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Perceptions of Black Student Athletes About Academic Mentorship at a Predominantly White Institution in Higher Education

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Abstract The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe the mentorship experiences of Black student athletes attending undergraduate programs at a Predominantly White Institution in Higher Education (PWI-HE). The research site for this study was a co-educational public research institution (PWI-HE) with an approximate enrollment of 45,000 students. A total of six Black student athletes (five African American and one Jamaican) agreed to participate in this study. Four major interrelated and complex themes emerged from the data analyses. These themes were: (a) *mentoring study habits and routines*, (b) *mentoring academic schedule and time management*, (c) *personal development within an isolated environment,* and (d) *family members' support and encouragements*. To better support Black student athletes at PWI-HEs, athletic department administrators, coaches, faculty, and all students should be encouraged to respect, value, and embrace the racial identities, origins, languages, and cultures of the student athletes that are being mentored.

Keywords Mentoring · Black student athletes · PWI-HE · Perceptions · Experiences

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Introduction

Successfully participating in athletic, academic, and social engagements is a unique opportunity for Black student athletes at predominantly White institutions of higher education (PWI-HEs) in the United States. The importance of a college degree in the United States is becoming increasingly apparent. Student athletes learn important skills (e.g., leadership), and time management. They also gain knowledge of how to work with others toward social mobility and professional or employment goals. Although university athletic departments assist in creating students' academic and social support networks and in facilitating student success, many Black student athletes who hold ethnic minority status on campus may not experience the same academic, social, and athletic engagements as students from majority groups (Outcalt and Skewes-Cox 2002). Approximately 10% of undergraduate students in colleges and universities are African American, including student athletes. Studies have shown that African American students perceive that getting a degree of higher education means "acting white" (Brittan et al. 2009; Cross and Slater 1997). Similarly, Black student athletes on a PWI-HE campus also often perceived other students' (including teammates) negative perceptions and/or overheard comments, or have experienced racial discrimination within their athletic teams and classrooms at universities (e.g., that they were academically inferior, had a lower grade point average). College students of color often experience acculturative stress that creates a threat to their own cultural beliefs and values, leading to a unique vulnerability to psychological distress (Brittan et al. 2009). Because of this, Black student athletes often arrive on campus feeling out of place, intimidated and emotionally fragile. The effects of acculturative stress in such students are associated with depression, low esteem, and academic difficulties (Constantine et al. 2004). Common challenges Black student-athletes face while making the transition to a PWI-HE include living away from home and previously-developed support networks, developing new social groups, assuming responsibilities, engaging in self-discipline, and managing new athletic and academic roles, which can lead to social and academic struggles (e.g., caused dropout or lower GPA) at the PWI-HE (Brittan et al. 2009).

Presence of role models is one factor viewed as important for academic, social, and athletic success as well as retention of Black student athletes. Kram (1985) explains that if student athletes with advanced experiences and knowledge are committed to providing upward mobility and support to younger student athletes, a mentorship developed that led to improved teamwork, self-worth, and academic competence. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of faculty, coach, staff, and Black students at PWI-HEs available to serve as role models (Brittan et al. 2009). Bozeman and Feeney (2007) suggest that someone who can serve as "boss" should not only be eligible under the concept of mentorship to be a mentor, but that a boss can be an effective mentor as well. This hierarchical style of mentoring is a particular type of role model—one who is an administrative superior, is an effective communicator, and often has face-to-face direct interaction. Through such a supervisory connection and role model, Black student athletes may establish a

positive identity in the campus environment. On the other hand, alternative forms of mentoring such as peer mentoring (Bozionelos 2004), group mentoring (Dansky 1996), formal and informal mentoring (Chao 1997), and racially diversified mentoring (Ragins 1997) have different core meanings. It is certainly the case that multiple meanings, approaches, and outcomes add complexity and in some instances ambiguity in terms of mentoring. Without any effective forms of mentoring, Black student athletes may continue to struggle to establish strong social networks that moderate negative stress events such as relationship conflicts, financial difficulties, and academic stress in colleges and universities (Spitzer 2000).

Purpose and Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this study was to investigate and explain the relational mentorship experiences of Black student athletes attending undergraduate programs at a PWI-HE. The research question that guided this study was "What were Black student athletes' academic experiences through mentoring while attending a PWI-HE?" We define "mentoring" to describe a relationship between mentee and mentor that provides guidance and academic achievement mediated by improved family relationships, self-worth, and scholarship competence (Rhodes et al. 2000). Traditionally, mentoring is viewed as a dyadic, face to face, long term relationship between senior student-athletes, faculty and staff, and junior student-athletes that fosters the mentee's academic and/or personal development (Donaldson et al. 2000).

Situated in self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1985), this framework allowed us to explore the capacity and mentoring engagement of Black student athletes. One important aspect of the theory focuses on power relations between dominant individuals (i.e., coaches, parents, teachers, mentors) and subordinate individuals (i.e., athletes, children, and students), seeking to understand how these relations influence resultant motivation and experiences in the subordinates (Sheldon et al. 2003). Deci and Ryan (2000) explain that individuals show mentoring behaviors with ego involvement and power relations which turn to introjected regulated behaviors. In self- determination theory, mentoring behaviors should be performed and demonstrated in a way that one can attain feelings of self-worth from others (Janssen et al. 2014). This helps mentees to gain others' respect through power relationships. It also allowed us to describe how, within their academic and athletic programs, Black student athletes learn and self-reflect though interacting with their teammates, classmates, professors, and academic counselors on campus at a PWI-HE.

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a concept of human motivation and personality that concerns individuals' growth tendencies (mental and maturation) and psychological needs (Deci and Ryan 1985). In the 1970s, Lepper et al. (1973) studied understanding children's intrinsic and extrinsic interest and motivation and investigated how the role of intrinsic motivation influenced individual's behaviors. SDT identifies five types of motivation that differ in terms of how they are psychologically regulated: (a) *intrinsic motivation* refers to behavior regulated by interest in the task for its own pleasure (Conway et al. 2015); (b) *integrated motivation* refers to behavior regulated by value a person recognizes as their own; (c) *identified*

motivation refers to behaviors that are regulated by values which a person identifies, but are not same as their own values; (d) *introjected motivation* refers to behaviors that are regulated by values and forces external to the individual that are not their own, but where the individual acknowledges the authority of external force (e.g., imagined others/avoid disapproved or guilt), and (e) *external motivation* refers to behaviors regulated by the external forces or contingencies such as rewards or punishment (Conway et al. 2015).

