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Let's be Blunt: Substance Use Among Black Male Student-Athletes

Elizabeth Griffin

University of Washington - Tacoma Campus, egriff06@uw.edu

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Let's be Blunt:

Substance Use Among Black Male Student-Athletes

Elizabeth Griffin

Spring 2019

University of Washington, Tacoma

Supervisory Committee:

Christopher Knaus, Ph.D., Chair

Jennifer Hoffman, Ph.D., Member

Martin Smith, Ph.D., Member

Abstract

Extensive research has been conducted on substance use within college athletics. However, a gap in the literature exists that does not specifically explore substance use among Black male student-athletes. This qualitative study seeks to answer the following research questions: (a) What do Black male student-athletes identify as reasons for engaging in substance use? (b) Do Black male student-athletes see substance use as a problem? If so, what supports would they envision needing to change their behavior? (c) Is there a perceived and/or experienced relationship between substance use and exploitation of Black male student-athletes? Ten Division I current and former Black male student-athletes were individually interviewed. Participants revealed the concept of athlete-student, marijuana use, lack of emotional and mental support, and the Black male student-athlete experience's role in substance use.

Keywords: Black male, student-athlete, substance use, marijuana, racism, coping

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Let's be Blunt

Colin Kaepernick. Michael Bennett. LeBron James. Martellus Bennett. National Anthem protests. "I am more than an athlete." These are a few names and movements who in recent years, have brought attention to racism, inequities, injustice, and substance use within professional athletics. However, less popular attention has been given to the same issues within college athletics. To shed some light on these current issues within college athletics, Hughes (2018) compares college sports to Jordan Peele's Oscar-nominated and Academy Award winning film *Get Out* (Peele, 2017). "...young men of superior athleticism, a disproportionate number of whom are Black and poor, will be treated like royalty by colleges and universities. But were it not for their athletic talent, they would be invisible to those same institutions" (Hughes, np, 2018).

This first-class treatment of Black male student-athletes occurs because their physical labor and talents secure winning records for collegiate athletic programs, provide million-dollar salaries for their coaches, and support the billion-dollar industry that benefits athletic departments, college administrators, alumni donors and many other university elites (Hughes, 2018). Furthermore, many of these Black male student-athletes will benefit these college systems while being significantly underrepresented in the student body's overall racial makeup (Hughes, 2018). "They will be perceived as athletes on the campus rather than students. It will be, sadly, a university's ownership of their body that ensures these young men access to the institution, not their intellectual potential" (Hughes, np 2018).

To provide a background, the plot of *Get Out* (Peele, 2017) centers around a young Black man named Chris. Chris' White girlfriend assists in his kidnapping, which is part of a bigger plan which involves transplanting the brains of white people into young, strong, Black bodies

(Hughes, 2018). Hughes (2018) goes on to explain how Peele's (2017) challenge of the use of Black bodies can also be applied to the college sports system. The world of college sports is one in which wealthy and predominantly white coaches are always searching for young, talented and athletic bodies for their programs. Once that talent has been attained, the larger college community will then live vicariously through the hardships of those athletes, "the sacrificial lambs of the religion of college football" (Hughes, np, 2018).

Another direct reference to college sports occurs at the end of the movie when Chris' girlfriend is searching for more victims on her laptop and uses the search phrase "top NCAA prospects." One final movie reference that relates to this study and college sports is "the sunken place" (Peele, 2017). Hughes (2018) stated that many college athletic programs resemble "the sunken place," which is a place in the film where the victim's voice is silenced and their consciousness is disabled while their body is used to benefit White racists who are infatuated with Black bodies and athleticism.

Substance use among Black male student-athletes can be viewed as another dimension of "the sunken place." Student athlete substance use has been and continues to be a well-known and controversial issue within higher education. Green, Uryasz, Petr, and Bray (2001) went as far as stating, "The majority of student-athletes engage in substance use, especially alcohol" (p. 51). Yusko, Buckman, White, and Pandina (2008) also state, "College student-athletes consistently report riskier patterns of alcohol use compared to their non-athlete peers" (p. 1546). In a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) study of substance use habits of college student-athletes, alcohol was the most widely used substance at 80.5%, followed by marijuana at 21.9% (2014). It is important to note that there is a difference between substance use and the diagnosis of substance use disorder, as outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5). These statistics do not mean that these student-athletes necessarily meet criteria for a substance use disorder. The increasing legalization of marijuana and the fact that 21-year old student-athletes are legally able to drink should also be taken into consideration. However, while many students can now use marijuana and alcohol at 21-years of age, for most students, the majority of their collegiate career is spent while both activities are illegal. Due to this illegal component, students who smoke marijuana and drink alcohol underage are still engaging in risky behavior regardless of the riskiness of the substance use itself.

Student athletes use a variety of substances for numerous reasons, and the risk for substance use related problems may be intensified by the unique social environments, heightened physical and psychological stress, and greater time constraints experienced by student-athletes as a result of their dual status as an athlete and a student (Yusko et al., 2008). The core problem is that college athletes are faced with so much pressure from their higher education institutions, themselves, their families, and their peers to perform at a certain level, that these students resort to substance use to cope with the stress and to enhance their performance (Yusko et al., 2008). As clarified in the literature review, while there have been many prior studies on student-athlete substance use, one specific area that represents a gap in the literature and research is substance use among Black male student-athletes.

Purpose of the Study

For the purpose of this study, substances include the main drug categories (stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens, dissociatives, opioids, inhalants, cannabis, and designer drugs) as well as performance enhancing substances (PES). Hainline, Bell, and Wilfert (nd) report that the prevalence of all of these mood-altering substances on college campuses has been researched by campus prevention professionals for decades and that this continued effort is important to evoke

varying degrees of effort and success to reduce use and negative consequences. Furthermore, continued research on student-athlete substance use is necessary to define more comprehensive and evidence-informed approaches to address these issues, including population-based environmental management, large screening events, and personalized assessment, feedback and intervention (Hainline et al., nd). College students, including student-athletes, are subject to the college effect, in which heavy and frequent alcohol use increases when students arrive on campus, buying into the cultural myth that campus life is about alcohol and drug use. Such beliefs result in an increase in negative impact on academic success, increased risk of sexual assault and other interpersonal violence, and other negative consequences (Hainline et al., nd).

The focus of this study is on Black male student-athletes, specifically basketball and football, at Division I universities due to the following reasons: (a) men's basketball and football are the highest revenue generating NCAA sports which leads to increased exploitation of the student-athletes; (b) Black male student-athletes make-up the majority of these teams; (c) the Black male student-athlete experience is much different than their female counterparts and male counterparts of other races because they are more likely to believe they are going to go professional and have heightened levels of pressure from their peers, families, coaches, institutions, and themselves; (d) Division I is the highest level of competition which also leads to heightened pressure and stress; and (e) in addition to the isolation that many student-athletes often experience, Black male student-athletes must also deal with negative racial, gender, and athletic stereotypes (Beamon, 2008; Beamon, 2014; Harper, 2016).

This study seeks to answer the following research questions: (a) What do Black male student-athletes identify as reasons for engaging in substance use? (b) Do Black male student-athletes see substance use as a problem? If so, what supports would they envision needing to

change their behavior? (c) Is there a perceived and/or experienced relationship between substance use and exploitation of Black male student-athletes?

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and athletic identity foreclosure (Beamon, 2012) guide this study. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explain that CRT is grounded in a compilation of activists and scholars with the shared interest in transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power. “Critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). CRT first came to fruition in the 1970s when a collection of activists, lawyers, and legal scholars realized that advancements of the 1960s civil rights era had not only stalled but were moving backwards. Some of the key figures began working to develop new theories and strategies and their group continued to grow. In the summer of 1989, the group held its first workshop outside Madison, Wisconsin (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

When studying race and sport, CRT can help “highlight systems of oppression and negative power relations in sport” (Beamon, 2014; Hylton, 2009, p. 30). This study will specifically utilize the CRT tenets racism as normalcy and counter-storytelling. Beamon (2014) explains the tenet of racism as normalcy: “Racism is a salient and normal experience that impacts the life chances of racial groups; ‘the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country.’” (p. 123; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also state that racism is difficult to address because it is not acknowledged. The participants of this study ultimately explain their personal experiences

with everyday racism as Black male student-athletes, acknowledging the realities of racism within athletics.

The tenet of counter-storytelling supports the qualitative methodology of in-depth ethnographic interviews chosen for this study. “The recipients of racism have the authoritative voice to describe the experience of racism; ‘voice-of-color’ thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know.” (Beamon, 2014, p. 123). Counter-storytelling is defined as, “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). This study thus provides Black male student-athletes an opportunity to be heard and share their stories that counter the mainstream narrative of Black athletes that is told for them.

CRT provides a lens to examine the impact of athletic identity foreclosure on Black male student-athletes. Athletic identity foreclosure is grounded in the historical work of George Herbert Mead (1934) and Erik Erikson (1956), and DuBois adds a race-centric lens specific to Black identity. Mead (1934) believed that a person develops their identity through a dynamic process of social interaction and reflexivity. Prior to Mead, DuBois (1903) discussed the Black American identity. Both DuBois and Mead stated that identity is formed through internal and external influences. However, DuBois (1903) explained that the Black American identity develops in a unique way and he positioned his analysis in the context of the Black American. The Black American sees them self as they truly are, but also sees them self how others see them. While DuBois and Mead had similar viewpoints, DuBois incorporated the influences of race and power on identity.

Erikson (1956) argued that identity foreclosure occurs when an individual settles on one identity and closes off further exploration of other identities. Erikson (1956) also believed that identity foreclosure mainly occurs in order to resolve or avoid role conflict. One example of athletic identity foreclosure occurs when Black males overemphasize the role of athletics and develop an athletic identity over other identities such as sociology student, brother, son, leader, entrepreneur, artist, significant other, from a specific community, and countless other identities unrelated to athletics. Reflective of the importance of this study, Black males in football and basketball have been found to have the highest rates of identity foreclosure (Beamon, 2012). Black males are faced with an intense socialization into sports by family, peers, media, and community. When referring to athletic identity foreclosure, athletes often choose athletic identities before – and instead of – considering other possible roles and identities. This sole centering of athletic participation and achievement begins early in life for many athletes and is frequently reinforced by peers, teachers, parents, and coaches. This identity is further shaped by significant others, the public, fans, and mass media's glorification of athletes and the overemphasis on athletics, especially for Black males (Beamon, 2012).

CRT and athletic identity foreclosure set a foundation for framing how the experiences of Black male student-athletes have a significant impact on mental and emotional health and overall wellbeing. Both theories also point out the major roles that systems and institutions play in the development and experiences of Black male student-athletes. The application of a CRT lens clarifies the everyday occurrences of racism within athletics. Applying an athletic identity foreclosure lens highlights the emotional and mental stress of having one primary identity that others assign to Black male student-athletes: athlete. Fostering counter stories helps participants

thus illustrate the normalization of racism and the limits placed upon Black male identities and is thus the foundation of this research study.

Literature Review

The first section of this literature review provides a foundation and background information pertaining to the exploitation and experiences of Black male student-athletes. The Black male student-athlete experience literature will be followed by literature which addresses interventions for such exploitation. The literature review will then focus on substance use and will provide definitions and background information concerning substance use within college athletics. While all of this literature identifies the issues of substance use within college athletics and the exploitation of Black male student-athletes, the voices of Black male student-athletes are still missing, which represents a serious gap in context and understanding substance use among Black male student-athletes.

