

MORE THAN A GAME  
UNDERSTANDING THE SUBJECTIVITIES OF BLACK MALE ATHLETES  
THROUGH SPACE AND RACE AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

by

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## ABSTRACT

Black male student athletes who attend Predominantly White Institutions or PWIs (Esposito, 2011) are afforded an opportunity to represent the institution through competitive sports; yet, they face many academic and personal challenges while they are doing so. Although much literature exists that examines the experiences of Black male student athletes and the forms of discrimination and racism they encounter, there is still a need for in-depth qualitative research that focuses on the daily lived experiences of Black male students and the different spaces they occupy at their PWI. Moreover, more exploration is needed into how the subjectivities they encounter within the spaces at their PWI constitute their identities. Within this research study, Black male athletes share their personal experiences of attending a PWI and occupying different spaces at the institution. Furthermore, their lived experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2009) offer insight into how they negotiate being a person of color at a PWI who is often praised for his athletic talents; yet at times he finds himself living as an racialized (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007) person because of his skin color.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Reverend Willie J. Smith, Sr. (1943-2003) and Ethel Smith. I am the woman I am today because of your unconditional love and support. Growing up, you always told us to “get something in our heads,” and I pray we have made you both proud.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In November 2015, the world of sport watched intently as Jonathan Butler refused to eat and went on a voluntary hunger strike. Butler, a Black<sup>1</sup> twenty-five year old graduate student at the University of Missouri made the vow to protest the habitual acts of racism and discrimination that occurred on Missouri's campus. It was a hunger strike that Butler said would continue until the University's administration engaged in dialogue and proactive steps were made to prevent future unjust acts on the campus. Hailing from Nebraska, Butler became the face and voice of the student organization for change and activism at Missouri; Concerned Student 1950. Butler took his demands for justice further and called for the resignation of Missouri system's president, Tim Wolfe. In his interview with *The Washington Post*, Butler states:

I had someone call me the n-word, I had someone write the n-word on the door in my residence hall—for me it really is about a call for justice. I'm fighting for the Black community on campus, because justice is worth fighting for. And justice is worth starving for (November, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> Black refers to Frantz Fanon's writings in *Black Skin White Masks* (1967; 2008); particularly chapter 5, and his discussion on understanding a Black identity. Fanon describes being labeled as Black as a type of social uniform placed upon the Negro and those of African descent and is used as a method to distinguish between Black and White.

Even with Butler's ongoing hunger strike and weakening body (Lowrey, 2015) Wolfe adamantly refused to step down. Wolfe continued in this stance until Anthony Sherrils, a leader and starter on the University of Missouri football team, posted a poignant and direct tweet to him and the University of Missouri's administration on behalf of the Black men who were members of the University's football team that read: "We're all Black. Black is powerful. Our struggle may look different, but we are all #ConcernedStudent1950," (Sherrils, 2015). With players of color threatening to boycott the remainder of Missouri's football season and no longer participating in any football-related activities, Wolfe resigned. The actions taken by Butler and The University of Missouri's football team reflected the growing racial tensions occurring not only in Columbia, Missouri but across the nation. From the streets of Ferguson, Missouri to the sidewalks of Staten Island, New York; social movements such as 'Black Lives Matter' (blacklivesmatter.com; Goodman & Gonzalez, 2014) and ConcernedStudent1950 centered on the problem of race relations in America and the myriad of unjust ways in which Blacks are wrongfully treated within American political structures.

At the University of Missouri, a large Predominantly White Institution (Esposito, 2011), such protests and outcry against the disdainful treatment of Blacks in America climaxed when social justice collided with the profession of sports. Although the athletes felt strongly about their identities as persons of color, they faced the reality of how the space of sports mediates their perception of self. Yet, they could not disregard

how they are abased and treated as second-class citizens in a country that professes liberty and justice to all who dwell within its borders (Loewen, 2007). Through their outward display of protest, the Black men on Missouri's football team showed their inner turmoil to understand why their Black lives within America did not seem to matter outside of the profession of sports.

I argue here that the athletes are engaged in a personal struggle to understand a multi-layered conception of self; what sociologist W.E.B. DuBois (1903; 2003) called double consciousness. According to DuBois (1903; 2003), Black males struggle in a country that has historically repressed and devalued them through the lens of double consciousness. Double consciousness forces the Black man to not only view himself from his own unique perspective, but also produces, "...a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," (p. 351) or what DuBois (1903; 2003) refers to as, White America. Furthermore, the double consciousness that Black males experience is prevalent in almost every space he inhabits in the US.