The key component is the extent to which motivation types are autonomous (intrinsic) or controlled (extrinsic). Deci (1971) explains that individuals who have more autonomous motivations are associated with well-being and a higher level of performance, whereas controlled motivation is not. Stone et al. (2009) explain three types of intrinsic motivation including autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to having experiences of acting with a sense of choice, volition, and self-determination that involve a sense of self-directedness in one's action (Stone et al. 2009). In regards to competence, the student athletes feel capable and have a sense of confidence and effectiveness during academic engagements on campus. Relatedness reflects the need to feel personal and psychological support that are involved in emotional connection, as into love and care, and to be loved and cared for (Baumeister and Leary 1995). This study explored how mentoring involved in relationships were experienced between new student athletes (the protégés or mentees) and the more experienced student athletes (mentors), staff, and faculty. This study also generates knowledge of how modeling as the function of student and athletic development behaviors contributes to student athletes' competences. According to Haggard et al. (2011), a mentor who understands the protégé's perspectives, provides choice, and encourages self-initiation, is autonomy supportive and could facilitate the protégé's self-motivation and performance.

Transformational Leadership Theory

SDT (Deci and Ryan 2000) explains that the nuance and growth of human psyche is dependent on the satisfaction of three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, SDT alone cannot explain mentorship phenomena in an institutional culture. In this study, transformational leadership theory (Bass 1998) was additionally used to examine institutional cultures following existing rules, procedures, and norms, and the social unit where the mentoring took place (Bass 1998; Bass and Riggio 2006). Leaders (mentors) change their culture by first understanding it and then realigning the institutional culture with a new vision and revision of its' shared assumptions, values, and norms (Bass 1985). The mentor raises follower awareness, understanding of moral values and inspiring visions, and encourages followers to transcend their own goals and interests for the collective good (Bass 1998). The concept is composed of four dimensions which include (a) idealized influence (the mentor acts as a role model who earns the admiration of mentees and articulates high expectations about group goals and mission, (b) inspirational motivation (the mentor provides meaning and a clear and attractive vision while demonstrating confidence that goals can be achieved), (c) intellectual stimulation (the mentor

encourages mentee to make their own decisions, both creative and innovative), and (d) individualized consideration (the mentor acts as brother and father, considering individual needs, strength, and aspirations) (Stenling and Tafvelin 2014). The mentor "seeks to satisfy higher needs and engages the full potential of the follower"(p. 4.). The leader develops exchanges or agreements with their followers, pointing out what the followers will receive if they do something right as well as wrong (Bass and Avolio 1993).

Mentoring is considered an activity in which members of an organization (e.g., PWI-HE) can influence mentee's actions, behaviors, and their developmental process (Bass and Avolio 1993). Mentoring is viewed as a practice that socializes a mentee and helps him or her to understand and accept the norm or risk on campus (Lechuga 2014). Through the self-determination and transformational leadership lens, Black student athletes need to understand the importance of fostering individual success through a mentoring process that does not infringe upon their needs. Tafarodi, Milne, and Smith (1999) found that an individual's enhanced sense of internal perceived locus of causality positively enhances intrinsic motivation and influence one's perceived competency in their performance.

Method

Research Design

This study used an explanatory (holistic) multiple case study design (Yin 2003).

This method allowed us to conduct each case as a separate study and to reflect using replication logic (Yin 2003). In this study, replication logic was situated in the framework of self-determination theory (Deci 1971) and transformational leadership theory (Bass 1998) to better understand the conditions in which a particular phenomenon (e.g., mentoring experiences) was likely to be found (i.e., literal replication predicts similar results across cases), as well as the conditions where it was not likely to be found (i.e., theoretical replication predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons) (Yin 2003). We used this approach to explore the complexities of mentorship experiences of Black student athletes in a PWI-HE replicated across cases.

Research Site

The research site for this study was a co-educational public research institution (a PWI-HE) with an approximate enrollment of 45,000 students. The selection of case study participants involved contacting the athletic department at the PWI-HE and seeking nominations of Black student athletes matching the selection criteria (Yin 2003), because student athletes' racial and ethnic identification became complex and sensitive. Therefore, academic counselors helped and asked prospective participants' racial self-identification. Six participants (two females and four males) were purposefully selected for this study. The selection criteria included (a) holding ethnic

minority status on their campus, (b) receiving a full scholarship, and (c) maintaining their academic eligibility to participate in their athletic activities. The researchers also sought out international Black student athletes for this study. All Black student athletes who met the criteria were asked to volunteer to participate in this study and asked to sign a consent form indicating their willingness to do so. The researchers received signed consent forms from a total of six Black student athletes who agreed to participate in this study. These student athletes represented football, softball, and track and field teams.

Data Collection

Data collection included (a) face-to-face open-ended focused interviews with each participant (Yin 2003) and (b) academic programs of study from each participant.

Face-to-Face Open-Ended Focused Interviews

According to Yin (2003), the researcher engages in two phases in conducting interviews: (a) following the interview case study protocol and (b) asking the researcher's actual (conversational) questions. Some examples of questions were (a) what characteristics do you look for in a mentor? (b) How has having a mentor (or not having a mentor) affected you as a Black student athletes? and (c) If you could change mentor relationships, what would it be? Using a face-to-face focused interview approach, the researcher used open-ended questioning and asked participants factual questions and their opinions about people, places, and events related to their academic, social, and athletic experiences at PWI-HE (Yin 2003). The participants were interviewed for a short period of time (approximately 60 to 90-minutes) during in season and off season (Yin 2003). For this study, the interviews remained open-ended and assumed a conversational manner. Moreover, the interviews were guided by a pre-established set of questions that were originally developed by NCAA (2007) and modified by Carter and Hart (2010). The specific questions were modified and carefully worded for relevance to the current investigation of Black student athletes in undergraduate programs at a PWI-HE (Table 1).

