How does the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship influence academic success?
2. How does the student-athlete-faculty relationship influence academic success?
3. How does the player-coach relationship influence academic success?
4. How does the student-athlete-nonathlete relationship influence academic success?

**Methodology.** A qualitative approach was utilized to examine if certain institutional agents influenced the academic success of Black male basketball players at Kenwood University. Through this qualitative approach, the Black male basketball players were able to give a firsthand account of their relationship with various institutional agents on campus and express how those relationships affected their academic achievement. Likewise, the remaining participants (e.g., academic advisor, athletic director, faculty member, and coaches) also had the opportunity through qualitative procedures to define the nature of their relationship with the basketball players and give an assessment on how that relationship influenced the athletes’ academic growth.

**Discussion**

In an attempt to examine the study’s research question and subquestions through a qualitative approach, four social relationships between institutional agents and Black male basketball players were explored in order to understand to what extent, if any, those
relationships influence academic success. Those relationships included student-athlete-academic advisor, student-athlete-faculty, student-athlete-coach, and student-athlete-nonathlete relationships. Of those relationships, the following were found to influence Black male basketball players’ academic success at Kenwood University: (a) the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship, (b) the student-athlete-coach relationship, and (c) the student-athlete-faculty relationship.

The student-athlete-academic advisor relationship. This study examined to what extent, if any, the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship influences academic success. The findings indicated that the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University had a healthy, positive relationship with their academic advisor, Mary, which extended far beyond the normal academic-advisee relationship. The players received the majority of their academic support and resources from their academic advisor. Her role as a liaison to professors, coaches, family members, and university personnel proved to be an invaluable asset to the Black male basketball players. The majority of the players expressed Mary’s importance, as she afforded them access to tutors, professors, and/or former athletes who specialized in certain academic areas. In addition, Mary often advised them on “life after basketball,” often encouraging them to draft long-term goals in preparation for “when the ball stops bouncing.” Mary stated,

That’s something that I’ve discussed with them. I hope it hits home for them, especially ones who have had injuries, maybe not career ending but season ending, where they had to sit out and really think about things. Hopefully, they take that to heart. Yeah, the ball will stop bouncing eventually.”
As a result, the players attributed a great deal of their academic success to their academic advisor, specifically the amount of time she dedicated to them with regard to issues outside of the classroom. George, a member of the men’s basketball team, stated, “Most of my support system is [Mary]. Every day I have issues to clarify; I just come to [Mary] and we kinda work things out and go from there.”

Although the findings showed that the academic advisor fulfilled her obligations of providing academic resources to her players, the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship was also genuine and nurturing. Many of the players sincerely trusted Mary with issues outside of the academic arena and often went to her for personal matters. This positive personal relationship helped to build a strong foundation for a positive student-athlete-academic advisor relationship, one that allowed the student-athlete to more readily receive and trust the academic advice given by the advisor.

Similarly, Mary was more than just an advisor to the players; she was someone who genuinely cared about their personal well-being, as if they were a part of her own family. Mary discussed the importance of entering relationships with student-athletes, specifically Black male athletes, with an optimistic point of view without stereotyping them. Mary stated, “You can’t stereotype people just because they’re Black or they’re an athlete.” Although Mary was careful not to stereotype the Black male athletes who came through her program, she did recognize that there was a trend among Black male basketball players with regard to academic achievement. Mary stated that given the high profile of the sport, basketball athletes may enter college with a lazy disposition, academically underprepared, or simply accustomed to having things done for them as a result of their athletic ability. In light of that, her mission was to instill in them a new
work ethic and an appreciation for academic achievement. As a result of her genuine investment in the players’ success both on and off the court, Mary was able to gain and sustain the trust of the Black male basketball players at Kenwood University, thus creating a positive student-athlete-advisor relationship that proved to be nurturing for both the players’ academic and personal well-being. This relationship influenced the players’ academic success, which may ultimately lead to degree attainment.

**The student-athlete-faculty relationship.** Next, this study examined to what extent, if any, the student-athlete-faculty relationship influences academic success. The findings showed that the majority of the Black male basketball players had positive student-athlete-faculty relationships. However, these positive relationships were developed primarily because of the players’ extremely proactive behavior with regard to bridging an open line of communication with their professors. The players also credited their proactive behavior to various academic support personnel, stating that they were encouraged by their academic advisor and coaches to make initial contact with professors at the start of each semester.

The majority of the basketball players voiced the importance of contacting their professors via email or in person in order to explain their status as a student-athlete and the frequency in which they would be missing classes due to athletic obligations. In addition, a couple of the players were adamant in expressing to their professors their intent to achieve academic success as opposed to being merely viewed as one who is only interested in athletic success. Many of the players believed this tenacious attitude toward academics only enhanced the relationship attempting to be established between player and professor. Dallas, a member of the men’s basketball team, stated,
It’s really on you and your mentality when you take a class at this university or at any. They don’t hold your hand through anything. They won’t come to you and just be like, “Oh, I see you’re having trouble. You should come by my office hours.” You really have to take the initiative.

The findings also showed that many of the Black male basketball players were encouraged academically by faculty members. This encouragement oftentimes led to deeper, more enriching student-athlete-faculty relationships. One player in particular, Kyle, was complimented by a professor on his speaking abilities during a speech class and was further encouraged by that same professor to explore other classes in that area. Recognizing that he had a talent for oral communication, Kyle developed a relationship with this professor based on academic circumstances that could positively influence his academic growth. Similarly, some of the players recounted events when they stayed with professors after hours in order to gain more understanding about their respective content area. In addition, some of the players stated that their professors were honest with them when they were achieving lower than their academic potential in the classroom. The majority of the players seemed appreciative of the honest rapport established with their professors.