Harper (2006) stated, "Perhaps nowhere in higher education is the disenfranchisement of Black male students more insidious than in college athletics" (p. 6). More recently, Harper (2016) produced a report with the purpose of making transparent racial inequities in the Power 5: Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Pac 12 Conference, and the Southeastern Conference (SEC). Data from the NCAA and the U.S. Department of Education were presented for the 65 institutional members of these five athletic conferences. Harper (2016) specifically analyzed Black males' representation on football and basketball teams versus their representation in the undergraduate student body on each campus. Harper's (2016) key findings include:

- During the 2014-15 academic school year, Black men were 2.5% of undergraduate students, but 56.3% of football teams and 60.8% of men's basketball teams.

- Across four cohorts, 53.6% of Black male student-athletes graduated within six years, compared to 68.5% of student-athletes overall, 58.4% of Black undergraduate men overall, and 75.4% of undergraduate students overall.
- Only the University of Miami and Northwestern University graduated Black male student-athletes at rates higher than or equal to student-athletes overall.
- Two-thirds of the universities graduated Black male student-athletes at rates lower than Black undergraduate men who were not members of intercollegiate sports teams.
- Only Northwestern graduated Black male student-athletes at a rate higher than or equal to undergraduate students overall (p.1).

Harper (2016) also discussed “White men calling the shots” and “Black entertainers, White spectators.” At the time of the study, Power 5 football coaches, on average, earned \$3.26 million annual salaries and head coaches of men’s basketball teams earned \$2.88 million; Black men were 16.2% of these head coaches. Power 5 athletic directors earned, an average of \$698,775 annually; 14.7% of which were Black. The five conference commissioners earned an average of \$2.58 million salaries. None were Black. Approximately 61,469 fans attended home football games and 10,452 attended men’s basketball games at universities in the Power 5 conferences. Though Black undergraduate men comprise a disproportionately high number of players on these fields and courts, their spectators are overwhelmingly White (Harper, 2016). In fact, a remark made by a White spectator towards a Black athlete during an NBA game inspired the title of Rhoden’s (2007) book on the exploitation of Black athletes: *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*. The fan yelled, “Johnson, you’re nothing but a 40 million dollar slave” (Rhoden, 2007).

Supporting Harper’s (2016) framing, Beamon and Bell (2006) examined the role that popular culture and media play on the exploitation and experiences of Black student-athletes.

The problem stated is that popular culture/media floods society with images of Black males as athletes and entertainers, which is harmful to the academic and social growth and development of Black males. Beamon and Bell (2006) discussed the notion that an intentional and intensive socialization of Black men and women into sports is a cause of the overrepresentation of Black males in the sports world. Consequences of this are the over identification with athletic achievement and the loss of academic achievement. The authors conducted a case study of a whole Division I football team at a major university (Beamon & Bell, 2006).

Black participants were found to have less emphasis on their academics than athletics during their socialization process, as well as having less emphasis on education than White participants. Pertaining to the first theoretical question of the study, socialization emphasis was found to relate to academic success. As the emphasis on athletics during the socialization process increases, poor academic performance increases (Beamon & Bell, 2006). Edwards (1984) further explained that poor academic performance of Black male student-athletes is systemically created and connects with exploitation. "Black student-athletes suffer from the outset from disadvantages: The myth of innate Black athletic superiority, the stereotype of the dumb Black, and social forces determining a vulnerability to exploitation" (Edwards, 1984, p. 8).

Exploitation and Experiences of Black Male Student-Athletes

Harper (2013) conducted an extensive review of research on racial problems Black students face at predominantly White institutions. Campuses are racially hostile for all Black male students, adding athlete adds another layer of hostility and exploitation. Oftentimes, these experiences and issues specific to Black male student-athletes as described above are ignored, minimized, and/or swept under the rug, despite prior studies and data that clarify this racism. Beamon (2014) explained that studies of racism have provided a great deal of evidence to

support the existence of racial discrimination in athletics and that an illusion that sports are free from racism is often assumed from current player statistics; however, on closer examination racism within athletics is evident. Additionally, while there is an overrepresentation of Black athletes, the decision-making duties found in such occupations as ownership, leadership, and management positions are still largely occupied by White males. In Beamon's study, 20 former Division I student-athletes discussed race and sport and the role that racism played in their athletic careers (Beamon, 2014). "Respondents described their experiences with racism on campus, in 'college towns,' and in the classrooms. In line with CRT, many (18 of 20 respondents) considered racism as systematic and a part of everyday life as an African American, therefore, they expected to experience some level of discrimination while attending college" (Beamon, 2014, p.127).

Similar results were found in Singer's (2016) narrative case study of three "elite" Black male football athletes (p.1065). Each athlete was attending well known predominately White institutions with "big-time" athletic departments (Singer, 2016, p. 1065). The purpose of this study was to find what education meant to each of the participants and how racism impacts their individual development as a whole. Focus groups and individual interviews ultimately found that all three participants strongly believed that racism is very present within college sports and has a negative impact on their education and development (Singer, 2016).

In a prior study by Beamon (2008), the exploitation of Black student-athletes was further examined. Beamon (2008) found that while collegiate sports have created many opportunities for Black males, serious involvement in athletics has hampered academic and occupational achievement development. Beamon (2008) explained that it has been alleged that universities exploit athletes, especially Black male athletes in football and basketball. This study used

interviews of former Division I Black student-athletes to examine the extent to which they feel that universities emphasized their education as opposed to their athletic performance and prepared them for careers off the playing field. The former student-athletes expressed feelings of being “used goods” and recount difficulties in choosing a major. Beamon’s findings are further support by Hawkins (1995) who wrote about the Black student-athlete as the colonized Black Body. Hawkins (1995) concluded that Black bodies are internally colonized by institutions for physical exploitation.

Maloney and McCormick (1993) conducted a quantitative study which found that student-athletes do not perform as well in the classroom compared to the overall student population. Similarly, many student-athletes come to college with inferior high school preparation in academics. These results suggest that a strong educational and academic background is critical to academic success in college. The authors also found that an elite group of student-athletes does worse in college even accounting for academic background. One should note that this group of athletes was also largely comprised of Black student-athletes (Maloney & McCormick, 1993). This group included the athletes participating in revenue sports; football and men's basketball players do one-tenth of a grade point worse each semester than other athletes and other non-athlete students. Men’s basketball players averaged a 1.93 GPA, which predicts that less than half of them graduate. Football players averaged a 2.12 GPA, implying a 53 percent graduation rate (Maloney & McCormick, 1993).

Suggested Interventions

The next set of studies explored interventions pertaining to the exploitation of Black male student-athletes. The concept of institutional integrity was investigated by Bimper and Harrison (2015). Institutional integrity is characterized as “the institution’s degree of consistency between

their rhetoric and their behavior relative to stated commitments to the development of all students' intellectual and social development, including student-athletes" (Bimper & Harrison, 2015, p. 3). The authors believed that taking institutional integrity into consideration can provide further insight into eliminating inequities relevant to Black student-athlete stakeholders in the arena of intercollegiate athletics. Two key themes in this study include "Little Skin in the Game" and "Run-of-the-Mill Colorblindness" (Bimper & Harrison, 2015). Bimper and Harrison also conducted case-studies with a focus on the problem that within the volume of academic deficits, especially in revenue-generating sports, there are Black male student-athletes who achieve a level of success in the classroom that rivals with their athletic skill. These case studies found that Black male student-athletes have difficulty in regard to their self-perceptions and behaviors contributing to their success in managing their dual roles as students and athletes while navigating their college experience. The implications of this study support fostering meaningful opportunities to develop healthy Black male student-athlete identities and academic achievement (Bimper & Harrison, 2015).

Harrison and Lawrence (2003) examined the perceptions of Black student-athletes on athletic career transition. Five major themes emerged from Black student-athlete perceptions of the career transition process: Inspirational Imagery Validation, Academic and Athletic Success, Classroom Accomplishments, Family Devotion, and Life After Sports. This qualitative and quantitative study found that Black college athletes were starting to think more about the importance of life after college that does not necessarily include their sport, especially when they have a success story that they can relate to (inspirational imagery validation). "Inspirational Imagery Validation involves the student-athletes' positive feelings and self-reflective thoughts in response to the successful transition made by the student-athlete." (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003,

p.381). While Black student-athletes had been thinking about this more, they were still having difficulty successfully planning and preparing for life outside of sport (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003).

The use of inspirational imagery validation is one suggestion pertaining to the problem of the exploitation of Black student-athletes. Person, Benson-Quaziana, and Rogers (2001) also developed suggestions based on their research which provided an overview of the various experiences of female student-athletes and student-athletes of color. These authors suggested, “As experts in student development, cultural competence, and organizational change, student affairs practitioners are in an excellent position to collaborate with faculty, athletic and academic administrators, and students to create inclusive and celebrative environments for student learning” (Person et al., 2001, p.63). A more specific suggestion offered by Person et al. (2001) involves introducing prospective students to the academic life of the college before they begin their athletic life.

Substances

One component of not only the Black male student-athlete experience but all students and student-athlete experiences involves substance use. The literature in this section provides foundational information pertaining to substances and substance use for the purpose of this study. Seven of the drug categories (depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens, dissociative anesthetics, narcotic analgesics, inhalants, and cannabis) are defined by the International Drug Evaluation and Classification Program (DECP, nd). Depressants slow down the brain and the body. Examples of CNS depressants include alcohol, barbiturates, anti-anxiety medication (e.g., Valium, Librium, Xanax, Prozac, and Thorazine), GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate), Rohypnol, and many other anti-depressants (e.g., Zoloft, Paxil). Stimulants accelerate the heart rate and

elevate the blood pressure and over-stimulate the body. Examples of stimulants include cocaine, crack cocaine, amphetamines, and methamphetamine. Hallucinogens cause the user to perceive things differently than reality. Examples include LSD, peyote, psilocybin and MDMA (Ecstasy). Dissociative anesthetics include drugs that stop pain by cutting off the brain's perception of the pain. PCP, its analogs, and dextromethorphan are examples of dissociative anesthetics. Narcotic analgesics relieve pain, induce euphoria, and create mood changes in the user. Examples of narcotic analgesics include opium, codeine, heroin, demerol, darvon, morphine, methadone, Vicodin, and oxycontin. Inhalants include a variety of breathable substances that produce mind-altering results and effects. Examples of inhalants include Toluene, plastic cement, paint, gasoline, paint thinners, hair sprays, and various anesthetic gases. Cannabis is the scientific name for marijuana. The active ingredient in cannabis is delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC. This category includes cannabinoids and synthetics like Dronabinol (DECP, nd).

Designer drugs are illicitly produced with the intent of developing substances that differ slightly from controlled substances in their chemical structure while preserving their pharmacological effects. Examples of designer drugs include bath salts (synthetic stimulant) and spice (synthetic cannabis) (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2017). Finally, performance enhancing substances are substances used to gain a competitive advantage (e.g., anabolic steroids) (Reardon & Creado, 2014). In regard to diagnostic criteria, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2015) explains that the DSM-5 (diagnostic criteria manual) no longer uses the terms substance abuse and substance dependence. The DSM-5 no longer refers to substance use disorders, which are defined as mild, moderate, or severe to indicate the level of severity, which is determined by the number of diagnostic criteria met by an individual. Substance use disorders occur when the recurrent use of alcohol and/or drugs causes

clinically and functionally significant impairment, such as health problems, disability, and failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school, or home. According to the DSM-5, a diagnosis of substance use disorder is based on evidence of impaired control, social impairment, risky use, and pharmacological criteria (SAMHSA, 2015).