Academic Programs of Study

The participants' academic programs of study (archival record) were used in conjunction with other source (face-to-face interview) of information in exploring these case studies. The rationale for examining the participants' academic programs of study is those documents serve as an agreement between athletic department and the participants regarding: (a) chosen area of academic majors; (b) the background of previous courses and academic experiences; (c) the expected time schedule for undertaking the required athletic practices, meeting, and classes; and (d) the courses anticipated to meet requirements of school and outside the school (practicum or internships), accompanied by a statement of rationale.

Table 1 Black student-athletes' demographic data

Pseudonym	Academic major	Gender	Sport	Hometown	Ethnicity
Diane	Health/PE	Female	Shotput (track and field)	Kingston, Jamaica	Jamaican
Kyle	Sport Studies	Male	Football	Miami, Florida	African American
Zed	Sport Studies	Male	Football	Miami, Florida	African American
Jeff	PE	Male	Track and field (400 M)	Baltimore, Maryland	African American
Julie	Exercise Science	Female	Softball	San Diego, California	Afro-Hispanic
Antonio	Sport Studies	Male	Football	Cleveland, Ohio	African American

Health/PE Health and Physical Education

Trustworthiness and Data Analysis

Trustworthiness in this study was established through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation involved the use of multiple perspectives to receive and analyze the information. In this study, researchers collected and analyzed their interviews and academic programs of study, all of which were utilized as data sources. Use of triangulation is intended to evaluate the accuracy of the data, as opposed to seeking universal truth (Merriam 1998). Member checking was used to reduce the impact of subjective bias (Patton 2002). The lead researcher e-mailed a copy of the transcribed interview data and program of study to the individual participants. The participants' acknowledgment of the accuracy of the data and the researchers' interpretations of the data ensured that trustworthiness was established (Merriam 1998). Peer debriefing is the process of exposing oneself to a distinguished peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session, with the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might remain only implicit in the inquirer's mind (Patton 2002). Peer debriefers judged the interpretations of the data as accurate and representative of the participants' statements.

A constant comparative method (Boeije 2010) was used to interpret the data. The basic strategy of this analytical process is to do what its name implies and constantly comparing pieces of data. More specifically, each potentially meaningful piece of data within the transcripts from the first set of interviews with each participant, as well as their interview transcripts from the in- and off-season interviews, were coded independently by the first and second researchers, and any differences were discussed until agreement was reached. The second set of interviews about practice experiences were initially coded by the lead researcher and then checked by the second researcher. In addition, the two peer de-briefers (graduate students) reviewed the codes to avoid potential researcher bias. Further coded data from three sets of transcripts from each participant were compared so as to identify similarities and differences. After peer debriefing, the researchers conducted a second round of coding key terms (e.g., mentoring; academic, social, and athletic experiences; motivation; personal goals; campus life; campus culture; and athletic contributions) in

the transcripts of the data sources (recoding the original ones). During this process some codes were combined (e.g., the similar terms *mentorship* and *guidance*), while others were split into subcategories (subthemes). Finally, the researchers examined the final codes to organize them into a hierarchical structure using individual and group coding percentages (how many times key terms appeared in the data source). Then all data and the definitions of the key terms were sent back to all participants for a second round of member checking. Then all data and the definitions of the key terms were sent back to all participants for a second round of member checking. After receiving final confirmation from all participants, the researchers grouped the codes into thematic categories, which were then refined into recurring themes.

Findings

All participants received formal mentoring opportunities (operated by department of athletics) in which they were required to meet with their mentors weekly or bi-weekly, depending on their academic assignments and/or exam situations. Four major interrelated and complex themes emerged from the data analyses. These themes were: (a) *mentoring study habits and routines*, (b) *mentoring academic schedule and time management*, (c) *personal development within an isolated environment,* and (d) *family members' support and encouragements*. These interrelated themes had influenced the academic mentoring experiences of Black student athletes at the PWI-HE. The themes and subthemes are discussed in the following narrative, with supporting quotes from the participants.

Mentoring Study Habits and Routines

This theme exposes the difficulties caused by study habits and routines as experienced by the participants at the PWI-HE. Participating student athletes struggled to earn good grades on writing assignments, as they encountered cultural mismatches in the daily use of English from the very beginning of their college education. Four of the six Black student athletes (Diane, Kyle, Zed, and Antonio) felt that they needed academic guidance the moment they began attending the PWI-HE. The students commented that early mentoring during their freshman year was the most important aspect of a university mentoring program for Black student athletes, because freshmen academic course grades become a significant indicator and a turning point of either surviving or failing in the academic world. In contrast, Jeff and Julie felt that it was helpful to have peer tutors from outside athletics, rather than academic mentors from their athletic teams during their freshman years, because peer tutors provided key elements of how to improve their grades for the specific courses they were taking at the time. Antonio (senior on the football team) clearly stated that he had a mentor, a white senior teammate, during his freshman year, but he did not pay much attention when the mentor suggested that becoming an academically independent student and studying outside of required study hours is most important in achieving academic success. He felt that the mentorship with the white

teammate from a vastly different background was not relevant to his ethnic background and behaviors as an African American, including student athletes' study habits. In his own words he explained that collectivism is very important for Black student athletes. Upon reflection he regretted that he did not study hard enough to be a good student, and that he did not take the advice of his assigned mentor more seriously. He reported:

> When I began to attend this university, I was not academically well-prepared. I felt like I came here for playing football. My grades were low so, academic counselors and my mentor told me that I had to come and spend a few hours at study hall after the practices. Well, that didn't help me, because I was playing around with other African American teammates. They were not serious about academics. Study hall was more about being a social occasion. I know I wasn't mature enough to be a college student. I had a chance to talk with white senior teammates, they told me "you have to attend your classes regularly and check office hours", but I didn't pay attention either, because I didn't like when someone told me I had to do something. It's kind of bossy. I should have paid more attention, because I wasn't eligible to play football because of my academics two years ago. I regret it so much (Antonio, interview).