As a result of establishing positive student-athlete-faculty relationships on campus, many of the players were able to capitalize off of those relationships and sustain them outside of the classroom. George, a member of the basketball team, connected with two of his professors on a personal level and was able to relate to them because of their similar immigrant experiences. He stated,
I took this class during the summer and, you know, when I went there, even after class, I stayed back for like extra tutoring, which he wasn’t supposed to do because it was like late at night. But he took that time, understanding the fact that I’m not an American, I’m from Africa, and he is from India as well.

George stated that he had since developed a long-lasting relationship with this particular professor partly due to them sharing this common bond.

Similarly, some of the players reported sharing personal information with some of their professors. Over time, the majority of the players trusted certain faculty members and had clearly made strong connections with them. Tim, a faculty member, also agreed that making connections with student-athletes was the key to influencing academic success. Tim stated, “Somehow you’ve got to convince them that they could do it and they need to do it.” The players also reported that they were treated like any other student at Kenwood University with regard to academics. Rashad, a former men’s basketball player, stated, “Actually, the thing is, that’s how they are with every student.” All of the players reported that no professors on campus treated basketball players, specifically Black male basketball players, as privileged. Kyle stated,

I had one teacher that was . . . his class was extremely tough, and I even went to see him, and he let me know, “You're really slippin’. I don’t know what you need to do, but you need to capture it now.”

Kyle was implying that even though he was part of the Kenwood University men’s basketball team, he was still held to the same level of academic rigor and responsibility as his nonathlete counterparts.
The findings also indicated that although most of the players did not perceive any negative student-athlete-faculty relationships, two of the players stated that some faculty members on campus simply had no sympathy for the players’ athletic schedule and overall athletic priorities that could interfere with academic obligations. As a result, these players saw this attitude by certain faculty as uncompromising. Nonetheless, one of these particular players had made connections with other faculty members on campus and seemed to be extremely academically driven and supported, thus finding a way to fulfill his academic obligations. However, the other player struggled to recall a specific connection made with any professor on campus.

Overall, the findings indicated a strong, positive relationship between Black male basketball players at Kenwood University and faculty members that strongly influenced academic success. Although the players often took initiative with regard to opening a clear line of communication between student and professor, faculty members often reciprocated the relationship and encouraged the players with regard to their academic achievement and overall academic well-being. This initiative was largely influenced by the players’ academic advisor. The players expressed times when Mary encouraged them to reach out to their professors in order to establish an academic rapport with faculty and staff. Players also established personal connections with certain professors, enhancing their overall academic effort and success. All but one player recounted an act of social investment in a faculty member with a positive return.

**The player-coach relationship.** This study also examined to what extent, if any, player-coach relationships influence academic success. Findings from this study indicated two different types of student-athlete-coach relationships—one on a personal level and
the other pertaining to academics. The two types of relationships were perceived differently by players. For example, there were varying accounts of personal relationships between the players and the coaches. While the majority of the players described relationships that were trusting, positive, and fruitful, many of these same players stated that the relationships with their coaches were often tested during times of adversity. One player admitted that although he trusted his coaches, he also vocally questioned every decision they made. Other players stated that although they felt the coaches had their best interests at heart, there were times when the players and coaches “bumped heads,” mostly over athletic related issues, comparing those times to family-type situations, for example, parents and children disagreeing with one another. One of the coaches corroborated this finding by admittedly being “loud and profane” and “getting on them excessively.” Despite his aggressive behavior, he believed that his players recognized his care for them.

However, two of the players described their personal relationships with the coaching staff as distant. One of the players believed that despite his efforts, the coaches were uninterested in his personal or academic well-being. He voiced concerns of noncommunication with the coaching staff and, as a result, kept his distance. However, it is important to note that this particular player did state that he believed the negative strain placed on his relationship with the coaching staff stemmed from a negative history with adults in general. He also stated the need and desire to rectify his inability to trust adults in order to improve his personal relationships.

Despite the varying perceptions regarding the coaching staff’s genuine investment in the players’ personal well-being, the findings indicated that the coaches at Kenwood University placed a strong emphasis on academic success among their players. However,
players varied in their opinions as to whether the coaching staff pushed academics as a result of their genuine care and concern, as men needing to establish “life after basketball,” or merely as “self-preservation” and to promote the university as a whole.

Despite varying opinions about their coaching staffs’ motives, all of the players, with the exception of one, reported that the coaching staff at Kenwood University held high expectations with regard to academic success for their players. The coaching staff encouraged players to develop relationships with their professors, stressed the importance of a positive player-academic advisor relationship, held players accountable for missed class time and other academic violations, emphasized the importance of being the first ones in their families to attain a degree, and continuously reiterated the successful graduation rate attained by the Kenwood University men’s basketball program. In addition, one particular coach recounted how he used his similarity of being a former African American male athlete to be a successful role model for his players. His current success as a former Division-I Black male basketball player with three degrees, including a law degree, served as an inspiration for his players.