Substance Use in College Athletics

The range of substances as described above have been studied extensively in the world of intercollegiate athletics. Reardon and Creado (2014) stated that the abuse of drugs occurs in all sports and at most levels of competition. Furthermore, athletic life may lead to drug abuse for a number of reasons, including for performance enhancement, to self-medicate untreated mental illness, and to deal with stressors, such as pressure to perform, injuries, physical pain, and retirement from sport. Reardon and Creado (2014) defined doping as “use of drugs or other substances for performance enhancement” (p.95). It is also important to note that performance enhancing substances (PES) are not restricted to illegal drugs or prescription medications, such as anabolic steroids but that they also include dietary supplements and a variety of compounds that are available at grocery and health food stores and online (Reardon & Creado, 2014).

The importance of understanding why student-athletes use drugs is illuminated by Tricker, Cook, and McGuire (1989). The pressure to be successful causes some athletes to go beyond using acceptable and appropriate methods to do their best. Instead of relying upon legitimate training techniques and developing a better psychological approach to their sport, some athletes choose to rely upon drugs to improve their level of performance. Using drugs also represents an opportunity to overcome some of the drawbacks and frustrations experienced in competition (Tricker et al. 1989). Student athletes are under constant scrutiny, especially from the media, and a great deal of public attention is focused on sport and intercollegiate athletes.

“Hero worship is a by-product and reinforces the status of athletes as exceptional individuals in a society that offers increasing social opportunities for the successful competitor” Tricker et al., 1989, p. 157). As a result, student-athletes are invited to many different social functions and a variety of new social settings increases the opportunities for using alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, and other drugs. Judgment may weaken, and drug use may follow without the student-athlete being aware of the possible negative consequences (Tricker et al., 1989).

In a study specifically exploring the use of alcohol, Brenner and Swanik (2007) sought to further describe the relationship of alcohol use by student-athletes to factors such as sport participation, time of year, and level of competition. There were 720 participants from Divisions I, II, and III who participated in either a team sport or an individual sport. The authors measured characteristics of alcohol use by college athletes at 9 colleges and universities. Participants reported a high rate of consuming five or more drinks per occasion in the past two weeks. There were greater percentages of team sport athletes reporting this behavior than athletes of individual sports, and there were significant differences according to level of competition. The authors also pointed out that participants in this study reported much greater high-risk alcohol use than previously reported (Brenner & Swanik, 2007).

In another substance specific study, Buckman and Yusko (2013) examined data from a large, national dataset collected by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). This study compared substance use behaviors of male undergraduate student-athletes who reported using ergogenic PESs (anabolic steroids and peptide hormones) during college (users) to those who did not (non-users). A consistent pattern of higher substance use rates was observed among PES users compared to non-users, including heavier drinking, higher prevalence rates of cigarettes, marijuana, amphetamines, narcotics, and a variety of permissible and impermissible

dietary supplements. The findings of this study suggest that male college athletes who use PESs while in college demonstrate a general tendency to engage in alcohol and drug use behaviors, regardless of whether these behaviors improve or impede athletic performance (Buckman & Yusko, 2013). Buckman and Yusko (2013) stated that changes to drug education and prevention programs may be needed to enhance understanding of drug properties and actions.

Buckman, Yusko, White and Pandina (2009) completed a prior study with a similar focus. The purpose of this study was to determine whether users of PESs report high-risk patterns of alcohol and other drug use and demonstrate risk behaviors associated with problematic substance use. Male athlete PES users compared with non-users reported more problematic alcohol use behaviors and more alcohol and drug-use-related problems. It was also found that PES users are more likely to report past-year use of tobacco products, marijuana, cocaine, psychedelics, and prescription drugs without a prescription. PES users also demonstrated higher sensation seeking, and greater coping and enhancement motivations for drinking and marijuana use than non-PES users. The authors explained that while banned PESs are not typically viewed as having a high addiction potential, male athletes who use these drugs may be more likely to participate in other problematic substance-use behaviors. Importantly, the male athletes in this study who reported PES use also participated in substance-use behaviors that can have profound negative effects on athletic performance (Buckman et al., 2009).

A study to determine the substance-use patterns of NCAA student-athletes for alcohol, amphetamines, anabolic steroids, cocaine/crack, ephedrine, marijuana/hashish, psychedelics/hallucinogens, and smokeless tobacco was conducted by Green, Uryasz, Petr, and Bray (2001). Participants were made up of male and female student-athletes from 30 sports competing at 991 NCAA Division I, II, and III institutions. Participants were asked about their

use of eight categories of substances in the previous 12-month period. In addition, data was collected regarding substance use according to team, ethnicity, NCAA Division, reasons for use, and the sources for drugs. For the eight categories of substance use, alcohol was the most widely used drug in the past year at 80.5%, followed by marijuana at 28.4%, and smokeless tobacco at 22.5%. Although anabolic steroid use was reported at 1.1% overall, some sports demonstrated higher use, and 32.1% obtained their anabolic steroids from a physician other than the institution's team physician (Green et al., 2001).

Hoyte, Albert, and Heard (2013) specifically focused their research on the use of energy drinks, dietary supplements, and prescription medications for the enhancement of athletic performance among college students. They conducted a multi-round online questionnaire collecting data from students at two-year colleges, four-year colleges, online courses, or technical schools at least part-time during the specified sampling period. Subjects who reported participating in athletics were asked if they used any of the following substances to enhance athletic performance (1) energy drinks (2) dietary supplements (3) prescription medications within the last year. Of those who reported that they participated in sports 85.9 % responded that within the last year they used energy drinks, dietary supplements, or prescription medications to enhance athletic performance. Energy drinks had the highest prevalence (80.1 %), followed by dietary supplements (64.1 %) and prescription medications (53.3 %) (Hoyte, et al., 2013).

Risk and Protective Factors

While the actual use of substances in college athletics has been reviewed, it is also important to discuss the risk and protective factors in order to gain a better understanding of why student-athletes do and/or do not use. Yusko, Buckman, White, and Pandina, (2008) discussed the concept of risk and protective factors. Yusko et al. (2008) included seven empirically and

theoretically supported risk factors in their analyses. Eleven items gauged how stressful participants found meeting academic demands, controlling their eating, their social life, having or getting an injury, controlling their weight, general health concerns, maintaining a scholarship (athletic or academic), academic competition, sports competition, and sport participation time demands. For each item, the level of stress was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (“not stressful at all” to “highly stressful”) with an additional category labeled “does not apply.” Athletes compared to non-athletes reported more exaggerated perceptions of peer heavy drinking and lower sensation seeking and coping and enhancement motives for drinking, suggesting a risk profile distinct from non-athletes. In the overall sample, higher sensation seeking, overestimation of peer heavy drinking, non-use of protective behaviors while drinking, and higher enhancement and coping drinking motives were associated with greater frequency of heavy episodic drinking and more negative drinking consequences. In athletes compared to non-athletes, sensation seeking was more strongly associated with heavy episodic drinking and drinking to cope was more strongly associated with negative alcohol-related consequences (Yusko et al., 2008).

As evidenced by Nattiy and Puffer (2008), college athletes appear to be at higher risk for certain “maladaptive” lifestyle behaviors. Nattiy and Puffer (2008) designed a study to determine whether college athletes may be at increased risk for unhealthy lifestyle behaviors. The authors compared the lifestyle and health risk behaviors of a group of college athletes with those of their non-athletic peers. A confidential survey questionnaire addressing preventable lifestyle behaviors was given to 109 intercollegiate athletes and 110 non-athlete controls. The study found that athletes had a significantly higher proportion of risky lifestyle behavior patterns compared with the non-athletes in the following areas: quantity of alcohol consumed; driving while intoxicated with alcohol or other drugs; riding with an intoxicated driver; use of seatbelts; use of helmets

when riding a motorcycle or moped; use of contraception; number of sexually transmitted diseases; and number of sexual partners (Nattiy & Puffer, 2008).

This literature review clarified the exploitation of Black male student-athletes and related substance use in college athletics. Given the lack of literature that specifically addresses substance use among Black male student-athletes, this study thus centered Black male voices.

Methods

This qualitative study consisted of in-depth ethnographic interviews with current and former Division I Black male football and basketball student-athletes. Qualitative interviews were selected due to the sensitivity of the research topic. Nakkeeran and Zodpey (2012) explain that qualitative methodology helps with rapport building and capturing data as naturally as possible. “These characteristics provide an ample scope to take care of quality and validity of data” (Nakkeeran & Zodpey, 2012, p. 4). In-depth semi-standardized interview approach was used (see Appendix A for the interview guide); this approach allowed for further inquiry and elaboration throughout the 30 to 60 minute interviews. The purpose of the interview questions was to engage participants in discussions about race and racism within intercollegiate athletics and to determine how specific Black male student-athlete experiences contribute to substance use. Interviews provided opportunities for participants to explain their answers in their own voices, clarifying stories that CRT would frame as counter-storytelling. These questions and topics were not something that Black male student-athletes get to openly talk about, both in terms of the anticipated risk to their standing as student-athletes, and due to the limited nature of supports for discussion about racism and substance use. The interview questions thus asked participants to process and respond through a race-forward lens by describing experiences specific to being Black males.

Purposive and snowball sampling was used in this research to identify a range of participants. Participants were recruited from a local, privately owned training facility and through personal connections with current and former student-athletes. Snowball sampling was used to identify additional Black male student-athletes across the United States. No participants who had a personal relationship with the researcher were included. The criteria for participation was: (a) 18 years of age and older, (b) Black male, and (c) Division I football or basketball student-athlete (current or former). The interviews were audio recorded after obtaining informed, verbal consent from the participants. Interviews were then transcribed by a transcription company. Content analysis and narrative analysis were used to identify common themes that emerged from the individual interviews. Narrative analysis took place through eliciting stories from the participants via the interviews and investigating each story. Content analysis was used to select themes by counting the number of participants that talked about a specific topic. If a topic was discussed by six or more participants, then it was included as a theme. All participants either attended or attend public Division I schools across the country.

Participants

Ten individuals participated in the study, including seven football and three basketball players. To protect confidentiality, participants chose their own pseudonyms and provided the information they wanted to share in their bios. Table 1 provides background and demographic data for each of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Background Information

Name	Current (within last 3 years) or Former (3 years or more)	Sport	Major
Brandon	Former	Football	Social Science
Charles	Current	Basketball	Business
Doug	Former	Football	Health Science
Frank	Former	Football	Social Science
Joseph	Current	Basketball	Social Science
Largo	Former	Football	Social Science
Prince	Former	Football	Environmental Science
Reggie	Former	Football	Social Science
X	Former	Football	Social Science
Xavier	Current	Basketball	Social Science

Charles Wilson grew up in Texas in a predominately White and Hispanic neighborhood for part of his childhood and then moved to a more diverse city. His parents separated some time before the move, so he experienced living with both parents and living in a single-parent household. Charles is not the first in his family to go to college, but he is the first to go to college on an athletic scholarship. Both his parents played sports in high school but not in college.