Based on Antonio's interview response, his previous mentor offered support and advice prior to facing the negative academic situation. However, this situation helped him learn from his mistakes and take proactive study habits and routines. He believed that peer mentoring is a positive source of personal and social growth if the mentor and mentee find common, effective forms of mentoring (e.g., grouping, bossing, friendly).

Kyle (junior football player) explained the senior teammate that acted as his mentor gave him advice about how to take and study for online courses. Kyle had no experience with online courses, and he preferred to take face-to-face courses, because of advantages such as an opportunity for social connection with professors, and the professors' ability to interpret students' non-verbal communication and real-time interactions. All participants agreed that they would be able to receive more relevant help and support enrolled in face to face courses, rather than online courses. However, he felt that student athletes cannot ignore online courses, because the online course format is convenient and flexible for student athletes, who have very tight schedules. They can access online course materials while traveling and participating in away games, which often occur on weekdays. He sought out advice and mentoring and asked his senior teammates about how to take and study for online courses. His teammates mentioned that organization, time management, and assignment deadlines are essential for successful completion of online courses. Kyle explained that

> When I had to take a motor development online course, I asked one of my teammates about how to study for an online course. He told me that I need to learn how to operate the Blackboard system and make sure I find assignment information and deadlines. Some professors give multiple assignments weekly. He told me 'if you miss assignment deadline, you would be in trou-

> ble.' I checked my syllabus, but when I looked at discussion bulletin board assignments, there were no deadlines listed in the syllabus. That scared me. The academic counselors or athletic department need to give us an idea of what to do and how to take online courses. There are many student athletes who missed submitting their assignments through the online submission system (Kyle, interview).

Kyle felt that there were "hidden" assignments he was not aware of while taking online courses. Zed, another football player, also mentioned that effective communication with online instructors was essential for guiding his academic success. He was concerned that if online instructors did not respond to his confusion and questions, and/or clarify assignments or tests, he would face the stress and anxiety that he may miss the deadlines of submission, or that he may not be doing the assignment correctly. It was clear that he believed that his online instructor cared about his success, but he felt that the department of athletics needs a session for freshmen about how to deal with online courses and interacting with instructors.

> I was nervous about taking an online course. When I had a question, I sent an e-mail, but the professor didn't respond back until the assignment's due date. I couldn't control the issue. An online course is different than a regular class (face to face). When I have a question in a regular class, I can ask the questions to the professor after the class, but the online course is very different. It is frustrating sometimes. I didn't know that I should submit the assignments without receiving any responses from professors. It is very tricky. When I asked senior students, their responses of how to submit the assignments through blackboard were mixed (Zed, interview).

In Zed's experiences, his online professors often sent course announcements through the online learning system (Blackboard), but did not spend ample time solving individual students' needs in the online courses. Zed felt that his senior teammates (mentors) did not have much experience or advice for taking online courses. He felt that it was important that academic counselors tell freshmen what and how to handle such situations that come up in online courses, because it could prevent many of the problems, issues, and concerns that he faced.

Mentoring from Outside from Athletics

This theme exposes the special challenges student-athletes face with a full academic schedule and intense athletic demands. The time management of academic and athletic requirements as experienced by the participants at the PWI-HE were an enormous challenge for them. Many perceived occasions of academic and athletic conflicts that made them feel it was extremely difficult and challenging to maintain good GPAs. Though participants used a variety of strategies to try and achieve their academic and athletic goals and objectives, they often faced academic and athletic conflicts that adversely affected their athletic and academic performance. The participants did not want to be seen as academically troubled students (e.g., showing academic laziness) based on stereotypes instructors may

have harbored from working with other Black student-athletes (Sato et al. 2011, 2017). The notion of student-athletes as troubled students is untrue, as it gives the false impression that a great deal of ineffective and poor academic behaviors exist among student-athletes (Entman 2006). For example, all participants had to miss at least 5-8 classes per course during a semester. College football is traditionally a Saturday staple, yet members of the football team (Zed, Kyle, and Antonio) had been required to participate in two away games on weekdays during week 7 and 8 in the middle of the semester. Kyle mentioned that

> I struggled to balance my academic and athletic schedule this year. I had football games on two week days. I had to miss my classes from Monday and Tuesday in the first week and then in the following week, I missed Tuesday and Wednesday. Both games were away games. It was right in the middle of semester, and I had several exams. I was in an evaluation and measurement of stats course. The professor scheduled an exam on Wednesday at 7:30. We played Tuesday night starting at 8 pm. We left the campus 12:00 am and we returned to our campus at 4:30 am. I had to take exam 3 h later. No way could I do well. Several senior teammates told me that upper-level courses are only offered in fall or spring semester. We had no control over the situation. We asked professors to change the exam dates, but it wasn't allowed, because of questions being multiple choice, they need to prevent students' cheating. If this university doesn't change things or give us options, we will continue to struggle (Kyle, interview).

Jeff (track and field athlete) also shared similar thoughts on time conflict and mentoring experiences at the PWI-HE. He is the only African American student-athlete on his track relay practice team (400 m and 800 m). He felt that he was not socially included or emotionally connected to the team. Unlike the football players whose mentoring experiences involved senior teammates, Jeff's mentoring experiences were about relationships with his dormitory floor mates:

> I'm still a freshman. I don't know if my teammates accept me as a teammate. They are in different academic majors and I don't have mentors on my team. I was anxious about time management and balancing between practices and study times. I also have to live on campus. This is my first time away from home. I would say my mentors are students who live on the same floors of dormitory. They suggested to me how to select nice and popular professors from the course selection of general requirement courses. It's very helpful. To me, they are my advisors, because my teammates didn't welcome me. I like that this mentorship is built on friendship and not one because a senior teammate is told he has to mentor me. I took advice from floor mates and used it to help make my schedule. It worked well. I love the resident hall, but it's not a good place to study, so I go to the library - not study hall for the student athletes. I have to isolate myself so I can I concentrate, so it's important to study by myself (Jeff interview).