Contrarily, one player believed that the coaching staff did not place much emphasis on academics whatsoever. He voiced his concerns regarding lack of follow through in terms of team study hall requirements and classroom checks. He also recounted an event when the athletic director asked him if he was going to earn a C in an academic class, the minimum needed to remain athletically eligible. As a result, this player admitted that he directed all of his energy to basketball, merely achieving the academic minimum in order to remain eligible.
Overall, this study’s findings indicated that although the personal relationships between players and coaches varied, the coaching staff’s overall emphasis on academics among their players influenced academic success. Many of the players reported that they wanted to keep up the tradition of the program’s successful graduation rate and, therefore, strove to attain academic success. In addition, the coaching staff implemented certain rules and regulations among the team that required academic responsibility. Perhaps most importantly, the players’ academic success was contingent upon their athletic eligibility. Lastly, having a role model, such as the players’ African American male coach who had significant educational success, was a great asset for the players. Some of the players referred to him as a mentor and were able to utilize his knowledge in order to increase their academic success.

**The student-athlete-nonathlete relationship.** Lastly, this study examined to what extent, if any, student-athlete-nonathlete relationships influence academic success. This study’s findings indicated that the Black male players on the Kenwood University men’s basketball team entered the university extremely apprehensive and somewhat guarded in terms of integrating with nonathlete students on campus. Some players reported being perceived as merely athletes rather than as intellects, while other players felt they shared no common interests with nonathlete students on campus. All of the players felt that many of their peers envied their status of being full scholarship students. The players reported that students used words such as “lucky” and “privileged” when referring to their ability as scholarship athletes to receive early registration for classes and tuition expenses paid. Despite their initial apprehensiveness, the players reported that they were encouraged by their academic advisor and coaches to establish relationships
with their nonathlete peers in order to enhance their academic experience and overall college experience.

In summary, the findings indicated that although the players eventually found a way to acclimate to their social climate at the university, their relationships with nonathlete students did not have a strong influence on their academic success. However, the majority of the players reported that positive student-athlete-nonathlete relationships contributed to their overall positive college experience.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this study indicated that the majority of the Black male basketball players’ relationships at Kenwood University were motivated by positive personal investment, trust, clear expectations, and a shared goal. Perhaps the most influential relationship reported by the players was the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship. Mary’s role, in relation to the Kenwood University Men’s Basketball Team extended far beyond that of an academic advisor. Mary served as a role model to the players on the team, more specifically the Black male players. Mary is a young Black woman who shared some of the same experiences as many of the players she works with. More specifically, Mary was a former Division-I basketball student-athlete and was able to advise the players from experience. In addition, Mary also filled the void of a “Mother Figure” for many of the players that were missing that connection needed to thrive in their personal lives. Lastly, Mary recalled how she genuinely cares for the student-athletes more than just as athletes; she cares for them as people.

Considering that this relationship was the foundation for most of the players’ academic and personal stability, Kenwood University’s basketball program would benefit
from continuing to provide its players, specifically its Black male basketball players, with an advisor who connects with them on a personal level. In addition, other Division-I institutions should consider the demographic makeup of their teams in order to provide them with the support both academically and personally.

The findings also indicated that the majority of the basketball players at Kenwood University made positive connections with faculty members on campus. Similar to the student-athlete-academic advisor relationship, the connections made with faculty members often involved a personal investment made by the players, which resulted in faculty members often personally connecting with the student-athletes. As a result, the student-athlete-faculty relationship was strengthened, resulting in a more enriched academic relationship. The findings also indicated that faculty members at Kenwood University and other Division-I universities should become mentors and advisors to Black male basketball players. Based on the findings, there is a need for Division-I institutions to create programs in which faculty members can assume academic and personal responsibility for Black male athletes in order to positively mentor and guide them. In addition, faculty members would benefit from professional development provided by university personnel and the NCAA organization with regard to policies and procedures pertaining to Division-I student-athletes, specifically Black male student-athletes’ academic success and personal and cultural needs.

The findings of this study also indicated that the majority of the players and coaches had positive relationships. Although this study found that the player-coach relationship influenced the academic success of the players as a result of the coaching staffs’ emphasis on education, one coach, in particular, served as a role model to the
majority of the players, connecting with them on a cultural level and representing the ultimate educational success. As a result, Division-I institutions should invest in hiring more basketball coaches who not only represent Black male players culturally but are academically accomplished as well. Black male athletes must have tangible examples of educated Black male role models in mentoring and coaching positions.

This study found that the positive relationships between the players at Kenwood University and their nonathlete peers had no strong influence on their academic success. However, research has shown that positive social college experiences among Black male athletes, specifically with their nonathlete peers, tend to influence academic success (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Harper, 2006; Messer, 2006). For this reason, it is recommended that Division-I universities develop programs where student-athletes, Black male athletes specifically, can become more involved at their institution outside of the classroom and with their nonathlete counterparts on both the academic and social levels. In addition, nonathlete students should be made aware of the multiple roles and responsibilities held by student-athletes. This would possibly ensure a greater appreciation for the student-athlete role on college campuses. Moreover, Black male student-athletes would benefit from participating in social events outside of the athletic realm. Although student-athletes are often required to complete community service to fulfill athletic obligations, it would benefit both student-athletes and their nonathlete peers to have an opportunity to collaborate in order for both populations to better understand one another.