Joseph was raised in an urban area of Illinois. His family is medium-high income and he lived in a two-parent, medium-high income household for half of his life and then stayed with his

mom. He has two other siblings who do not play sports. He is the first in his intermediate family to go to college. He also went to college on an athletic scholarship.

Xavier grew up in a lower income family in California. He was raised in a single-parent household with his mother but his father would drop by every so often for sports and similar activities. He has a sister who is finishing her last year of college and a little brother who still lives at home. He is not the first in his family to attend college, but he is the first to attend college on an athletic scholarship.

Brandon grew up in urban Illinois in a low income, two-parent household. He has an older brother and sister but they all have different mothers. Neither of his siblings lived with him and neither played sports. His father received a bachelor's degree. His mother and siblings did not go to college. Brandon went straight from high school to college on a full athletic scholarship.

Frank grew up in an urban area of Michigan but always went to school in the suburbs. His family was low-middle class. He was raised primarily by his mother as his parents divorced when he was younger. His step-dad played a huge role in his life when his step-dad married his mother. Frank has a half-sister and a step-brother who both played sports growing up as well. Both of his parents went to a community college, but he is the first in his family to attend a major university. He is also the only male in his family that he knows of who has never been in jail. He went straight from high school to college on a full athletic scholarship.

Reggie was raised in a very diverse, urban city of California where he was a top ranked athlete. He grew up in a single-parent, medium income household with his mother. Both his parents were involved in his upbringing, despite living in a single-parent household. He is the

second in his family to go to college. He went straight to college from a college preparatory school on a full athletic scholarship.

Doug was raised in a two-parent, medium-high income household in the suburbs in California. He went straight from high school to college on an athletic scholarship. Both of his parents graduated from college. He has two siblings who also play sports.

Largo Lime grew up in a middle to low income neighborhood in California. He was raised in a two-parent household and has two siblings who play sports as well. Both of his parents attended college but he is the first in his family to earn a degree from a university.

Prince Zamunda and his two siblings were raised by their mother in a single parent household. He grew up in a middle to low income neighborhood in California. Both of his siblings also played sports. Prince ultimately left college before completing his degree because of complications related to student-athlete rules and restrictions.

X El is from California. He went to a junior college first before attending a university on an athletic scholarship. He and his two siblings were raised in a single parent household with their mother, but their father was very present and involved.

Only one participant is currently a professional athlete. Two of the participants who are current student-athletes have plans of playing professionally. Three of the interviews took place in person while the rest took place over the phone. Not only were all of the participants willing and wanting to talk with me, but they all were thankful for the experience and for being given an opportunity to reflect and share their stories.

Findings

Through content analysis and narrative analysis, the following themes emerged from the interviews: athlete-student, marijuana, lack of emotional and mental support, and the Black male

student-athlete experience's role in substance use. Within each of these themes, several subthemes came up as well. Intertwined throughout all of themes is the CRT tenet of racism as normalcy. The participants discussed their experiences with racism as a part of everyday life. The racism experienced ranges from microaggressions, to systemic and institutionalized racism, to overt racism. On a frequent basis, the participants were only seen as athletes, had to prove their worth and value as individuals, felt isolated, and felt used.

Athlete-Student

Singer (2008) also wrote about athlete-student and athletics taking precedence over academics. This study connects the athlete-student piece with substance use. Athlete-student refers to Black male student-athletes being seen and treated as athletes first and students second. In some cases, the participants described not being seen as students at all. This treatment came from other students, faculty, and staff. All of the participants had strong feelings about this theme and thoroughly discussed athlete-student through all of their interviews. The participants also believed that their White male counterparts tend to be taken more seriously as students and people on campus do not automatically assume White males are athletes based on the color of their skin. Brandon described his experience and specifically referenced the term, athlete-student. He also discussed the common experience of Black male student-athletes not being allowed to learn, to take certain classes, or to actually be students.

I feel like for the most part they saw just athletes. I feel like even my university where our academic advisors, we went through a stage where you was only taking two or three different majors because we knew most of the professors in there, you knew that you would get a good grade, you knew that you would graduate, you knew that you would be eligible when it comes down to Saturday. That was their way of kind of keeping their eyes on us and knowing if we were going to class because they know the professors in these different majors. Even though we still try to say we're student-athletes it was definitely an athlete-student deal.

Brandon pointed out that he and other student-athletes were pushed towards certain classes and majors so that their coaches could keep tabs on them and make sure that they were eligible to play. Largo reflected on his college experience and also used the term athlete-student. He talked about a picture being painted during recruitment that did not align with reality once on campus. Academics were made to seem like a priority, but athletics took precedence. Largo also pointed out that they are wanted for their sport and not for their mind. Before they even get to campus or decide what school they are going to, the athlete-student perception has already been created.

I see everything I went through, just with sports and school and everything, we're really athlete-students. A lot of these coaches out there, they'd be trying to make it seem like, 'Oh it's all about the grades, it's about this and that.' We come in here, you're all recruiting us to play football or basketball or soccer or whatever. You're not recruiting us to come in here and be straight A students or whatever. Most of these kids want to get out here and try to go to the league or something like that. And then on top of that, while they're recruiting you, if they really want you as that athlete, they're going to make it seem like, you know ... 'Yeah, you can take this major, you can do this major, you can do this and that, like yeah, yeah, yeah, we're all about school, blah, blah, blah.' And then as soon as you get there, if your school schedule don't match up with the football or basketball or track schedule, you have to change your major off the top. It's not student-athlete. It's athlete-student and that's that.

Largo raised the issue of athletic schedules taking precedence over academic schedules. This barrier disempowers student-athletes by taking away their right to make their own decisions about their future, reinforcing the athlete-student identity. Frank also described this schedule conflict, which limits the selection of classes they can take.

I think that they definitely try to persuade you to take certain classes, especially if they're gonna interfere with what you've got going on with their football schedule. It's pretty evident that your athletics and that sort of schedule is more important than your academic schedule. So you definitely know that one is prioritized a bit higher over the other.

As Frank explained, sports took precedence over academics. White male student-athletes have struggles as well, but they tend to be taken more seriously as students. Joseph addressed the inequalities and differences between Black male student-athletes and their White counterparts,

and explained how other students, faculty, and staff had preconceived notions about him which they based just on his skin color. Even though he was not taken seriously as a student, he still worked hard academically and excelled.

I wouldn't say it's equal across the board. I feel like people look at me and say, 'Either he doesn't probably read well or he doesn't study a lot. He's just here. He's here for different reasons.' But as a student, I go in as a normal person and do what I have to do and try to get the best grades possible.

As Joseph described, being stereotyped based on physical appearance and race is another common experience for Black male student-athletes. This tends to be made even worse when attending predominately White institutions. Frank detailed the impact of attending a predominately White institution and how that magnified how others on campus saw Black male student-athletes.

I was definitely seen as an athlete. I think the school I attended, there's already such a small percentage of African-Americans, so I think once you combine that with our physical stature, you can't help but stick out. So you try to do different things, like maybe not wear sweats all the time to your classes, but at the end of the day, everybody recognizes and knows that you're an athlete.

Frank tried to minimize how he stood out on campus as not just as an athlete. He wanted to be seen as any other student. However, despite his efforts, he still knew that people on campus would identify him as an athlete. All participants shared every day examples of microaggressions reminding them that being a Black male on campus was equated to being an athlete first.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) defined microaggression as a, "Stunning small encounter with racism, usually unnoticed by members of the majority" (p. 167). Xavier described the very common microaggression of people assuming he was an athlete just because he was a Black male on campus.

Like, it's a lot of questions. 'Do you play sports?' Always assuming that I'm there because of sports. I feel like it comes with constant questioning and just assumptions about being an athlete. Whereas a White student-athlete can be looked at more as an

actual student as opposed to being a student-athlete. But, people kind of just see a Black male walking around campus and just assume that, 'I guess he fits the criteria of being an athlete.'

The persistent questioning and biases contribute to athletic identity foreclosure. Xavier also highlighted the different experiences between Black and White male student-athletes and that White male student-athletes are actually seen as students. Doug further elaborated on the frequent stereotyping as well. However, unlike other participants, Doug felt that faculty treated him well. Instead, he had issues with other students.

The only Black people there were athletes. So you know, they see you're Black and you get treated accordingly. They assume you're an athlete. It was okay, at least from the faculty standpoint. They treated you well. The other students, it was hit or miss.

Another frequent experience for Black male student-athletes is that other individuals on campus do not care to talk academics with them, because they are not seen as academics. When conversing with other students, the topic of conversation is most often athletics. Prince discussed how he would at times lie just to see how people would react and if they would engage in academic conversation with him.

When it comes to, like, the student life, I felt like, disrespected a lot because people would walk up to me and ask me, 'Hey, what sport do you play?' I'd be like, 'Oh, football.' And they'll have a conversation. Or, I'll be like, 'Oh, I don't play a sport,' just to see what they would say, and then the conversation would end there. Like, many ... very few conversations started with, 'What do you major in?'

The disregard of academics as described by Prince is yet another way in which athletic identity foreclosure is perpetuated. X summarized the athlete-student theme well with an analogy that his degree was actually football. He also stated that he was paid to be a football player. Again, this shows how athletic identity foreclosure is formed. It was made clear to X that he was only at his school to play football. This projected onto X and shapes how not only others, but how he sees himself.

You know, as a student-athlete, I was paid to be a football player, so the student part felt like ... It felt like the student part was a hobby. Football was my degree. I don't think they viewed any of us as students. I think we were all viewed as athletes. We were always wearing athletic gear, we were on the move, we were missing classes on certain days because we were traveling. So, they knew what our job was, and we did also. And they came out to support us on Saturdays.

Unfortunately, the support in the stadiums does not equally extend to the classroom or other aspects of Black male student-athletes' lives. The athlete-student theme provides evidence of how athletic identity foreclosure is formed and perpetuated. Several subthemes relating to athlete-student surfaced as well. These subthemes include the practice of Black male student-athletes being directed toward certain classes and degrees, Black male student-athletes having to advocate for and prove themselves as students, and being respected as a Black male-student athlete.

Smoke & Mirrors

The first subtheme of athlete-student is the practice of faculty, staff, and athletic department staff pushing Black male student-athletes to specific majors and degrees and lying to them while they are being recruited. Prospective student-athletes are told during recruitment that their academics are just as important as their sport and that they can major and graduate with whatever degree with they want. However, once the student-athlete is on campus and registering for classes, they are told they cannot take certain classes or choose specific majors because the schedules do not align with their athletic schedule, or the classes are too difficult, which will distract them from their athletics and jeopardize their eligibility. Seven participants discussed the issue of not being able to pick the major of their choice and/or being pushed towards certain majors.

Reggie knew what he wanted to major in and was adamant to keep his major. However, he witnessed other Black male student-athletes being pushed towards certain degrees. Reggie

talked about Black male student-athletes being pushed towards certain degrees, but he also talked about Black male student-athletes not being pushed enough to reach their full academic potential.

When it did come to picking a major, I think yeah, it was kind of like, 'Well if you don't know, then why don't you just go with a communications degree? Or why don't you just go with, like a recreation degree?' You know, something where the classes weren't as challenging. I don't think the Black males were pushed enough. I think definitely they weren't pushed enough. But now, looking back on it, you can see that it's the White male athletes, it seemed like they were more in the engineering degrees. Opposed to, you know, like I said, the recreation degree and the communications degree.