Jeff explained that floor-mates of his dormitory are family and friendship oriented. His residence hall is the place where his mentoring relationships occur. He believed that finding a right place of academic and athletic success is critically important during the freshman year. However, it is difficult to mentor new in-coming student athletes, because everyone has different style of study habits and life routines.

Diane (Jamaican student athlete—senior) had extra difficulty writing papers. As English was a second language to her, she struggled to learn new writing skills. Diane explained that her university had several writing centers and academic counseling support depending on the course structure. She asked academic counselors how to solve issues she was having with her writing. She felt that the university support services tried to meet her unique needs throughout her academic experiences. However, it was a major challenge for Diane balancing her schedule with the extra time she had to put into help with her writing. She constantly used the writing center for proofreading her writing assignments. With her academic major being physical education teacher education, which requires extensive lesson planning, reflective writing and critical thinking skills, as well as field experience and student-teaching, she often had to adjust and balance her practice and academic schedules.

> I struggled with my time management. Many student athletes' schedules are much more flexible than mine, because I had to plan to make extra trips to the academic writing center on campus. My academic counselor mentored me and showed me available resource centers on campus and told me that I needed to know and use these various centers, so that I can maintain good grades and graduate. Mentors and academic counselors also told me I speak different and use English languages differently, because I am Jamaican. As an international student, it was even more difficult to have time management and scheduling skills when I was a freshman. Time management is about routine and practices. Academic counselors were my best mentors. I preferred an administrative mentor rather than my senior teammates, because they did not quite understand my cultural background of being Jamaican, and they were not sensitive about my ethnic background as being Jamaican (Diane, interview).

Diane felt that mentors and academic counselors should offer relevant guidance that contributes to students' academic and athletic success. She also said that academic counselors and mentors sometime treat her as an African American (not Jamaican) student athlete which positioned her into an uncomfortable situation (such as racial stereotypes and discrimination). She said that negative racial images sometimes adversely affected her academic performance. She felt that academic counselors and mentors should be diversified and educated/trained to offer culturally relevant guidance to Black student athletes at the PWI-HE.

Personal Development Within an Isolated Environment

This theme explains how these six participants felt a lack of meaningful social contact and a racial disconnect with many of their White American teammates. Some of their mentors offered guidance and advised that they need to learn how to survive

and find their own comfortable positions within a socially isolated team environment. This indicates that Black student athletes continue seeking a positive personal quality of life that contributes to individual functioning and well-being with social cohesion in an athletic environment. They feel that they need to grow their own personal development and maturity within an isolated environment while Black student athletes were separated from white American teammates. Five of the six participants felt that many white American student athletes have not engaged or interacted with racially diverse people or student-athletes before attending the PWI-HE. Their mentors, particularly those who were fellow student-athletes, suggested that Black student athletes may not have positive social and athletic experiences, because they began to learn individual and independent behaviors of athletic culture. These Black student athletes had interacted with only the people of their own ethnic group (collective behaviors) in a social circle prior to attending the PWI-HE.

Antonio remembered unforgettable guidance from his former mentor when they were in the locker room. He mentioned that

> My mentor told me that I should have good balance with interacting with Black and White teammates. He said that when you're grouping together with black teammates, white teammates have this stereotype that black student athletes always cause academically in trouble. There are negative racial images of academic inferior associated with you. Since then I kind of emotionally and mentally separated myself from teammates. It didn't matter if they were black or white, but I put myself in a position in which I was socially isolated. But as time went by, I started to grow as a person from this socially isolated position, because I self-reflected a lot and thought about my personal and academic goals and how to get there (Antonio, interview).

Antonio believed that he should seek and develop his own academic identity and prevented himself from "acting as a low academic achieving student", or engaging in what was perceived as being an African American on his team. He said "it took three years to overcome others' academic inferior stereotypes and find my own position." Time and patience, two things his team mentor had tried to impart on him, he eventually learned were as important as his mentor had tried to tell him. Antonio somewhat isolated himself, but became comfortable with his identity through the passage of time and a great deal of reflection.

Julie (senior softball player) was another participant who shared her mentoring experiences. She was the only softball player on her team who was from the west coast. She had a difficult time adjusting to being so far away from home, and what she described as "Midwestern culture". Her entire first year she felt lonely and isolated at the PWI-HE. Julie's mentor, her Academic counselor, knew Julie had a talent for understanding and comprehending areas of science. She suggested to Julie that she become a tutor for exercise science students. Julie was intrinsically motivated to serve as an academic tutor and through this was able to separate from her isolation.

> I really struggled to overcome the loneliness when I was a freshman and sophomore. Weather, culture, behaviors and student habits….I struggled a lot.

> My major is exercise science, so I took anatomy and physiology. Some teammates struggled taking those courses. They asked me to help them. My mentor told me that I should be a tutor for them. I've been helping my teammates and other students with their studies since then. I'm a Black student athlete, but I'm taken seriously about my academics, which is unusual for my racial background, but I feel really good about it (Julie, interview).

Julie believed that a mentor should extrinsically help, motivate, and assist in the personal growth and maturity of younger student athletes. At the end of the interview, Julie mentioned that "good mentors have the knowledge of how to offer mentoring that increases mentees' self-efficacy and self-esteem during the challenging times." She felt that she was fortunate that she had a good mentor who pulled her away from the isolated environment she felt she was in. Zed reported that he felt he had been positioned in social isolation with the football team. He had grown up in and came from an urban and disadvantaged region of a southern state in the United States. He had a hard time building personal trust and relationships with other teammates. He recently found a senior mentor who is from the same high school. He felt that this mentorship helped to build his trust in, and relationships with, his teammates. Zed mentioned that

> I grew up in a community that was violent and high in crime. Poverty was the major issue. I couldn't trust anyone before coming here. This is my first time out of state and I live more than 1300 miles away from my hometown. I didn't know how to develop new friendships with teammates. I learned that it's difficult to survive without friendships on campus. I struggled, but my mentor… he's from same home town and he told me that 'it's ok to trust teammates here. It may take a while, but we need to develop good teamwork.' Since then, I started to develop good friendships. I'm not sure that I can trust others 100%, but mentorship helped a lot (Zed, interview).