Lastly, this study found that one player, in particular, seemed to be struggling more than his counterparts with regard to developing positive social relationships at Kenwood University. Admittedly, he voiced his mistrust of adults and reported a distant
relationship with his coaches, professors, and nonathlete peers. He expressed less interest in his academic endeavors and more of a focus on his athletic achievements. Given that some Black male basketball players may enter Division-I institutions with varying emotional issues, it would benefit these institutions to identify and provide players with socioemotional support. This support could aide in enhancing a player’s personal well-being, thus influencing his overall academic achievement.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

As a result of this qualitative study, several recommendations for future research have been made apparent. First, researchers should continue to examine the social relationships between Black male basketball players and various institutional agents and their effects on academic success. Second, further research is needed in order to examine the relationships between Black male basketball players and external influences, such as family members, outside mentors, and athletic supporters (e.g., athletic boosters), in order to measure their effects, if any, on players’ academic success. Third, it is recommended that this study be replicated among larger Division-I public institutions. Given that Kenwood University is a medium-sized private, predominantly White institution, it would benefit researchers to examine the social relationships of Black male student-athletes at big-time institutions in addition to historically Black colleges and universities. Lastly, it is recommended that the results from the Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire be taken into consideration and that further research determine whether players’ SAT scores, GPAs, and academic motivation are predictors of academic success.
Concluding Statement

There is a growing misconception that Black male athletes, specifically those who participate at the Division-I level, are genuinely more concerned with attaining athletic greatness than with assuring their academic future. However, perhaps for some of these athletes, pursuing their athletic goals has become somehow programmed into their DNA by family, community, the media, and even the institutions that they represent. As I allowed myself to become immersed in this study, I recognized the players’ desire to be looked upon as student-athletes rather than just jocks. In light of their goals, these players were cognizant of the resources and relationships that were needed to be successful. With the help of the support system afforded to them (e.g., academic advisor, professor, and coaching staff), the Black male basketball players were able to exhibit academically successful behaviors while still aggressively pursuing their athletic dreams. John, a member of the Kenwood University men’s basketball team, summed up the attitude of the Kenwood University men’s basketball players:

I have above a 3.0 and going pro that’s my number one thing. Me going pro and possibly making way more money than I’m gonna make when I go . . . it’s like you are having two options. If I get a job and it’s going to be a 9 to 5, $67,000 a year and I know that’s what my degree is giving me, I’m on track for that. So the question is, am I on track for my number one goal, which is if I can get that goal, I could buy my mom a house? I’m going for that one. I care about my academics, but my number one thing I would want is to go pro and make a lot of money for my family. That’s the number one thing. If I can’t do that, I have my plan B,
which is what I’m on track with. So it’s not like, “Oh, I can’t go pro. Dang!” Nah, if I can’t go pro, it’s whatever. I’m still on track. I’m going to go get the job.
References


Appendix A: Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire

Pre-College and Demographic Background Questionnaire

Please fill in the blanks or circle/check the most appropriate answer for the following questions. You may leave responses blank if you do not prefer to answer a question.

Preferred Pseudonym: _________________________________________________

1. Age ______________

2. Academic Year: Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  Senior +

3. Ethnic Identity:
   a. African American
   b. Black
   c. Biracial/Multiracial
   d. African
   e. West Indian/Caribbean
   f. Haitian
   g. Jamaican
   h. Other (please specify):_____________________________________________

4. Scholarship Status (please circle all that apply):
   a. Athletic Partial
   b. Athletic Full
   c. Academic Scholarships
      1. Loans
      2. Grants
      3. Work-Study

5. Athletic Eligibility Status:
   a. True Freshman
   b. Transfer
   c. Academically Eligible
   d. Academically Ineligible

6. Where is your place of birth (City/State/Country)? _______________________
   a. Description of Home Town (please circle one):
      Rural  Suburban  Urban
   b. Racial Makeup of High School (please circle one):
      1. Virtually All White (over 93%)
      2. Predominantly White (over 75% or more)
      3. Multiethnic (Inclusive of Blacks, Whites, Latinos, etc.)
      4. Predominantly Black (over 75% or more)
      5. Virtually All Black (over 93%)

7. High School GPA: _________________________

8. Highest SAT/ACT Score: ____________________
9. Family/Parent’s Income:
   a. Under $20,000
   b. $20,000-39,999
   c. $40,000-59,000
   d. $60,000-79,000
   e. $80,000-99,000
   f. $100,000-119,000
   g. $120,000-139,000
   h. Over $140,000

10. Parent’s Highest Education Attained (please circle):
    Mother:
        a. GED
        b. Some High School
        c. High School
        d. Some College
        e. Associate’s Degree
        f. Bachelor’s Degree
        g. Master’s Degree
        h. Graduate/Professional Degree
    Father:
        a. GED
        b. Some High School
        c. High School
        d. Some College
        e. Associate’s Degree
        f. Bachelor’s Degree
        g. Master’s Degree
        h. Graduate/Professional Degree

11. During High School did you play on your high school’s basketball team? ______________
    If yes, how many years did you play on your high school’s basketball team?
        a. All four years
        b. Three years
        c. Two years
        d. One year

12. Number of Siblings: ______________
    a. How many are attending or have attended college? ______________
    b. If your sibling attended college, do they play a sport in college? ______________ If yes, what sport? ______________
I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:

As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview intended to collect information for a research study that examines the influences that contribute to African American male basketball student-athletes’ degree attainment at a Division-I private university. During this interview, we will talk about your experiences as an African American male Division-I basketball student-athlete.