Reggie also observed White male student-athletes working towards different degrees than Black male student-athletes. The degrees in which White male student-athletes were working towards are not only seen as more challenging, but also hold more prestige. Largo explained how he also witnessed some of his peers being forced to change their majors. This is detrimental for student-athletes because it does not prepare them for life after sport and in some cases, they ultimately quit their sport and/or school.

I had a few friends who wanted to do a different major but couldn't do it. They didn't want to play football after football. They wanted to do something else and they wanted to do this major, but coaches lied to them and said, 'Hey, nope, that don't work with football, you've got to change your major.' So now they're stuck doing something else they didn't want to do or end up quitting football, quitting basketball, quitting whatever sport.

The coaches had lied and told the student-athletes that they would be able to do whatever major they wanted to, knowing that this would not be true if it interfered with their athletics. Prince described how he was lied to about academics and football being of equal importance while he was being recruited, but when he got to the university, that was not the case.

Well, when the university approached me, both football and education, academics were both on the same level. And when I got to the university, it was clearly ... it was blatant that football was the main thing. Once I was there, education was definitely important, but football was first, you know? It was clear football was first.

One positive is that Prince states that education was important; it just was not as important as football. X further illustrates, in detail, being lied to and how that impacted his student experience. One of the many misconceptions about the Black male student-athlete experience is that they are getting an education and degree which is preparing them for their future. X talked about this misconception and how this belief is unfortunately not often the case.

The student part, coming in, I felt like a student because that was the first thing that I did, was sign up for classes and get going. But once things got rolling, me myself personally, and I can speak for others, we didn't really feel like students, more because we were playing football seven days a week. We were not on campus Fridays or Saturdays. And for me, personally, my degree was in Health and Exercise Science prior to getting into the school that I was at. Then once I got to my college, I was more or less advised, but more forced, to change my degree to something that was more aligned with football, which would be a little easier in terms of class schedule time. A lot of the better degrees, in my opinion, the classes are during times where you would be busy with football. I had a clear understanding of what I wanted, and the people who recruited me made it very clear that I could pursue that and everything would be good. But upon getting there, you're given such a huge load on football, it's easy for them to say, 'Hey, this is the route right here. If you take this, you'll get out of here in three years.' I think the biggest misconception is that we're given so much, people think. And for the younger kids, they see a coach, he comes with a brochure and says, 'These are the uniforms that we have. These are the opponents that we play. And we would love to have you play for us on a full scholarship.' But they don't ... Not all programs, but there are some programs where coaches really do look after their players today and in the future. But most do not, because most coaches do not stay in a certain program for over three years. I think it's just a huge misconception on what you'll get when you're there, and what you'll get once you leave. And a lot of people leave prior to actually achieving a degree or achieving any perspective that will help them once they're into a different career path.

X highlighted how his coaches were not looking out for him as a human being or for his future.

X summarized why this act of misrepresentation by university faculty and staff and athletic department staff is so detrimental to student-athletes. Given the extremely small percentage of student-athletes who end up going professional, coaches set student-athletes up for failure.

Ultimately, these participants challenged the belief that student-athletes should be grateful because they are getting a free education by explaining that if they obtained a degree, their degrees were not useful and/or they were not well prepared for life after sport.

Grind & Hustle

Another subtheme of athlete-student is that of self-advocacy. Nine of the participants feel that their universities and athletic departments did support them academically through mandatory study hall, tutoring, and academic counselors. However, the participants point out that a lot of the support depended on the student-athletes advocating for themselves, proving themselves, and knowing about and how to take advantage of the resources available to them. While all students must practice some degree of self-advocacy in order to be successful academically, such efforts are especially difficult for student-athletes because even though resources are available, they still know that athletics takes precedence. Another difference is that Black male student-athletes tend to have to prove themselves more than other students and student-athletes because of the assumption that they are only there because of their athleticism.

Doug explained how he had to work to prove himself over the first several years of his college career. Even though he had decided on a major, he was registered in classes that did not match with his major.

I established myself after a certain point. And it's a small student body, the school population wasn't very big, and even within my major it was even smaller. So I had kind of established a rapport within that, you know, by like the end of my junior year. But at the start, yeah, I mean, even with the faculty in that regard, I told them my major and they just put me in random classes that had nothing to do with my major. They just gave me easy courses, 'cause they thought I wasn't gonna care, I'm there for sports.

The false and biased perception that Black male student-athletes do not care about academics and need easy classes is detrimental to their identity, self-worth, and future. Reggie came in knowing what he wanted academically and what he needed to do, which helped with his academic success. However, he still had to get past the point of professors first seeing an athlete.

Personally, I felt okay with being a student as far as academics. Just because leading up to going to college and to the university, I felt like I had a solid foundation to where I knew I needed to take care of business for myself and I knew what my goal was. I wanted

to earn my degree before I left the university. In the beginning if you're a student-athlete, then yeah most professors would see you as an athlete first, but if you're consistent in terms of asking questions, getting help, then I think that begins to kind of break the barrier of just seeing you as an athlete, but also seeing you as someone who is interested in further, gaining further knowledge and really wanting to educate themselves. I definitely would say that there was support, academic support for the athletes, if the athlete's kind of took advantage of those opportunities.

The support was only available when sought out, and Reggie was able to figure out how and where to access academic support. However, other Black male student-athletes may not know where to go or what to do and/or are waiting for help to be offered. If that support never comes forward, they are left behind academically.

X also felt supported but believes that that support was for ulterior motives, such as financial bonuses for the coaches. For context, the Academic Progress Rate (APR) is a metric used by the NCAA to determine the eligibility and retention rates of student-athletes. An APR of 1,000 means a team is graduating or on track to graduate all of its players. In order for a team to remain eligible, the NCAA requires an average APR of 930, which means a team is graduating about half of its players (New, 2015). "While tying academic progress to athletic bonuses is rare, offering separate bonuses for academic performance is a common practice among college sports contracts" (New, 2015, np). New (2015) provided Jim Harbaugh's contract with the University of Michigan as an example. Harbaugh's contract offered the head football coach up to \$150,000 a year for achieving an APR of 960 or higher. X states:

In terms of the degree that I ended up getting, yeah. I was very much helped. The counselors, the tutors, they're always helping out trying to lighten the load. But if I were to have gone a different route, I don't think I would have gotten as much help. They wanted me to be eligible, of course, because they get paid to ... The coaches get paid for the team's GPA being higher.

The support was not really for X's best interest. The interest of the coaches, athletic department, and university were the motivating factors behind the support. When asked if he felt

academically supported by the university and athletic department, Prince felt very strongly that he was not supported.

No. I felt like I was not supported academically, because academics wasn't ... I feel like the university is doing a disservice to the kids, because they're giving them more resources for athletics than they're giving them resources for academics.

Just as scheduling priority is given to athletics over academics, allocation of resources for athletics is seen as the most important. Similar to discussions with other participants, Prince talked about the initial impression that academics is important, until it interferes with athletics. He also emphasized a key point of taking classes that society thinks Black males should be restricted to.

Man, it's crazy. When I first got there ... So, I got there July 4th, 2011, and we went through a program called, it's called the Bridge Program, and it basically allows you ... It basically kind of gets you started in college in Summer. So, you do that. It's kind of like mandatory. You come in at that time frame, and then you start in the Fall. In the Fall, you meet your counselor, and she's helping you get classes to move you towards whatever you want to do. But, there's a but. There's a Catch-22. The Catch-22 is any classes that she ... when you sit down in there, you can get any class you want, but the Catch-22 is if any of those classes conflict with the football schedule, whether there's lifting, meetings, film, training table, study hall, then you can't pursue those classes outside of a box that the society doesn't see. And that box, you have to be ... nobody on campus has to get a degree at a certain rate. Everybody, all students can ... there's no progression rule. And as long as you're in good standing with the university, then there's no reason why you wouldn't be able to do anything you want.

Prince went on to explain the 40/60/80 rule which can really limit student-athletes in regard to which majors they can choose. Prince personally ended up disenrolling from school because of the complications he experienced with this rule.

But, when it comes to athletics, all athletics, there is a rule that you have to be progressing your degree at a certain rate, and it's 40/60/80. So, I went to where I went ... to be an engineer, and they had a really good engineering program, so that was one of the selling points of me attending the university, is the engineering program. And the coach, I remember on my visit, the coach looked at me and my mom in the eye, and was like, 'Your son will be able to get an engineering degree in three years and graduate,' knowing that it was impossible to graduate in three years with an engineering degree, and at the pace that they have set. It's like, impossible. The fact that he told me that, and I didn't

know any ... I didn't ... I thought he was, had my best interest at heart, that wasn't the fact. It was just him selling the university. So, that definitely hindered my education process, but I was able to switch my degree into agriculture and, because I didn't meet the 40 mark with engineering. And when I first got there, I was assigned 18 credits for Fall, starting going into my first term in real college, football. So Fall term, I was assigned 18 credits by my counselor, and she deemed that, for a freshman, she was like, 'That's good. You're good.' She didn't take into consideration that I'm playing football, and this is my first term in college. 18 credits is unheard of. Even for a regular student. I felt like the university set me up for failure.

Prince trusted the coach that told him he would be able to get an engineering degree. Yet the coach blatantly lied to Prince and his mom just to get Prince to commit to his school. The academic counselor also did not address or interrupt this dynamic. Prince's experience clarified how the exploitation of Black male student-athletes can significantly impact their future. Not only was there an alignment around setting unreal expectations, but Prince's trust was completely disregarded, resulting in a substantial psychological and emotional toll.

Unlike Prince's experience, Frank felt that his school excelled when it came to academically supporting student-athletes, though he also recognized that this may not be the case for many other institutions. Frank stated, "I think that the school that I attended, they had great academic support for its athletes. But I know that my school could be the exception." As Frank explained, there are institutions that fully support and encourage academic growth and excellence for their student-athletes. However, this still remains a widespread issue that the participants have experienced and witnessed. Academic self-advocacy for Black male student-athletes can be difficult as higher education is a very complex system to navigate, especially when athletics takes precedence along with many systemic and institutionalized barriers.

What Have You Done For Me Lately?

Participants were asked if they felt respected by peers, the university, and the athletic department as a Black male student-athlete. Respect meaning being seen and valued as an

individual and more than an athlete. Half of the participants felt that they were respected. The other half argued that the level of respect depended on their status as a star athlete or starter. Prince, for example, was a star athlete in high school, having over 13 Division I athletic scholarship offers. When he got to college, he did not meet expectations of the coaches and ultimately felt disrespected by the way he was then treated. On the other hand, Largo got to college, excelled as an athlete, and felt respected as an athlete.

I learned a lot, but I don't think that I was given the right dignity or humanity being a Black student-athlete. So, yeah, that's kind of like the whole experience in a nutshell. If you're not in the in group, then you're ... you know what I mean? I had no leverage at the university.

He did not feel seen or treated as a human being, specifically because he was a Black student-athlete. This led to him feeling like he no power or control over his own life and future. Prince elaborated on what he meant by in group:

Well, the in group are people who are submissive to the system and to what the coaches are selling them. The out group are people who either don't know, don't care, or ... you feel me ... rather hold their dignity than to be submissive to a coach who really doesn't care. I got respect from the out group and certain members of the in group. I think the university is there to protect the members of the in group.

The out group are individuals who challenge the system of intercollegiate athletics and those in positions of power. These individuals are not challenging just to be difficult, but because they realize that the coaches and other university faculty and staff do not really care about them as individuals, so they have to look out for themselves. Additionally, the members of the in group get protections and preference by the university that the out group does not get. While Prince felt respected by some of his peers, he recognized that there was a larger problem of respect depending upon the standing of the athlete. He self-identified as being in the out-group, and thus did not feel respected by the university or athletic department.