According to critical geography studies, individuals' develop their identities within different spaces through the meaning that is produced about them and how they interact with the spaces (Helfenbein, 2009; Gershon, 2008; Taylor & Helfenbein, 2009). In recent years, there have been analyses that have linked space and identity. For example, Henri Lefebvre (1991) offers insight into the process of how meaning is created within spaces. Lefebvre (1991) draws upon a critical geography lens (Merrifield , 2003; Stark,

2010; Harvey, 2011; Helfenbein, 2010) to explore the mental and physical occurrences; human interactions; and the histories at work that produce the spaces that people occupy and in turn constitute their identities. Space encompasses both mental abstractions (thoughts) and the visible physical (place) built environment (Levebvre, 1991). Space represents the socially produced meaning or, "... material representations," (Woods, p.34) that individuals use to understand, "...their real conditions of existence," (Althusser, p. 109). However, the meaning that develops within spaces should not be viewed as concrete. In fact, the meaning is both contextual and subjective.

Critical geographer, David Harvey calls meaning temporary truths (Harvey, 1972) that develop through socially occurring processes in order to reach a resolution of understanding. It is important to remember such truth statements are dynamic and ever-changing. Furthermore, the statements will oftentimes be contradicted and replaced by other 'truth' statements, (Harvey, 1972) over time. Individuals should not seek to uphold truth statements and instead effort should be exerted towards understanding the processes (Harvey, 2011) that are occurring in order to produce the meaning. By understanding the meaning construction process (Merrifield, 2003; Harvey, 2011; Helfenbein, 2010) individuals can, "...regard solutions as problems and regard questions as solutions," (Harvey, p. 118). Furthermore, understanding how meaning is constructed allows individuals to explore the complexity of meaning

development within spaces and perceive the norm from that which is considered the deviant. Researcher Chris Weedon (2009) notes that meaning creates identities<sup>1</sup> that are “socially, culturally and institutionally assigned,” (p. 6), and the identities are then internalized by those who take them on. It is through the use of language (Weedon, 2008; 2009) subjective thoughts and acts about individuals are used to constitute their identities. Furthermore, Weedon (2009) shares that such subjectivity is “... constituted in language consisting of an individual’s conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions and desires,” (p.19). In short, subjectivity is an effect of the discursive field which individuals occupy and are made up of competing discourses (Weedon, 2009) that produce different subjective positions and forms of identities.

Since Lefebvre (1991) and Harvey (1972) noted that space is the product of social processes, this study draws on their argument to explore how individuals’ social interactions produce space. Lefebvre (1991) divides space and the everyday practices that occur within it, or spatial practices, into a triad. He identifies representations of space, spaces of representation or representational space, and spatial practices. Representations of space can be understood in terms of the mental representations that guide how people are to behave and interact within spaces. Spaces of representation or oftentimes called representational space is viewed as lived space; the space of everyday

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<sup>1</sup> According to Chris Weedon (2009) in *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging*, identity is understood as “a limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one is,” (p. 19). Additionally, identity is contextually based upon “relation of difference to what it is not,” (p. 19).

experiences. Here lies the material set of practices (Merrifield, 2006) that shape individuals' realities and identities. The final element to Lefebvre's (1991) triad of space that expounds upon spaces of representation is spatial practices. Lefebvre (1991) also calls this perceived space because it is here that people try to make sense of their everyday practices and routines that in turn produce their everyday realities. Although the experiences of the spatial triad will vary amongst individuals, each part of the triad works to produce space and its meaning.

Jonathan Butler, Anthony Sherrils and other students of color at the University of Missouri find themselves in a state of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903; 2003). They are faced with the burden of constituting their identities through the gaze of the dominant White culture and the meaning they ascribe to their Black identities. Furthermore, they realize their identities are contextually based upon the different spaces they occupy at the institution and the value the dominant White culture imputes upon them. This state of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903; 2003) experienced by the students of color at the University of Missouri is also experienced by those who participated in this research study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A student asked me why Black people received scholarships and (that) she could not help that her parents could afford to send her to college....really? Like I could speak for all Black people who received a scholarship...I also have good grades.

[Ray, Interviewed on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013]

As referenced by DuBois (1903; 2003) in his historical work, the system of higher education is a place where the Black male exists in a position of subordination and inferiority in relation to the dominant White culture. Whiteness is lauded and coveted as the norm within higher education, especially at PWIs (Esposito, 2011; Harper, 2009). Although the percentage of Blacks enrolled in American higher education institutions has increased since the time of the Civil Rights Movement, (Bennett, 1995), the percentage of Black males enrolled at four-year institutions is actually decreasing, (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005). As noted by its findings in "Separate & Unequal; How Higher Education Reinforces the Intergenerational Reproduction of White Privilege, Carnevale and Strohl (2013) note that institutions of higher education are places where, "...polarization by race and ethnicity" is commonplace and institutions of higher education are "the capstone for inequality," (p. 7). In their establishment, race is used as a means to establish a person's identity and structure lives (Esposito, 2011) within the system of higher education.