Confidentiality:

Any information you share with me today will be used for research purposes only. I will be aggregating results from all interviews and will not be attributing comments to any particular person. Personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name and school, will not be used to identify you in any report or document. Today’s interview session will be audio-recorded. I will also be taking notes of the conversation. The audio recordings may be transcribed for analysis. The audio recorded file, transcribed file, and notes will be stored securely in a password protected laptop of the principle investigator until completion of interview analysis. Upon completion of analysis, files and notes will be destroyed. Only the researchers identified in the Consent to Participate will have access to the files and notes. The files and notes will be accessed and analyzed in strict confidentiality. Finally your name or personally identifying information will not be used in any published or public reports.

Informed consent:

This consent notice summarizes some information from the Consent to Participate in Research and communicates the procedures, potential risks and discomforts for participants, potential benefits to participants, payment to participants for participation, participation and withdrawal, and rights of research participants. Procedures in this interview are limited to semi-structured personal interview sessions. Because the study
deals with issues that are sensitive, some interview questions may involve issues of a personal nature. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, findings from this study may provide insights into your role as a Division-I athlete and may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. Interview participants will not be paid for their participation in this interview. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audio recording be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without interview. You can halt your participation in the interview at any time. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this interview.

Identification and contact information of principal investigator:

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact Porsha Boyd at her mailing address: 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330 Mail code: 8265 in the care of Jody Dunlap. Alternatively, you may contact Porsha Boyd via telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or via email at XXXXXXX.XXXX@XXXXX.org.

Timing:

Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Interview Protocol

Student-Athletes

Main Questions:

Academic/Pre-College

1. How were you introduced to the sport of basketball?

2. How did you perform academically as a student in high school?
a. Were there any moments where your academic performance was hindered by basketball?

b. Were there any moments where your academic performance was supported by basketball?

**Academic and Athletic Motivation**

3. Can you tell me what brought you to this university?

4. What drives you to succeed academically in college?
   a. Give me an example
   b. Who do you attribute that success to?

5. What drives you to succeed as an athlete in college?
   a. Give me an example

6. What academic help is available for student-athletes?
   a. Who do you go to for academic help?
   b. What kind of academic help do you go to them for? Give me an example.
   c. Do you feel the academic assistance you receive is helping you overall in your classes?

7. How much of an emphasis do you feel the university puts on academic achievement for athletes?
   a. How does this affect how you pursue your academic goals?

**Student Athlete-Faculty Relationships**

8. What has been your experience with your professors?
   a. How much contact do you have with your professors?
b. Can you tell me about a time that any of them have helped or encouraged you academically? Or discouraged you? How did you respond?

**Student Athlete- Nonathlete Relationships**

9. How are student-athletes perceived by others on campus?
   a. Are basketball male student-athletes treated any different than other student-athletes on campus? If so explain.
   b. Do you feel it has anything to do with your race or athletic status? Elaborate.

**Coach- Athlete Relationships**

10. What has been your experience with your coaches?

11. How much of an emphasis do your coaches place on academics?

12. Some people say that Black male student-athletes are more concerned about “going pro” than they are about their academic achievement. What do you think about that statement? WHY DO SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT?
   a. How easy is it for you to stay focused on academics?
   b. What or who are those influences that keep you focused? That distracts you?

13. If you could change one thing about the academic assistance you receive here on campus what would it be?
I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:

As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview intended to collect information for a research study that examines the influences that contribute to African American male basketball student-athletes’ degree attainment at a Division-I private university. During this interview, we will talk about your experiences as an African American male Division-I basketball student-athlete.

Confidentiality:

Any information you share with me today will be used for research purposes only. I will be aggregating results from all interviews and will not be attributing comments to any particular person. Personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name and school, will not be used to identify you in any report or document. Today’s interview session will be audio-recorded. I will also be taking notes of the conversation. The audio recordings may be transcribed for analysis. The audio recorded file, transcribed file, and notes will be stored securely in a password protected laptop of the principle investigator until completion of interview analysis. Upon completion of analysis, files and notes will be destroyed. Only the researchers identified in the Consent to Participate will have access to the files and notes. The files and notes will be accessed and analyzed in strict confidentiality. Finally your name or personally identifying information will not be used in any published or public reports.

Informed consent:

This consent notice summarizes some information from the Consent to Participate in Research and communicates the procedures, potential risks and discomforts for participants, potential benefits to participants, payment to participants for participation, participation and withdrawal, and rights of research participants. Procedures in this interview are limited to semi-structured personal interview sessions. Because the study
deals with issues that are sensitive, some interview questions may involve issues of a personal nature. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, findings from this study may provide insights into your role as a Division-I athlete and may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. Interview participants will not be paid for their participation in this interview. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audio recording be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without interview. You can halt your participation in the interview at any time. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this interview.

Identification and contact information of principal investigator:

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact Porsha Boyd at her mailing address: 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330 Mail code: 8265 in the care of Jody Dunlap. Alternatively, you may contact Porsha Boyd via telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or via email at Xxxxxx.xxxxx@xxxxx.org.

Timing:

Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Interview Protocol

Coaches

1. How were you introduced to intercollegiate coaching?

2. What brought you to Kenwood University?

3. How do you think athletes (specifically male basketball players) are perceived on campus by students, faculty and staff and why?

4. How would you describe your style of leadership?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your players?
   
a. Do you feel that they trust you? Give me an example.