If you're not contributing to the program... like, everyone realistically is contributing to the program when it comes to the athletes and the trainers, and everybody, but when it comes to the politics and everything, if you're not putting money in the university's pocket by helping them win games, in live games, then you are a nobody.

For Black male student-athletes, status and respect are often times dependent on politics and how much money they are bringing in to the university. Prince felt that the respect would also be different if he were a White male student-athlete. "They would respect me, probably as a student. Definitely." Largo, on the other hand, felt respected because of his position and because he was seen as a star athlete. He did still have experiences where he felt like he was being used, but overall, he was respected as an athlete. While there are many Black male student-athletes who feel respected, the respect does not go much further than as an athlete. Largo clarified how he felt respected only as an athlete and not for other identities.

I felt like my position being a leader, I got the respect. I kind of feel like the organization or the faculty, whatever, people in the higher ups or whatever, they kind of look at us as meat, you know what I'm saying, almost. Because I remember at one point, this is a different story off the topic or whatever, but I remember at one point I had broken my finger and they had asked me like, are you going to play this week. One of the coaches said, 'I need to pay my mortgage. Like are you going to play this week because we need you and that's it. If you don't play then we're going to lose by a lot and if you do play we might win, or we might lose by a little bit on national television and we don't want to be embarrassed.' I mean in that regard you can kind of see the business and how they really look at things at those big universities. But like I said, my position, my role for the most part I got respect. Yeah. I feel like I got most of my respect just from everything I did on the field. So I don't know. I guess they never really show ... they didn't really show they respect me as a student, but they respect me as an athlete.

There was no respect or concern for Largo's health and wellbeing. All the coach cared about was winning the game for his own personal benefits. None of the participants spoke about feeling respected as an individual. The identity of athlete was always tied to the respect. Being seen and valued as only an athlete can have a range of psychological repercussions. For example, if the athletic identity is ripped away because of a career ending injury, they feel they are nothing and left with nothing. This feeling of emptiness can lead to severe depression. Through a CRT lens,

this is made even worse because of the everyday racism Black male student-athletes have to cope with on top of this identity foreclosure.

Not Getting the Mind Right

The discussion of psychological impact leads to the lack of adequate mental and emotional support for Black male student-athletes. This is an issue for all student-athletes, but is especially problematic for Black male student-athletes because of the population's unique experiences and stressors described throughout these findings. Largo described how the business aspect of intercollegiate athletics played a role in the lack of mental and emotional support. He pointed out the coaches were so worried about advancing their career that were are not worried or invested in the whole wellbeing of their individual student-athletes. Many of the coaches and athletic department staff are in this solely for themselves, and as pointed out earlier, ironically often benefit financially from student success. This causes an oversight of student-athlete mental and emotional health.

It's like real business. It's a business. These coaches are just trying to get higher and higher. Coaches are coaching to get to the next level; to the NBA, to the NFL, to the whatever. They're not coaching just to impact player's lives and stuff like they say they are. No, they're coaching to get to the next step and yeah, for them and their family. I know we had a sports psychologist, but they didn't make it ... I don't think mental health was really big. So yeah, no they didn't really put that out there for us.

The coaches tend to be more concerned with their own personal careers and success over the wellness of their student-athletes. Xavier believed that there were resources available, but it was not clear how to access and utilize such resources and he along with his peers did not feel comfortable talking to someone within the athletic department about their problems.

Even though they say like it's okay to come up to them and stuff like that, I feel like a lot of students aren't ... A lot of student-athletes aren't that comfortable going up and telling their problems to, like faces they gotta see like constantly and stuff like that. I'm gonna be honest, I don't know where to go but I know they told me earlier so... So I would say they don't make it that clear. But I would say they like ease off of it. Like during the

beginning of the school year, they were more kinda focusing on it. Whereas now, it's kind of just up to us.

Several of the participants mentioned that they could talk to their coaches and trainers, but they did not feel comfortable having such discussions with those individuals. Reggie pointed out the need for professional support outside of the athletic department. "I think that one thing that the university could have done better was offering professional support. Somebody who is knowledgeable and has the background and can help you." It is important for mental health care to not only be accessible, but to be very individualized. When asked about mental and emotional support, Prince touched on the lack of support specific to athletes. "No. Hell no. They gave us a resource number to somebody who helps normal students, but it wasn't ... there was nothing like mental health related to sports at all."

X discussed the feeling of not having anyone to reach out to. He was waiting for support to be offered and to be made clear, but it never happened. X, along with many other student-athletes often times feel like their sport program is the only support they have.

I don't think they did well with that. I never felt a part of anything, me, personally. I felt like I was playing football and if I did need someone to reach out, they would be someone who was already connected to seeing me every day, like my coach. But outside of the football program, no. I felt isolated.

X did not feel a sense of belonging, which is so important to self-identity, self-worth and mental health. As these participants clarified, Black male student-athletes can feel particularly isolated. This is due to the cumulative impact of athlete-student stressors and not being reached out to and offered sufficient support. They may be popular around campus and well-known, but there is still a feeling of not belonging and only being identified as an athlete.

Mary Jane: "She is My Main Thing"

This sense of isolation, coupled with a lack of clear support structures for mental and physical health, ultimately leads to increased weed use. Indeed, all participants believe that marijuana is the primary substance of choice for Black male student-athletes. All but one of the participants either currently use or have previously used marijuana. The participants did mention personal use and have witnessed occasional peer use of alcohol, and, in rare instances, of cocaine, molly¹, and lean². However, marijuana was still the main use by far. The reasons for using marijuana include coping mentally and emotionally, pain management, and bonding with other Black male-student-athletes. Additionally, all participants first started smoking marijuana in their teens before they got to college. Three of the participants mention that marijuana use is also cultural and part of their background, where they are from, and how they were raised. It was something that they came to college already doing and continued because it was what they were used to. The majority of the participants also saw marijuana use as beneficial and that there are far more pros than cons.

Joseph stated why he uses and sees such use as a positive and not a problem. He emphasized that marijuana use is not always used just for the high and that many people use it for the numerous benefits. He also described the prevalence of marijuana use among Black student-athletes.

It'll be times where I'm just like, 'Okay, this is something that'll just take my mind off all the stress that's going on in my life. So I would say it's more so in a positive way than something just for fun or to get high. Some people really need it to calm down. People really need it to get their mind off things, or cope with different things. Some dudes just like doing it in social crowds. It's definitely something that every school does it. Every school. I don't think it's a problem, but I think every school and their Black student-athletes have been involved in it in some type of way.

¹ Molly is the pure form of MDMA (Ecstasy)

² Lean is a combination of prescription-strength cough syrup, soda, and fruit flavored hard candy

This addresses the research question of why Black male student-athletes use substances. Joseph explained that he uses marijuana to cope with stress and to feel a sense of calm. Joseph further elaborated on what he believes are the benefits of marijuana use within athletics. He also discussed how numerous athletes use marijuana, including athletes that the general public would never think smoke weed. This is an important point because one argument against athletes being allowed to use marijuana is that it would negatively impact their performance. On a recent episode of ESPN's *First Take*, Stephen A. Smith stated, "I don't want you inebriated in any way when you're out there performing...I don't want to watch some athlete high" (2019). Joseph countered this argument by explaining that most people would not even know if an athlete smokes weed based on their athletic performance.

I'll say that specifically marijuana is something that without it, and in sports in general, I don't think the players that we know today would be the way that they are. That's a really big statement, but it's true. I've been around the best of players. I've been around people you'd be like, 'No, there's no way.' Trust me, like everyone has benefited from it in some type of way. It's just true. Of course, you can abuse anything in life. But in general, I've seen it really be a benefit to people. People have to understand there's a true science behind it now. It's not just like, 'I'm trying to get as high as I can.' For example, I know a person that has sickle cell, and he hoops, but to cope with that pain, he'll really go to dispensaries to get things for pain. That helps. Why wouldn't you want to help that?

Joseph raised another important point about the difference between use and abuse and recognized that anything is a problem if it is being abused. Frank also stated that marijuana use has its benefits as a coping mechanism and that it is helpful for treating anxiety and depression. This is not an isolated or rare belief. Many people rely on marijuana to treat mental health disorders and are legally prescribed medical marijuana.

I think that it's almost like a coping mechanism. I think a lot of student-athletes deal with anxiety and depression, and that weed definitely is one gateway to escape those sorts of things. I think that it helps, especially in their eyes.

Largo discussed reasons for his personal marijuana use which include the fact that he does not like to take pills, preferring marijuana use instead. Because of the side effects and addictive qualities of opiates and benzodiazepines, many student-athletes prefer not to take pills.

Additionally, Largo explained how smoking weed helps him be more productive with other coping mechanisms and tasks as well.

It kind of just relaxes me. Relaxes my nerves. Relaxes my thoughts. I'm always over thinking stuff. I've got ADHD so I'm always hyped. When I smoke I can just chill. I can think about things, I can write things down, I can meditate. And I don't like taking those pills.

I'm Your Pusher

Largo's statement about not liking to take pills leads to the use of additional pain medications. Half of the participants reported having personally experienced or witnessing pain medications being pushed on student-athletes. All of the participants believed that marijuana use is a healthier and/or safer option over pain medications. As an example, a common case of opiate addiction occurs when an athlete is injured and prescribed pain medication. Anecdotal evidence as a mental health professional and chemical dependency professional suggests that reasonable pain prescriptions turns into an over prescription of pain medication, which turns into a pain medication dependence which continues even after the injury is healed, which turns to heroin use because it is cheaper and easier to get. Joseph stated, "I've seen the actions of that. I know people who were addicted to pain medication and it changes you as a person."

Frank described the extent to which he saw pain medications being pushed to student-athletes. He also pointed out that student-athletes are given pain medications without much instruction on how to properly use the medications and manage the many side effects.

I think as I reflect on the pain medicine and stuff, that's typically the first thing that obviously doctors and the trainers push. Any sort of injury, they load your pockets and bookbags with all sorts of pills and stuff. Then, you may be mixing them. Not even

intentionally mixing them, but you take your pain meds after a game on Saturday, and then you're out at the bars Saturday night, drinking beer. You have no sort of idea how this pill is mixing with the alcohol.

Frank raised the dangerous risk of mixing pain medications with alcohol without full awareness of the risks associated. These student-athletes are being offered and/or pushed medications but not being informed of the potential risks. Largo explained that while he was never forced to use pain medications, he was pressured by coaches and trainers for their own benefit. Once again, the student-athletes' health and well-being is overlooked because what their body can do to benefit the school is more important.

Definitely. Especially at the bigger schools. At the bigger schools they got the money for all that. They got the money for the pain shots and everything. Yeah, personally, they didn't put a gun to my head, you know what I'm saying. But they were like, 'Man, we need you to play, you've got to play.' And even if we didn't practice or I didn't practice that whole week, they still need you to play and stuff like that. And I still played. I took a pain shot, still played, and broke bones in my body even more because I didn't feel it while I was playing. So yeah, so they do push that on you, especially on their star players or whatever. Like I said, their jobs are on the line.