The importance given to race within higher education warrants examination into how the social system of higher education cultivates and fosters racial discrimination (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007) to disenfranchise those who possess a desire to pursue a higher education. Furthermore, PWIs uphold discriminatory, actions, and attitudes that exalt Whiteness into a place of privilege while abhorring Blackness. At PWIs, this ordering of lives is prevalent in the institutions' representations of space and everyday

spatial practices. This is true for Black males who must occupy spaces of subordination that appear fixed "...coherent, enclosed, and established," (Schroeder, p. 44). Examining different spaces of PWIs that Black males traverse allows for an explanation into how they view their identity construction; as their personal selection or that which is placed upon them by the dominant White culture.

This also calls attention to how behaviors, ideologies, and practices within the social structure of higher education can "perpetuate racial discrimination," (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007, p.560) against Black males enrolled at PWIs. For example although administration at the University of Missouri responded to the unfair treatment of Black students once Sherrils made the declaration of the football team's pledge to forfeit the remainder of its season, the dominant White culture at the institution failed to recognize its role in how their representational spaces and spatial practices helped perpetuate higher education as a system unwelcoming to Blacks and other marginalized groups. The administration and the White dominant culture seemed more concerned about the continuation of the institution's sport of football and chose not to have an open dialogue with Jonathan Butler or the Black student group ConcernedStudent1950. In fact, communication with administration did not occur until it was faced with the discontinuation of an area that brought economic gains and national recognition to the University of Missouri: sports.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This study will examine how Black male student athletes view their identity formation and operate within different spaces at PWIs. In order to be accepted at PWIs, I argue Black male student athletes must adhere to the identity ascribed to them by the dominant White culture at the institution. Although they are tasked with the responsibility to represent the institution in competitive sports, they still possess limited agency (Leaven, 2003) as their success is dependent upon how well they perform in the sport. In addition, they must exhibit the expected spatial practices deemed acceptable by the dominant White culture. I argue that while participating in their sports, Black male athletes also remain racialized individuals (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007) whose inability to occupy spaces beyond their sport at the PWI is based on their skin color. Through this research, I seek insight and exploration into the following questions:

- What are the experiences of Black male athletes within the different spaces they occupy at the PWI?
- How do these experiences in the different spaces in the PWI shape their subjectivities?
- What are the implications of these spatialized subjectivities on their academic and athletic experiences at the PWI?

## **Racialized Space(s)**

Lefebvre's (1991) writing on space works well to explain how meaning is created within spaces. Moreover, Lefebvre (1991) devotes attention to the unequal socioeconomic conditions and meaning that develop because of the processes occurring within spaces. However, Lefebvre (1991) does not engage how race can affect the

meaning created within spaces and position people of color into oppressive locations. Exploration is needed into how spaces can also become racialized (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007) in America through socially created meaning. Such spaces are referenced by DuBois (1903; 2003) as he discussed double consciousness and the Black males' search for an identity within America. These racialized (Taylor and Helfenbein, 2009; Smith, Yosso & Solorzano) spaces produce meaning used to construct identities based on and relevant to one's race. There is scholarship that examines how spaces are created and influenced by race. In their work "Teaching Race at Historically White Colleges and Universities: Identifying and Dismantling the Walls of Whiteness" Brunsma et al. (2013) argue that "walls of Whiteness" (p. 719) have long surrounded White culture within American society in order to create ideologies of dominance and supremacy over people of color.

Additionally, spatial arrangements are created by those who possess agency (Lowen, 2007) to provide a needed "lens and map" (p.717) to understand social surroundings and how individuals should perceive their realities. These spatial arrangements are not free from the influence of race as it is the "central axis" of social organization. Furthermore, "spaces are where white social actors live and construct their identities as white vis-à-vis non-white," (p. 723). Spaces are important and needed by members of the dominant White culture because within spaces, they create meaning to position Whiteness as the norm and something to be desired by those who are non-

White. Taylor and Helfenbein (2009) note in their writing “Mapping Everyday: Gender, Blackness and Discourse in Urban Contexts” that space is material and cognitive and spatial arrangements are often viewed as being natural and often uncontested or challenged. Moreover, such research points to how a subjective dichotomous relationship (Leaven; 2003; Harvey, 2011; Gershon, 2013) is created that typically preferences the dominant White culture in America. Spatial arrangements can be used to purposefully oppress Blacks and depict them as subordinate individuals in relation to the dominant White culture. It is through this meaning Blacks are left trying to understand their identities (Gershon, 2013), struggle with double consciousness (DuBois, 1903), and are the targets of oppression (Leaven, 2003) within spaces. Since racialized spaces operate to create oppressive identities of Blacks, it is important to learn first-hand of their everyday experiences and spatial practices. By utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) in connection with Critical Geography as theoretical frameworks, attention is given to the personal narratives and experiences of individuals marked by race.