6. Were you yourself a student-athlete? What were you like as a student academically?

7. What do you think contributed to your academic success (or struggle)?

8. What is your attitude and approach toward academics with regards to your players?

9. Do you or your coaching staff work in conjunction with academic support staff to support your players? If so describe that relationship.

10. What are the consequences when a player does not meet the team’s academic expectations?

11. Can you tell me about a time when a player didn’t succeed academically at Kenwood University?
   
a. What could that student have done to better succeed academically?

   b. How did the coaching staff try to work with that student?

12. How much pressure, if any, does the university put on you to win basketball games as opposed to graduating players?

13. How much does Kenwood University as a whole support athletes’ academic development, specifically the men’s basketball team?
   
a. Can you give me an example of what that support looks like?

14. Which policies, practices and or programs at Kenwood University are most helpful to the athletes with regard to their academic success?
15. If any, what barriers exist at Kenwood University that may hinder their academic or overall social growth?

16. How much, if any, does your past academic experience influence the way you instill academics in your players?
Appendix D: Interview Protocol Athletic Support Staff

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE
BLACK MALE BASKETBALL/GRADUATION RATES
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:

As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview intended to collect information for a research study that examines the influences that contribute to African American male basketball student-athletes’ degree attainment at a Division-I private university. During this interview, we will talk about your experiences as an African American male Division-I basketball student-athlete.

Confidentiality:

Any information you share with me today will be used for research purposes only. I will be aggregating results from all interviews and will not be attributing comments to any particular person. Personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name and school, will not be used to identify you in any report or document. Today’s interview session will be audio-recorded. I will also be taking notes of the conversation. The audio recordings may be transcribed for analysis.

The audio recorded file, transcribed file, and notes will be stored securely in a password protected laptop of the principle investigator until completion of interview analysis. Upon completion of analysis, files and notes will be destroyed. Only the researchers identified in the Consent to Participate will have access to the files and notes. The files and notes will be accessed and analyzed in strict confidentiality. Finally your name or personally identifying information will not be used in any published or public reports.

Informed consent:

This consent notice summarizes some information from the Consent to Participate in Research and communicates the procedures, potential risks and discomforts for participants, potential benefits to participants, payment to participants for participation, participation and withdrawal, and rights of research participants. Procedures in this interview are limited to semi-structured personal interview sessions. Because the study
deals with issues that are sensitive, some interview questions may involve issues of a personal nature. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, findings from this study may provide insights into your role as a Division-I athlete and may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. Interview participants will not be paid for their participation in this interview. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audio recording be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without interview. You can halt your participation in the interview at any time. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this interview.

Identification and contact information of principal investigator:

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact Porsha Boyd at her mailing address: 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330 Mail code: 8265 in the care of Jody Dunlap. Alternatively, you may contact Porsha Boyd via telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or via email at XXXXXXX.XXXX@XXXXX.org.

Timing:

Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Interview Protocol

Athletic Support Staff

1. How did you become involved with the Kenwood University Men’s basketball program?

2. Have you worked academically with any other Division-I college men’s basketball team before? If yes, please share your experiences. If no, what motivated you to start?
3. Before working with this particular population, what was your impression of Division-I male basketball players?
   a. Does your impression of the players at Kenwood University differ from your overall perception of Division-I male basketball players?

4. Describe in detail your relationship with some of the male basketball student-athletes.
   a. What support do you offer them?
   b. Is it a give and take relationship?

5. With regards to academics, how invested are the basketball players in achieving success as opposed to simply maintaining academic eligibility for athletic purposes?
   a. Do they go above and beyond academically?
   b. When season is over, do they maintain academic success?

6. From your perception, what institutional support systems are instrumental in maintaining the male basketball student-athletes’ academic successes?
   a. Are those programs mandatory for all student athletes? Basketball team?

7. From your perception, what institutional barriers are currently in place that may be a hindrance to the male basketball student-athletes’ academic success?
   a. What support systems are in place to help student-athletes overcome these barriers?

8. What are your overall impressions of the coaches in terms of motivating their players academically?

9. How much of an emphasis do you perceive the coaches place on academics?
a. To what extent do you feel supported by the institution to work closely with the men’s team to ensure their academic success? What does that support look like?

b. Do you feel supported by the coaches? Give an example.

10. If you could make a suggestion to improve the academic success of the male basketball players at Kenwood University, what would it be?

   a. What stakeholders would be key in implementing that success?
Appendix E: Informed Consent Form Student-Athlete

California State University, Northridge
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT


You are asked to participate in “Athletic Cheers and Academic Assists: Examining The Roles of A Division-I Institution and Its Effects on African American Male Basketball Players’ Degree Attainment”, a research study conducted by Porsha Boyd as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are (1) an African American male basketball student-athlete, (2) attend a Division-I private university and (3) are willing to share your experiences as an African American male basketball student-athlete attending a Division-I private university. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher: Porsha Boyd
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
(XXX) XXX-XXXX
XXXXXXX.XXXX@XXXXX.org

Faculty Advisor: Jody Dunlap
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
Mail code: 8265
(818) 677-3078
Jody.dunlap@csun.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the institutional factors that contribute to the degree attainment of African American male basketball players at Kenwood University. Moreover, this study aims to understand, specifically, how these factors affect the academic success of African American male basketball players and to what extent Kenwood University influences academic achievement among this specific population.
SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if you…
- Are an African American male Division-I basketball player
- Attend or attended Kenwood University
- Are at least in your sophomore year and
- Meet the NCAA academic eligibility requirements

Time Commitment
This study will involve approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour of your time.