Largo was pushed pain medications just so he could keep playing through injuries and ended up damaging his body even more. This reflects the reality that coaching jobs are valued more than the student-athlete's body and wellbeing. X had similar experiences and beliefs as Largo as far as being pushed pain medications just so they can keep playing, which damages their bodies and health even more. He also brought up the role that sponsorships play. When pharmaceutical and/or medical companies and organizations are involved in sponsorships, their products are that much more likely to be pushed.

Because we're playing a sport where we're hitting every day, and the school is sponsored by certain people and they're giving out pills. I know my first week, I almost broke my wrist, I sprained my ankle, and the first thing they did was hand me a bottle of pills. And I told them, like, I don't take pills. A lot of us are forced to have shots during and before games and after, in certain areas of our bodies that will numb us and allow us to play through the game with no pain.

Again, when asked questions about substance use among Black male student-athletes, all participants clarified that marijuana is the most widely used, and outlined the clear benefits of marijuana use. The connections between the forced athlete-student identity and marijuana use are further outlined in the next section.

Black Male Student-Athlete Experience and the Impact on Substance Use

When asked if participants believe that there is a connection between being a Black male student-athlete and substance use, all participants responded that there is a connection. The reasons ranged from substance use being cultural and a way to bond, the similar backgrounds and upbringings of Black male student-athletes, and the stressors that come with the Black male student-athlete experience. Joseph, for example, described the stressors related to his upbringing, background, and being a Black male in society.

Growing up, I knew that I really had to go to college. Just because the odds are already against me. So I knew that this was something I had to do regardless of any sport I chose or anything I did. Often times, Black student-athletes have a story behind why they're there. I definitely think there's a link between the two. Oftentimes, people who do use have similar back stories and just similar experiences.

Joseph addressed the research question of whether Black male student-athletes believe there is a connection between the exploitation and experiences of Black male-student athletes with substance use. Brandon also explained the stress associated with his upbringing and details how his background impacted his college experience. Coming from an urban area to a predominately White institution was a major change for him and many other Black male student-athletes. It is a huge adjustment period that is also piled on top of trying to find yourself as an adult.

Me personally, growing up in the intercity urban area where my first day at my college was like my first day of classes; my first time ever sitting in a classroom with anybody outside of my race too at the same time. So for me it was kind of, I won't say that I was shocked or culture shocked because I feel like my parents prepared me. I kind of knew what I was going to. You know, playing sports kind of opens your eyes to a lot of different other things. So I was kind of expecting everything that was here. But I mean

there's times when I could sit in a lecture hall with four hundred people, and me and my teammates would be the only Black people in the class. That was completely different for me coming from a school where you walk in and you got to put your bag through the scanners, you walking through metal detectors, the police search you if you beep. It was like going through the airport everyday for high school. So coming to college that was a little different, and just trying to find myself and not change in a sense, and still be me. So that was a little different, it was an adjustment.

Brandon went from attending a school and living in a community where the majority of his peers looked like him, to an environment where he was in a room with hundreds of people but he and a few of his teammate were the only Black people. Such adjustments as described by Brandon can take a significant toll on an individual's mental and emotional wellbeing. Additional sources of stress for Black male student-athletes come from the physical pain (mentioned above by Largo) and racialization amongst the coaching staff. Coaches in the NCAA are predominately White. For Black male student-athletes, this power-dynamic is especially stressful. Having a White male have so much power and control over their future is a lot to process and deal with. X stated:

I will for sure say that we deal with stress from the coaching staff. And for sure a lot of us, when we go back home or we're away, we like to... we smoke cannabis and kind of relax. We're relaxed from the stress that we're dealing with, the pain that we feel in our body, and try to focus on what we have. Because, you know, it hurts today, and you have to deal with these coaches. But you know that they are the gatekeepers to your degree and everything further that you may want and that you have signed up to come to the program for.

X highlighted both the physical and mental/emotional pain that Black male student-athletes experience and that they use marijuana to treat the pain. Prince talked about marijuana use for pain management, but also discussed hyper-masculinity as an engrained effort to get student-athletes to be more aggressive.

It can be beneficial strictly for pain management and to be able to relax at the end of the day. Because Black male student-athletes deal with a lot and a lot of anxiety, and hyper-masculinity. You have to be able to ... you got to get out of that state. You can't be in killer mode all day. I feel like if an individual was brought up in an environment where

that was typical or normal, then they will be more likely to engage in that type of activity, or that type of coping in college as a Black athlete.

Again, Prince mentioned the need for coping, but also explained that if an individual is raised around using marijuana as a coping mechanism, they are likely to use that same coping mechanism. Finally, Xavier described a different motivating factor for marijuana use: bonding and community. "I guess you can say like brining that community together. It's kind of a common thing with Black student-athletes, so I guess they feel more comfortable around each other." The feeling of isolation is an issue that came up in earlier themes. Being able to smoke with other Black male student-athletes is a way for this population to be around people they are familiar with and what they know. This sense of community translates to comfort and safety. Smoking together is also a way to show that they all have struggles going on and are dealing with pain and racism.

Is it Because I'm Black?

The first subtheme of the Black male student-athlete experience is racism. While all of the participants described experiences with microaggressions, three of the participants discussed experiencing overt racism. Largo highlighted the CRT tenet, racism as normalcy and a part of everyday life. While participants named how the racism they experienced is happening all the time, they also identified how this racism is masked at times based on how well they are athletically performing.

There's racism everywhere. Especially with the Black athletes. I'm not saying that just to be biased or anything, but it's everywhere. Politics is everywhere, racism is everywhere. I don't care what nobody say, everybody's racist. They love you when you're winning. But if you lose, they're quick to throw out racial slurs and racist comments.

As stated earlier, the level of respect and treatment depends on the what the Black male-student athlete is doing for the fans and for the university. Doug previously mentioned that faculty

treated him well, but that he had issues with other students on campus. He echoed the treatment Largo identified, clarifying that he faced, “Racial slurs, getting told the only reason you're there is for the football team, and those kinds of ... disregarding your academic standing, stuff like that.”

For those who did not name their experiences with overt racism, a common theme emerged: athlete status as a protective factor. For many universities, the athletic facilities are on the outskirts of campus. Student-athletes are thus geographically segregated from the rest of the student body. X described this separation.

I think it's protective, for sure, because we have our own buildings. You know? We have facilities, and everything that we do is segregated from the rest of the campus. The only thing that we do with the regular students, is attend certain classes. But even sometimes we're not forced to do that, because those teachers will send syllabuses to our counselors so we'll be in tune with what we need to do and what has to be done for certain deadlines, because we have to travel.

Black vs White

A second subtheme is that the Black male student-athlete experience is not the same as the White male student-athlete experience. All participants believed that the Black male student-athlete experience is different than their White counterparts, including the reasons they are at college and how they got there. All participants agreed that all student-athletes have difficulties, but recognized that the stressors they face being Black males are different. Reggie stated, “Definitely. It's not to say that White male athletes don't go through things. But definitely the melanin in your skin makes a huge difference for how your life goes.”

X described how the experiences are different based on the different motivating factors to selecting which university to attend.

In terms of being a Black male student-athlete, the experience is a little different for us being that most of us, we chose our university not based upon the degree preference, but

more of ... It was more in tune with our sports programs: who we were going to be coached under, et cetera, et cetera.

Specifics of the athletic programs are more enticing for Black male-student athletes, while White male student-athletes may be more concerned about academics. This difference happens because from a young age, Black male student-athletes are led to believe that their sport is their only way to success and should take priority. Prince explained how social climate creates different experiences and that skin color is a determining factor in how much exposure an athlete gets. This level exposure is another source of tension.

I feel like for the White athlete, it's totally different when it comes to the main revenue generating sports, football and basketball, because they naturally won't get the same exposure as a Black athlete who's the same height and weight, because of the color of their skin. So, I think the experience for them is totally different, especially if they're walking on, or if they have a scholarship. It's different, and there are different social ... it's a different social climate for them. And the stressors are completely different and on different levels.

To summarize the theme of the Black male student-athlete experience and the impact on substance use, Reggie spoke directly to athletic identity foreclosure while discussing the connection.

There's a major connection because I would say especially a lot of the times when football is kind of like the only thing that is your release. Then you get to this level and it's more so a business. Business and politics, you know, it's like when you first come there you might be the man and you the man and you produce and then something happens, whether it's a disagreement with a coach, and that main release is now shaken up. How do you cope? You cope with what's there and what's popular. In that time period, it's alcohol, weed, or girls. I think that just in general there's not enough attention towards finding other passions aside from the sport itself. It's very stressful just even trying to figure out what you want to do. I don't think there's enough push towards finding those other passions or those other interests that might, you know, might be a career for you. You just never know what'll happen, and you know, football itself, it can stop at any point in time. I've seen it many times. I've seen it happen and you know, even now I look on Instagram and I see, I think it's hindering. I see people reminiscing, and there's nothing wrong with it, but you can kind of tell when someone can't let it go. Or is kind of stuck, because they post about it a lot. So I don't think there's enough push to find other passions, and I would like that to be something that's addressed.

As Reggie explained, for many Black-male student athletes, their sport is all they think they have and they only identify as an athlete. If that is taken away from them or disturbed, they need something to help them cope; marijuana is a primary way to cope. Speaking to the research question of what supports Black male student-athletes would like to see, Reggie would like to see Black male student-athletes being pushed to find additional passions and identities. Largo discussed the differences between substance use between Black and White male student-athletes. Four other participants echoed Largo's argument and mention how they observed Black male student-athletes choosing marijuana and White male student-athletes choosing pills, alcohol, and cocaine. Largo also tied in marijuana use as a coping mechanism for Black male student-athletes.

Like I said, it's really ... I'm not going to lie, not even a lot of ... I'm not going to say I know a lot of Black athletes that do the pain meds like that. That's more the White athletes. More Black athletes is on smoking. The majority of the Black athletes is smoking. The White athletes is really on the pills and the ones getting like that. But I think a lot of us, we do smoke to cope. To get through the day after a long day of film and lifting weights and practice and blah, blah, blah and then we go, we smoke. We go home, we watch some more film and chill and just try to ease our minds, because we all got stuff going on. We all smoke to cope.

No Problem, Mon

The final theme centers around whether participants believe substance use among Black male student-athletes is problematic. Seven of the participants believed that substance use among Black male student-athletes is not a problem. These participants were specifically talking about marijuana use. Largo referenced the prevalence of use and identified when substance use would be a problem.

I don't think it's a problem at all. For the most part, I would say more than 85% of athletes is doing it. It's not like it's steroids or something, making you hella fast or hella buff or whatever. Everybody's doing it for the most part and I don't think it's a bad thing at all. I don't think it's a problem because, especially like I said, the smoking, most of the Black athletes, what is it doing? If anything it makes us more lazy (laughs). So if we smoke and we get up and go work out and go play, then that's all just the energy we got. But if the smoking will make you just want to relax and sit here and chill and whatever. But like I

said, if dudes doing cocaine before the game or whatever, which I do know, I knew some dudes doing that, then I guess that could be different.

Largo felt that if they are still functioning and getting everything done that they need to, than marijuana use is not a problem at all. He also pointed out that unlike other substances, marijuana does not provide an unfair athletic advantage, such as steroid use and is not as dangerous as cocaine use. The two participants who did see substance use as a problem among Black male student-athletes identify use as the sole coping mechanism. Reggie explained why Black male student-athletes use marijuana as a temporary coping mechanism that does not address the root of the problems and stressors.