Zed began to seek a social support network through his mentors. He began to participate in various academic, social, and athletic gatherings and experiences in and outside of classroom and team events. He is slowly finding his satisfaction and success on campus.

Family Members' Support and Encouragement

This theme was exposed as all six participants felt that their family members encouraged and supported their academic and athletic success and served as effective mentors as they attended the PWI-HE. Athletes mentioned that their parent(s) felt fortunate that their son or daughter was offered and received athletic scholarships to participate in athletic activities and earn a university degree from the respected PWI-HE. Coincidentally, all participants were first generation college students in their families, and they felt some degree of family achievement guilt. Participants expressed feelings of being uncomfortable for having more educational opportunities and university success than their family members (Covarrubias et al. 2015). They appreciated all of their family members' daily or weekly phone calls, and/or

constant communication using social network services. However, they were cognizant that their individual academic achievements could add stress to the harmony of existing family relationships, which could cause social and emotional detachment from their family members.

Kyle mentioned that it was not an easy decision for him to leave his father and attend the PWI-HE 1300 miles away from hometown. However, his father has been a great mentor for him since he attended college. He shared his communication experiences with his father during the interview:

> My father has been a great mentor. He never attended any college or university. He doesn't know anything about what the college life looks like. What he taught me was how to connect with our faith and religious beliefs. Did I appreciate God every moment there was something I achieved? Did I read the Bible? He is a good mentor and helps guide me to being a good person. I feel bad that I left home and left my dad alone, but we talk every day. I think this is important. Even though we talk, I miss him a lot. We are very close (Kyle, interview).

Zed and Antonio said that their mothers always reminded them that they should demonstrate a good work ethic and positive behaviors while they were attending the PWI-HE.

> My mom told me that I should behave. She told me to stay away from trouble. My home town is violent and isn't a very safe city. She hasn't been here. I can tell she's worried. I felt guilty that I left my mom and my brothers at home. She has been a good mentor and supporter of my education. I can feel her caring. I want her to be happy, but I'm thinking about after I graduate, I don't want to go back to my home town. I want to be in a safe place to live. If I work around here after graduation, I don't know what my family is going to say. I know that she'll support me whatever I decide, but you know….. I don't know if this is really what she wants me to do (Zed, interview).

Through parental communication (including mentorship), Zed clearly experienced family achievement guilt that may disrupt the harmonious relationships with family members. He was intrinsically motivated to study and practice hard toward his academic and athletic success, because he created his own pressure and guilt due to physical absence from the home, which impacts family members. Zed was not physically available to help provide, support and protect his family, and he felt guilty for it.

Julie and Jeff explained that their parents cared a great deal about their education and academic achievements. Their parents mentored and emphasized that Julie and Jeff must appreciate their own cultural capital that includes being African American role models and a commitment to future community. Julie's mother mentored her when she needed to select her academic major:

> After my first semester, I was thinking about choosing my academic major. My mom told me that I should select one of science fields of study, because I've been successful in science at secondary schools. It's a great time for me to

> demonstrate that an African American can be successful in science. I think my mom told me that I have to overcome negative images or stereotypes in being African American. It's important for her how and why I select my academic major, overcome academic inferior stereotypes, and make an impact with my contributions to this university. I think her advice is guiding me through my professional success. I'm really paying attention to my mom's mentorship (Julie, interview).

Julie expressed that she received racial socialization through parental mentoring that prepared her for overcoming racially based biases and helped establish her strong racial/ethnic identity.

Discussion

These complex and interrelated themes expose the academic and social challenges that can occur when university mentoring neglects the psychosocial experiences of the participants at the PWI-HE. The participants at times struggled to overcome low academic performance that was related to a lack of connection and integration with the mentorships and minimum interactions with classmates and mentors during their freshmen and sophomore years as student athletes. Transformational leaders who build mentoring environment and culture articulate them to mentees exhibit a sense of vision of purpose of academic experiences (Bass and Avolio 1993). Dudley et al. (1997) suggest that one way to assimilate new Black student athletes into academic life is to involve them in cooperative or collective learning sessions and sharing of experiences with a broad range of diverse senior student athletes.

These participants also had academic concerns and challenges taking online courses. They did not perceive online courses as effective as face-to-face courses, particularly with the lack of interaction with the instructor. However, they realized that online courses significantly offered them greater control over when and where they completed their coursework, which made online courses an attractive option for the time crunched, place-bound student athletes (Schwartzman 2007).

These participants experienced cross-race mentoring relationships since they began attending the PWI-HE. The athletes reported that they believed that race appears to have played a meaningful part in the formation of mentor relationships among student athletes (Collins et al. 2001). They clearly mentioned that senior White American teammate mentors offered their guidance or advice about study habits and routines, but that they felt that these mentors were not necessarily culturally compatible or reflective of their racial backgrounds. More specifically, they perceived that White mentors emphasized individualism and working independently, while they perceived their identity as student athletes who reflected (a) self-reliance with competition, (b) low academic concern, and (c) social distance from in and other groups. This cultural normality is the opposite of collectivism, which is more typical of student athletes of color at the PWI-HE (Nelson Laird et al. 2007). According to Dudley et al. (1997), collective, collaborative and cooperative experiences were important for the academic success of new student athletes.

Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1985) explains that mentors offer guidance of particular behaviors and patterns that align with other personally important values. This means that mentors help their mentees by encouraging them to reflect and assess whether their behaviors align with the mentors' personal values. Therefore, the participants should receive appropriate mentorships of academic and social support from senior mentors and athletic program staff who reflect a broader spectrum of diversity. These mentorships may promote achievement, attendance, graduation, persistence on challenging tasks, and greater compliance with recommended regimens.