PROCEDURES
If you elect to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a 45-minute to 1 hour one-on-one interview.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
Given the purpose of the study on issues that may be personal, some interview questions could be more sensitive, including questions related to your experiences as a Division-I basketball student-athlete, specifically from an African American male perception, questions regarding your past home life, and personal academic issues you may deem private. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. Your participation will not affect your relationship with the basketball team. While there are limited potential risks, care and consideration will be taken during the interviewing process.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits
You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this study is to explore the institutional factors that contribute to the degree attainment of African American male basketball players at Kenwood University. As a participant in the one-on-one interview, you may develop a greater awareness of your role as an African American male basketball student-athlete, which may facilitate positive change for you personally

Benefits to Others or Society
In addition, findings from this study may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. The information gleaned from the study may promote best practices among NCAA Division-I basketball programs and institutions, alike. Lastly, it is hoped that this research will positively spark the ongoing debate of policies and procedures among African American male basketball student-athletes and their quest for academic equivalency among Division-I athletics.
ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation
Research participants will not be paid for their participation in this study.

Costs
There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss.
You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audiotape be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. Once your participation in interviews has concluded, you will have a period of 30 days (from the date of the final interview) to review digital audio files and/or transcriptions (whichever are available). There is no time frame to withdraw consent from participation in this study. If you withdraw consent after participation in the interviews has concluded, digital audio files and/or transcription files (whichever are available) from your interviews will be immediately destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.
Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. No identifying information will be used, and your institution and/or program will not be identified by name in any published report.

De-identifiable data will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection that only the researcher, Porsha Boyd, will have access to. All of the data will be collected through audio recording and will be transcribed. The transcribed data will also be secured on the password-protected computer located at the researcher’s place of residence and a backup external flash drive and will be discarded at the end of the study. The external flash drive will be secured in a locked filed cabinet located at the researcher’s place of residence.
The researcher, Porsha Boyd will have access to the study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies participants will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about the participant.

**Data Storage**
During the course of the project, participants may be audio recorded. Your initials here ________ signify your consent to be audio recorded. You will be audio recorded for reasons related to data analysis and interpretation. During the audio recording, you may decline to be recorded and have the recorder turned off at any time during the interview. Digital audio recordings (i.e., files) will be stored on the laptop (password protected of the principal investigator. De-identified records in the form of transcriptions (i.e., files) will be maintained on the laptop (password protected) of the principal investigator for the period through which findings from the study will be disseminated. After this period, digital audio files and transcription files will be destroyed.

**Data Access**
The researcher alone will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

**Data Retention**
- The researcher intends to keep the research data for approximately 1 year and then it will be destroyed.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**
You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.
I agree to participate in the study.

___________________________________________________  ____________________
Participant Signature  Date

___________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

___________________________________________________  ____________________
Researcher Signature  Date
Appendix F: Informed Consent Form Coaches

California State University, Northridge
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT


You are asked to participate in “Athletic Cheers and Academic Assists: Examining The Roles of A Division-I Institution and Its Effects on African American Male Basketball Players’ Degree Attainment”, a research study conducted by Porsha Boyd as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are (1) a Division-I male basketball coach at Kenwood University (2) have worked with the student-athletes for at least two years and (3) are willing to share your experiences and interactions with the student-athletes both on and off the court. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

RESEARCH TEAM
Researcher:
Porsha Boyd
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
(XXX) XXX-XXXX
XXXXXXX.XXXX@XXXXX.org

Faculty Advisor:
Jody Dunlap
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
Mail code: 8265
(818) 677-3078
Jody.dunlap@csun.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY
The purpose of this study is to explore the institutional factors that contribute to the degree attainment of African American male basketball players at Kenwood University. Moreover, this study aims to understand, specifically, how these factors affect the academic success of African American male basketball players and to what extent Kenwood University influences academic achievement among this specific population.
SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if you...
- Are a Division-I male basketball coach at Kenwood University
- Have coached the players for at least two years

Time Commitment

This study will involve approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour of your time.

PROCEDURES

If you elect to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a 45-minute to 1 hour one-on-one interview.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Given the purpose of the study on issues that may be personal, some interview questions could be more sensitive, including questions related to your experiences as a Division-I basketball coach, specifically working with African American male student-athletes, questions regarding their past home life, and personal academic issues they may deem private. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. Your participation will not affect your relationship with school employment. While there are limited potential risks, care and consideration will be taken during the interviewing process.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits
You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this study is to explore the institutional factors that contribute to the degree attainment of African American male basketball players at Kenwood University. As a participant in the one-on-one interview, you may develop a greater awareness of your role as a Division-I male basketball coach, which may facilitate positive change for you personally.

Benefits to Others or Society
In addition, findings from this study may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. The information gleaned from the study may promote best practices among NCAA Division-I basketball programs and institutions, alike. Lastly, it is hoped that this research will positively spark the ongoing debate of policies and procedures among African American male basketball student-athletes and their quest for academic equivalency among Division-I athletics.
ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation
Research participants will not be paid for their participation in this study.

Costs
There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss.
You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audiotape be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. Once your participation in interviews has concluded, you will have a period of 30 days (from the date of the final interview) to review digital audio files and/or transcriptions (whichever are available). There is no time frame to withdraw consent from participation in this study. If you withdraw consent after participation in the interviews has concluded, digital audio files and/or transcription files (whichever are available) from your interviews will be immediately destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.
Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. No identifying information will be used, and your institution and/or program will not be identified by name in any published report.