I just, pretty much I see it's a coping mechanism. I think it stems from where the athletes come from. Their background. More so like, here they are at this institution, but they still have to worry about their family and the well-being of their family. Then, they have to cope with life. You know, sometimes the family can't provide financially. Which is very important, just in life, but especially at that time period. The money that you do receive is not enough to sustain, and a lot of, I would say especially a lot of Black people or a lot of people in general just don't know about financial management. It's like the money you do get, it's not enough, and then you're trying to figure it out. You're stressed out. It's just a domino effect.

Having to worry about family, money, and life in general is a lot for any student-athlete to deal with. Add on top of that, the additional stress of being a Black male, and as Reggie states, it is a domino effect. One stressor leads to another, resulting in emotional and mental distress. Prince also saw substance use a problem when there are no other supports. When asked what supports he would like to see, Prince stated:

Maybe some type of therapy. I think it would definitely make a difference. But it depends on how enthusiastic the university was to making a difference in that. At the end of the day, if no one holds the university accountable, they're not going to ... like, if the university didn't have to give the athletes water, they wouldn't.

Prince would like to see mental health therapy offered and available to Black male student-athletes. However, he also recognized that the university has to want to offer such support, which

could be unlikely or difficult, considering his analogy that they would not even give them water if they did not have to. He was saying that the university does not even care about their physical health and lives, so they are not going to care about their mental health. X explained that marijuana use is not really a problem aside from legality, but that there is a problem with pain medication.

I think only when it comes to pills, to be honest. I think cannabis, in a sense, I think the only reason why it's a problem is because it's viewed as a problem. I know in the State that I'm in, California, it's legal. So, I feel like that's one reason why that one may align with it being a problem. But I think it has more or less to do with pills.

The legality issue of marijuana use is an important one. For many student-athletes, not only is marijuana a banned substance by the NCAA, but is still illegal in most states. While the physical and psychological effects of use may not be problematic, the legality of the use is a problem for student-athletes.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal numerous problems when exploring substance use among Black male student-athletes. However, these problems are not with the Black male student-athletes themselves. They should not be looked at as thugs or criminals because of their use. Instead, the root of why Black male student-athletes need coping mechanisms should be the focus. Key findings that help clarify this root include: the need for coping mechanisms, racism, and difficulty finding additional coping strategies. Marijuana is used by Black male student-athletes to deal with both physical and emotional/mental pain. Black male student-athletes experience racism that ranges from overt acts to microaggressions. Racism experienced by Black male student-athletes is also embedded in the systems of intercollegiate athletics. Finally, due to a lack of adequate mental health services and education, Black male student-athletes struggle with finding ways to cope, thus, reinforcing weed use as a coping mechanism.

This study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What do Black male student-athletes identify as reasons for engaging in substance use? (b) Do Black male student-athletes see substance use as a problem? If so, what supports would they envision needing to change their behavior? (c) Is there a perceived and/or experienced relationship between substance use and exploitation of Black male student-athletes? One of the biggest takeaways from speaking with the participants reflects the CRT tenets of racism as normalcy and counter-storytelling. All of the participants share their own personal experiences that counter the belief that student-athletes are well taken care of. All students and student-athletes have struggles and stressors. However, participants clarified how Black male student-athletes have additional stressors that other student populations do not have to cope with. Black male student-athletes not only have the stressors of performing well academically and athletically, finances, relationships, and trying to find their identity; but they also have to deal with the everyday racism that they encounter. From racial slurs for throwing an interception in a bowl game to microaggressions like being asked by another student on campus, “Do you play basketball or football,” just because a student made an assumption about a Black male on a predominately White campus.

These everyday experiences lead to athletic identity foreclosure. From a young age, these men are led to believe that their best path to success is either sports or entertainment, and athletic identity foreclosure guides this pathway. These men get to college after being recruited for their bodies and their sole identity of athlete is further reinforced by their experiences as Black male student-athletes. Throughout the findings, the participants reveal that they needed to escape and take their mind off all of their stressors and that they felt isolated and did not know where they could go or who they could talk to for help. When considering everything that Black male student-athletes have to cope with along with athletic identity foreclosure, it is not surprising that

this population struggles mentally and emotionally and turn to marijuana as one of their primary ways to cope.

If an individual is not able to stop using despite negative consequences such as legal problems, failing classes, getting kicked out of school/off the team, strained relationships, and/or ruining career possibilities; then there's a problem. When a person cannot stop, it is now a substance use disorder. However, all of the stressors that were described throughout the findings can show how Black male student-athletes easily turn to marijuana as a coping mechanism. This leads to several conclusions: (a) The criminalization and banning of marijuana use within athletics should be reevaluated. If allowed within athletics, marijuana use could be monitored to make sure that use is not turning to dependency and that other coping mechanisms are being utilized as well. (b) If marijuana use is not at the point of dependency and the use is helping then it is not a bad behavior, and (c) With pain pills being pushed by athletic department staff and given the current opioid epidemic, marijuana could be a safer and healthier alternative.

Another problem with strict bans on marijuana use is that it disproportionately targets and punishes Black student-athletes. This is comparable to the legal justice system disproportionately arresting and unjustly sentencing Black men and women for marijuana charges. Black male student-athletes are already being exploited, as Black males make up the majority of the rosters for the top revenue generating sports: football and men's basketball. The positions of power within intercollegiate athletics are predominately White men. Marijuana bans act as another way for White men in power to control Black bodies and minds, all while making a common coping mechanism illegal.

Marijuana use within athletics has been a topic of discussion recently because of two cases. The first case is David Irving. Irving was a lineman in the NFL for the Dallas Cowboys.

He had been suspended three times in four years for violating the NFL's substance abuse policy. In March 2019 during his last suspension, Irving took to Instagram and announced that he was quitting because of the NFL's ban on marijuana use (Patra, 2019). The second case involves NBA player, D'Angelo Russell, who was caught with marijuana in his checked bag at LaGuardia airport in New York City in May 2019 (Perez, 2019). These two cases highlight when marijuana use crosses the line between use and dependency. These two individuals made poor decisions (quitting football via social media and trying to sneak weed through airport security) that greatly impacted their personal and professional lives because of marijuana use. However, these cases also highlight the prevalence of marijuana use among Black male athletes and opens the conversation of whether marijuana should be legalized and decriminalized. As participants in this study clarify, discussion about the roots of Black male athlete marijuana use needs to be centered.

All of the participants of this study who use or have used marijuana describe instances where they stopped or had periods of abstinence so that it would not interfere with their life and to avoid negative consequence. This is evidence that marijuana can be used for physical, mental, and emotional coping without turning to a dependency. However, as a mental health provider, I strongly believe that counseling should go hand-in-hand with medications. Just like any other psychiatric medication, marijuana use should be paired with other coping mechanisms such as counseling, journaling, and meditation. The NCAA and universities need to improve the mental and emotional supports for Black male student-athletes. Again, this is needed for all students and all student-athletes. But Black male student-athletes are at an increased risk because of additional stressors. The lack of support contributes to Black male student-athletes feeling isolated, depressed, anxious, and devalued as individuals.

Individual and/or group counseling should also be available for all student-athletes. Counseling can be provided by mental health professionals (MHP) who are employed and funded by the university athletic department. Having MHPs employed within athletics ensures that they are aware of what is going on within the department and with the student-athletes and they are easily accessible to both the student-athletes and the coaching/training staff. It is imperative that the student-athletes are told and understand that whatever they disclose with an MHP will not be shared with anyone else without their permission unless there is an imminent risk of danger to self or others.

In order to address this need, I argue for an MHP residency model that ensures placement of qualified professionals with direct experience with student athletes in general, and Black male students in particular. The MHPs would be mandated to meet State licensing and practice requirements. The NCAA will monitor the MHP to student-athlete ratio. Each Division I school shall have at least three MHPs on staff. This number would increase depending on the number of student-athletes. It is essential that the MHPs be diverse. There need to be MHPs on staff who can relate and build rapport with Black male student-athletes. The concepts of being able to relate and build rapport are vital. Black male student-athletes need to have someone who they feel like gets them and their experiences. Without this, support services will not be utilized because Black male student-athletes will not feel comfortable or confident in the services offered. Biopsychosocial evaluations for all incoming student-athletes can be beneficial as well. This will help identify what risk factors each student-athlete is already coming in with and how to best prepare to support them. Evaluations will also help with identifying the student-athletes as individuals and more than just athletes.

Once adequate support services are in place, where and how to access such resources needs to be made very clear and consistently to Black male student-athletes. Information on resources cannot be something that is glossed over just once to incoming student-athletes. If MHPs are doing evaluations on all incoming student-athletes, this will make the student-athletes aware of who and where they can go. Student-athlete mental and emotional health should be discussed with student-athletes just as much as physical health. Athletic staff also need to receive consistent training on student-athlete wellbeing. They should be able to recognize signs and symptoms of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and other mental and emotional health issues. Not only should they be able to recognize signs and symptoms, but athletic staff should also know what to do and who or where to refer student-athletes. Having MHPs housed within the athletic department would make such trainings and communication between coaches, trainers, and MHPs a streamlined process.

Finally, the NCAA should develop stricter policies pertaining to student-athlete wellbeing. For example, the NCAA should enforce continual training for athletic staff and workshops for the student-athletes. The NCAA should also improve the monitoring of each institution's resources and services that are available for student-athlete mental and emotional health. Student-athlete mental health is at the forefront more than it has ever been, but there are still great strides that need to be made.

Due to the lack of research data, more research is needed on Black male student-athlete substance use. A limitation of this study is that only ten individuals were interviewed. Future studies should seek to include more participants in order to gain a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the risk factors and reasons for use. It is important that such research remain focused on Black male student-athletes and that ways of gathering data are

fundamentally re-evaluated to center Black male student-athletes. Such continued research will guide MHPs and best practices for working with and advocating for Black male-student athletes.

Conclusion

Blunt has several definitions. In the case of this study, blunt refers to being straight to the point and a cigar that has been hollowed out and filled with weed. The participants of this study were blunt and open with sharing their experiences, revealing the truths about being a Black male student-athlete and how these experiences reinforce marijuana use. Blunts are smoked to ease the very real physical and emotional pain experienced by Black male student-athletes. While marijuana use is banned by the NCAA and illegal in many states, Black male student-athletes are limited to other legal coping mechanisms because of the lack of mental and emotional support offered by institutions and athletic departments. To be blunt, Black male student-athletes smoke weed to create spaces for them to just chill, decompress, and just be young, Black men: in short, more than just athletes.

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Appendix A

Semi-Standardized Interview Format

Demographics

- What year are you?
- What is your major?
- Do you play basketball or football?

Substance Use

- Do you currently use any substances?
 - If “yes:
 - What do you use?
 - How often?
 - When did you first start using?
 - Why do you use?
 - If “no:”
 - Have you ever used substances?
 - If “yes:
 - What did you use?
 - When did you start?
 - When and why did you stop?
- Tell me about what you’ve observed with other Black male football and basketball players using.
- Do you see substance use as a problem?

- If “yes:”
 - What supports would you like to have to assist with changing your behavior?
- If “no:”
 - Why not?
- Do you feel pressure from your peers, coaching staff, training staff, advisors, or anyone associated with the university to use? Explain.
- Do you believe and/or have you experienced a relationship between your substance use and your status as a Black male student-athlete? Explain.

College Experience and Future Plans

- Tell me about your college experience as a Black male student-athlete.
- What are your plans after college?