The Black student athletes showed mixed feelings about taking online courses. Some of them found online courses to be effective in promoting student achievement (avoid missing class and schedule flexibility), others have demonstrated better results (better social engagement and peers in classrooms) from traditional face-to-face classes. Some challenging aspects of online learning that the participants experienced included difficulty when attempting to control their study habits, gaining new knowledge, using their learning technologies, and understanding the format of the online classes (e.g., synchronous vs. asynchronous) (Platt et al. 2014). Face-to-face courses are more amendable to community learning development. Furthermore, when online instructors are not fully engaged and/or communicative in the course, students may feel that the academic quality of online education is diminished (Armstrong 2011). Students' ability to organize their own course materials and assignments (Ingram 2005) can also impact the level of academic outcomes and success in online education courses. These Black student athletes felt that their mentors had to be patient and caring and offer consistent feedback or guidance that contributed to their academic progress, whether for face-to-face classes or online classes. However, their mentors offered little guidance in how to succeed in online courses. In self-determination theory, mentors should help and support protégés' feelings of intrinsic motivation that contributes to their own higher levels of reflection (Gagné and Deci 2005). This study found that though they received the mentoring from senior teammates, the participants were still anxious about failing to understand highlighted points embedded in the online course assignments. They believed that if they had a good online course instructor and mentor who provided direction, feedback, and alternative assistance through e-mail communication or phone conversations and repeated announcements when necessary (Chang 2007), they would have an increased sense of competence, which increases feelings of confidence and effectiveness as well as relatedness, reflecting the need to feel connected with mentors and course instructors (Baumeister and Leary 1995).

Overall, these student athletes experienced academic and social struggles, and found it difficult to balance academic demands of faculty with their athletic demands. These Black student athletes expressed a strong commitment to attend the PWI -HE and complete their degree programs. They were concerned about potentially losing their athletic scholarships because of their academic hardships; which in turn, would lead to facing possible separation from the university and returning to their home states. Comeaux (2011) explained that mentoring should assist in helping Black student athletes find course instructors who are more engaging and willing to provide extra assistance. Such instructors tend to understand the athletic subculture

and student athletes' challenges in balancing academics and athletics. The participants also utilized dormitory peer mentoring from non-student athletes on campus. Dormitory peer mentoring is a mechanism for helping all students to adjust to university life and assisting the expansion of peer mentoring in the university (Lin et al. 2016). Dormitory peer mentoring is different from student athlete mentoring programs. Dormitory floormates worked hard to become familiarized with the resources on and off campus, and helped the student athletes find other campus resources available to them. They also help these student athletes collect learning details on certain common core subjects and general education courses. This type of informal mentoring (which occurs in a relationship between two people where one gains insight, knowledge, wisdom, friendship, and support from the other) helped the student athletes to engage in positive psychosocial activities such as counseling, facilitating social interactions, role modeling, and providing friendships. These participants expressed their autonomous (intrinsic) motivation and competent support from dormitory floor-mates. When both mentors and mentees develop affirmative relationships, mentees begin to copy the mentor's behaviors as identified motivation and use them as their own rules and values as integrated motivation (Janssen et al. 2014). A few student athletes (e.g., Jeff and Diane) experienced a sense of self-isolation with White American teammates, having little or no meaningful contact or mentorship both inside and outside of academic activities (Beamon 2014). They felt that college campus did not necessarily bring racial groups together and at times created racial tension among student athletes. These Black student athletes utilized academic counselors or staff as their peer mentors to voice concerns and issues that were not adequately addressed with coaches, senior mentors, or other teammates. Their concerns were related to academic issues, frustration and emotional responses toward teammates, or anger with coaching staff (Jordan and Denson 1990). Their academic counselors helped Black student athletes eliminate some of the pressure they felt from coaches, staff, and team mentors, whose primary interest they felt was athletic performance, not academic success. The academic counselors also offered unlimited access to network counseling and student development resources, such as testing, assessment, behavior decision making programs, and other academic support offered by the university.

These Black student athletes found themselves on the front lines of negotiating bicultural dilemmas of academic and social mentoring. Their need to manage their lives as Black student athletes effectively at a PWI-HE creates paradoxes that position them at risk with respect to stress (Jordan and Denson 1990). This study found that there were mentoring difficulties in articulating the way in which mentors facilitated the personal development of Black student athletes, which may be interrupted through the concepts of declarative and procedural knowledge (e.g., Banwell and Kerr 2016; Elferink-Gemser et al. 2010; Giacomini et al. 2011). Declarative knowledge refers to factual information that mentors and protégés consciously are aware of and can clearly express (e.g., what they need to do in order to achieve academic, social, and athletic goals and objectives) (Baumard 1999). Procedural knowledge is to know how to do something and the ways to do things (e.g., observation, imitation, and practices) (Sahdra and Thagard 2003). Self-determination theory (Janssen et al. 2014) supports that mentor and mentee often differ in their expectations regarding

the need—fulfillment. These participants were eager to learn procedural knowledge, but they reflected that there was a lack of relatedness and competence support by mentors. Inzer and Crawford (2005) explain that the best mentors are not necessarily high academic achievers. Mentors need to exhibit flexibility and good interpersonal and counseling skills. They recommend that mentors should be selected from two groups. The first group includes individuals who like teaching, guiding, and training. These mentors can tell their mentees a story from their academic experiences in which can guide them on the right track. The second group includes individuals who use transformational leadership style in working with mentees. Transformational leadership allows mentors to engage their mentees in a way that they raise one another to higher level of motivation and morality. Athletic Departments must examine and evaluate how mentors' and mentees' perceptions regarding the fulfillment of needs within the mentoring relationship are met. The Black student athletes who participated in this study received strong declarative knowledge with respect to academic survival skill development, but they had inadequate procedural knowledge (culturally irrelevant information) in reference to their personal development. This occurred because the athletic department did not emphasize or promote mentoring cultural changes that all student athletes need in order to be able to understand and respect the past, and to return to it for inspiration, instruction, and identification of past objectives, principles and strategies in the mentoring system (Bass and Avolio 1993). Gardner (1990) explains that all student athletes need to understand and appreciate "interweaving of continuity and change" for long-term purpose and values. Without this understanding, these participants were in an isolated position. Without explaining transformational culture, student athletes were forced to find their own procedural knowledge that would contribute to their personal development. Athletic departments should move in the direction of more transformational qualities in mentoring cultures (Bass and Avolio 1993). This study also found that academic counselors and staff fulfilled a mentoring support function, and articulated procedural knowledge that facilitated and supported their personal development. For example, academic counselors clearly enabled Julie's academic tutoring opportunities for her personal development and allowed her to separate from an isolated position, because she could integrate idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration in the opportunities. Mentoring must be used to provide various opportunities to vehicles of learning as well as guiding Black student athletes toward personal and performance excellence.