All study records will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection that only the researcher, Porsha Boyd, will have access to. All of the data will be collected through audio recording and will be transcribed. The transcribed data will also be secured on the password-protected computer located at the researcher’s place of residence and a backup external flash drive and will be discarded at the end of the study. The external flash drive will be secured in a locked filed cabinet located at the researcher’s place of residence.
The researcher, Porsha Boyd will have access to the study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies participants will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about the participant.

**Data Storage**
During the course of the project, participants may be audio recorded. Your initials here ________ signify your consent to be audio recorded. You will be audio recorded for reasons related to data analysis and interpretation. During the audio recording, you may decline to be recorded and have the recorder turned off at any time during the interview. Digital audio recordings (i.e., files) will be stored on the laptop (password protected of the principal investigator. De-identified records in the form of transcriptions (i.e., files) will be maintained on the laptop (password protected) of the principal investigator for the period through which findings from the study will be disseminated. After this period, digital audio files and transcription files will be destroyed.

**Data Access**
The researcher alone will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

**Data Retention**
- The researcher intends to keep the research data for approximately 1 year and then it will be destroyed.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**
If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**
You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.
I agree to participate in the study.

___________________________________________________  ____________________
Participant Signature  Date

___________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

___________________________________________________  ____________________
Researcher Signature  Date
California State University, Northridge
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT


You are asked to participate in “Athletic Cheers and Academic Assists: Examining The Roles of A Division-I Institution and Its Effects on African American Male Basketball Players’ Degree Attainment”, a research study conducted by Porsha Boyd as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are (1) a member of the athletic academic support staff (2) support the Kenwood University Men’s Basketball Team in their academic endeavors and (3) are willing to share your experiences as faculty or staff with regards to your interaction with the student-athletes in an academic setting. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:
Porsha Boyd
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
(XXX) XXX-XXXX
XXXXXXX.XXXX@XXXXX.org

Faculty Advisor:
Jody Dunlap
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
Mail code: 8265
(818) 677-3078
Jody.dunlap@csun.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the institutional factors that contribute to the degree attainment of African American male basketball players at Kenwood University. Moreover, this study aims to understand, specifically, how these factors affect the academic success of African American male basketball players and to what extent Kenwood University influences academic achievement among this specific population.
SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if you...
- Are a member of the athletic academic support staff
- Support the Kenwood University Men’s Basketball Team in their academic endeavors
- Have been working with members of the Kenwood University Basketball Team for at least two years.

Time Commitment
This study will involve approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour of your time.

PROCEDURES
If you elect to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a 45-minute to 1 hour one-on-one interview.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
Given the purpose of the study on issues that may be personal, some interview questions could be more sensitive, including questions related to your experiences as a faculty or staff member supporting a Division-I basketball student-athlete, specifically working with African American male student-athletes, questions regarding their academic history and capabilities, and personal academic issues you may deem private. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. Your participation will not affect your relationship with school employment. While there are limited potential risks, care and consideration will be taken during the interviewing process.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits
You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this study is to explore the institutional factors that contribute to the degree attainment of African American male basketball players at Kenwood University. As a participant in the one-on-one interview, you may develop a greater awareness of your role as a faculty or staff support member to Division-I male basketball student-athletes, which may facilitate positive change for you personally.
Benefits to Others or Society
In addition, findings from this study may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. The information gleaned from the study may promote best practices among NCAA Division-I basketball programs and institutions, alike. Lastly, it is hoped that this research will positively spark the ongoing debate of policies and procedures among African American male basketball student-athletes and their quest for academic equivalency among Division-I athletics.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation
Research participants will not be paid for their participation in this study.

Costs
There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss.

You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audiotape be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. Once your participation in interviews has concluded, you will have a period of 30 days (from the date of the final interview) to review digital audio files and/or transcriptions (whichever are available). There is no time frame to withdraw consent from participation in this study. If you withdraw consent after participation in the interviews has concluded, digital audio files and/or transcription files (whichever are available) from your interviews will be immediately destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. No identifying information will be used, and your institution and/or program will not be identified by name in any published report.
All study records will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection that only the researcher, Porsha Boyd, will have access to. All of the data will be collected through audio recording and will be transcribed. The transcribed data will also be secured on the password-protected computer located at the researcher’s place of residence and a backup external flash drive and will be discarded at the end of the study. The external flash drive will be secured in a locked file cabinet located at the researcher’s place of residence.

The researcher, Porsha Boyd will have access to the study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies participants will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about the participant.

Data Storage
During the course of the project, participants may be audio recorded. Your initials here _______ signify your consent to be audio recorded. You will be audio recorded for reasons related to data analysis and interpretation. During the audio recording, you may decline to be recorded and have the recorder turned off at any time during the interview. Digital audio recordings (i.e., files) will be stored on the laptop (password protected of the principal investigator. De-identified records in the form of transcriptions (i.e., files) will be maintained on the laptop (password protected) of the principal investigator for the period through which findings from the study will be disseminated. After this period, digital audio files and transcription files will be destroyed.

Data Access
The researcher alone will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention
- The researcher intends to keep the research data for approximately 1 year and then it will be destroyed.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

191
VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT
You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

___________________________________________________  ______________________
Participant Signature  Date

___________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

___________________________________________________  ______________________
Researcher Signature  Date