These Black student athletes showed some degree of survivor's guilt which describes their feeling of guilt about academic achievement and privileged opportunities of attending college at the PWI-HE. The participants were considered first generation members of their family to attend college. In general, often due to guilt from opportunity and/or conflicts with family expectations, first generation college students often stop attending college to follow their own cultural norm (such as getting a job and beginning a family at younger age) (Higbee and Schultz 2013). Piorkowski (1983) explained that often in higher education, Black student athletes feel like "survivors", because they "escaped" difficult home conditions or violent neighborhoods, while leaving friends and/or family behind. Some participants showed feelings of guilt in choosing to attend college. However, this study

found that these Black student athletes received parental mentoring that acted as a protective factor that helped their adjustment to the socialization process while retaining ethnic identity (Juang et al. 2016). During the college years, family support and peer mentoring should be sufficient enough for Black student athletes to counter higher levels of academic, social, and athletic challenges. However, Juang et al. (2016) raised the concerns that many peer mentoring situations may not become a "protective-stabilizing" factor for Black student athletes at a PWI-HE, because the mentors often misunderstood racism, family history, or other threats unique to being Black student athletes. When peer mentors could not fulfill the support function, other alternatives such as family support is necessary. Henton et al. (1980) recommend that if there are ways for academic counselors, faculty members, and coaches to encourage the maintenance of close contacts between student athletes, peers, and their parents or families during at least the beginning of academic year of college, the isolation factors associated college life may be minimized and academic, social, and athletic performance may be improved.

Study Limitation

This study has two primary limitations. First, the participants were purposefully selected from one public PWI-HE in the United States. Statistically speaking, the findings are therefore not generalizable. From a qualitative perspective, however, the reader may consider transferability to the contexts of private or public colleges and universities elsewhere. Second, the number of participants was small, and they had rather diverse backgrounds, experiences, cultures, and languages. However, qualitative inquiries, including case studies, typically use small samples, and in the logic of maximum variation sampling the intent is to capture and describe the central themes that cut across a vast array of participant variation in ethnicity (Patton 2002). Our intention in using this sampling approach was to uncover common themes reflective of a diversity of Black student athletes.

Recommendations and Conclusions

These Black student athletes gained some academic survival skills and knowledge through mentoring relationships with senior student athletes when they first attended the PWI-HE. Cross-cultural mentoring should be a meaningful part of formation of students' academic, developments that emphasize more culturally sensitive, responsive, and relevant guidance (Collins et al. 2001). Although they understood some of the ways of adjusting to the PWI-HE, they struggled to gain the knowledge and skills of how to cope with particular academic situations. Below are some recommendations for responsive mentoring strategies that could help support Black student athletes' academic engagement.

Multicultural Openness

Student athletes including mentor and mentees should be encouraged to learn multicultural openness, which might lead them to solve academic, social, and cultural conflicts over individualism and collectivism (Yakunina et al. 2013). Academic and social adjustment in terms of individualism, as well as collectivism, should be included as part of orientation and/or mentoring and mentoring training programs for student athletes. Senior student athletes may be able to help junior student athletes understand concepts and social practice of both collectivism and individualism. More contact with student athletes from diverse cultural and social backgrounds promotes greater understanding among student athletes and creates a multicultural openness (Yakunina et al. 2013).

Alternative Peer Mentors

Student athletes' mentors and mentees cannot automatically expect peer interactions within athletic teams to be met with open arms by all student athletes involved. If mentors demonstrate their positional power found in being a mentor, it may limit the guidance or help for the mentees in ways they perceived they needed to be helped, causing student athletes to lose trust and disregard their mentors (Colvin and Ashman 2010). Therefore, athletic departments must encourage and help Black student athletes to find non-student athletes as alternative peer mentors for fulfilling mentor roles. The purpose of this approach is to prevent the mentors' power and resources to flow in one direction that potentially create the possibilities for misunderstanding or misuse of power and resources, leading to challenges, resistance, and conflicts (Colvin and Ashman 2010).

Strong focus on Academic and Social Learning Outcomes

Athletic departments may need to establish official student athletes' development programs focused on academic and social learning outcomes at a PWI-HE. This type of program may be able to provide a benchmark for administrators of the athletic department to evaluate the quality of its' mentoring program and its' training and supervision protocols. In creating this formal mentoring, the organization develops a program and process for mentoring to take place (Inzer and Crawford 2005). The formal mentoring may play a significant role for the positive outcomes, because mentors and mentees were high in the organizational hierarchy (Inzer and Crawford 2005). Therefore, department of athletics can also guide student athletes to be involved in informational mentoring, that is, the natural coming together of a mentor and mentee through personal and academic respect and admiration (Cotton et al. 2000). The academic counselors and athletic administration may be able to develop formal and informal assessment plans of student personal development with mentoring materials to demonstrate how to model and

practice these mentoring programs as they occur between the freshmen through senior years of student athletes.

Empathy and Connection

Academic counselors, faculty, coaches, and staff must understand how being an ethnic minority and/or first generation college student impacts the academic experiences of student athletes at a PWI-HE. They need to investigate and learn students' family histories and backgrounds and identify the values that exist, including conflicts, within the PWI-HE and home and community environments and to apply these values to their purpose for attending the PWI-HE.

The findings of this study suggest that for Black student athletes to be more successful, a responsive, program-wide formal and informal mentoring programs must be in place. University sports is one of the few public social structures which units diverse members of society both as participants and spectators. Athletic department administrators, coaches, faculty, and all students should be encouraged to respect, value, and embrace the racial identities, origins, languages, and cultures of student athletes that are being mentored. A person-first, responsive approach to mentoring Black student athletes contributes to a greater appreciation for the richness of diversity and meaningful mentoring at PWI-HEs for all student athletes, and responsive mentoring reflects a commitment to both the society we have, also reflects a commitment to the society we hope to achieve.

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