### **Critical Race Theory and Racialized Spaces**

Critical Race Theory examines how race is frequently used as an ordering tool for society and is never absent within social structures (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Racism can be found in all forms of oppression and discrimination within America and serves as the guiding force within many political systems such as education and law. This theory

recognizes that meaning and value is ascribed to Whiteness, and it is something to be valued (Harris, 1995). CRT allows for the, "...deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction," (p. 9) of the oppressive systems used to establish Whiteness as a trait that is to be exalted while other races are to be debased. Critical Race Theorists argue that racism is normal and permanent feature within US culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Delgado, 1995) and manifested in the everyday practices of US citizens.

Additionally, this framework allows for the personal narratives and experiences of individuals to be heard. These personal narratives provide first-hand accounts of the racist practices and ideologies they encounter in US culture. It is through this, "...experiential knowledge," (Ladson-Billings, p. 11) individuals of color are able to share their lived experiences while negotiating spaces of oppression as racialized others (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Barnes 1990; DuBois, 1903) in relation to whiteness within America. A tenet of CRT is that racism is deeply embedded within American political systems and cannot be ignored. Exploring the relationship between CRT and space allows inquiry into how the identities for people of color are created, validated, and negotiated through the meaning and spatial practices of American social institutions. For this study, CRT will be utilized to evoke the personal narratives of Black male athletes in the study and learn of the racialized spaces and practices they encounter at their PWI.

## **Sports as a Racialized Space**

Although CRT does not focus on space as a social product, it does describe how meaning and ideologies (Woods, 2007) about Blacks and other people of color are used to place them into subordinate positions in relation to Whites within American social structures. One context where spaces are racialized (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Smith, Yosso, Solorzano, 2007) is that of sports. Within this space, the aforementioned Black male athletes experience double consciousness (DuBois, 1903; 2003) as meaning shifts within the different spaces they occupy as an athlete, student, and person of color. They must negotiate between multiple identities within different spaces at their PWI, and they have to endure the implications of these identities in their educational experiences.

The current academic scholarship (Woods, 2007; (Gershon, 2013; McCann, 1999; Taylor, 2009) on racialized spaces addresses issues such as crime, the urban ghetto, and the identity construction process for middle school boys. Furthermore, much of the contemporary research on sports is limited to addressing the popularity, viability, and multi-billion dollar (Singer, 2005; ncaa.org) annual impact of sports on colleges and universities. When discussing race and sports, much of the research focuses on the Black male athletes' perceptions of racism at their institutions. This research will therefore expand that focus to explore how Black male collegiate athletes constitute

their identities within the racialized (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Smith, Yosso, Solorzano, 2007) spaces they occupy at their PWI.

### **Reimagining Space and Spatial Practices**

At PWIs, being White is a valued property (Harris, 1995) that has benefits given due to a person's race and the characteristics they possess to separate Whiteness from that of Blackness. I argue that maintaining Whiteness as a desirable trait is embedded in the everyday spatial practices of PWIs. Attention must also be directed towards the possibilities, opportunities, and new meaning that can arise through the resistance of everyday spatial practices at the institutions. Moreover, the truth statements (Harvey, 2011) that exist within spaces need to be challenged and re-imagined. Furthermore, this transformative approach allows for meaning to be understood as a social product that must be constantly recreated in a manner that will re-appropriate (Lefebvre, 1991) the environment into one more reflective of the mental and physical conceptions of the individuals who dwell within the space. At PWIs, there is a need to re-imagine and recreate spaces for people of color as they negotiate identities and spaces created by the dominant White culture.

### **Race, Space and Black Male Athletes at PWIs**

When they see a big Black dude with muscles and dreads, they think I'm an athlete, not a scholar—like I don't care about school.

[Kenneth, Interviewed on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013]

As previously mentioned, Black male athletes must deal with the inability to create their own identities at PWIs and navigate the meaning produced about them within the different spaces at the institutions. Additionally, the Black male athlete has a double burden (Cose, 2002) of enduring the social meaning produced about him as a Black male student enrolled at a PWI, while at the same time being subjected to ideologies of being an athlete of color at the PWI. The Black male must contend with intellectual, athletic, and professional inferiority (Singer, 2005) as he pursues a college degree as a Black male student and athlete. He must embrace an identity and spatial practices that are ascribed to him by the dominant White culture.

When compared to their White counterparts within the collegiate sport of football, less than 50% of Black male athletes of the sport graduate from their PWIs. Moreover, at least 63% of White male athletes continue on to earn their collegiate degrees (Singer, 2005; Yasuda, 2004). Singer (2005) declared that Black male athletes lack the necessary, "...academic preparation for college..." (p. 368) as PWIs are, "...aimed at only keeping them eligible to play their respective college sport." Regardless if their academic performance fails in comparison to White athletes, Black male athletes are expected to remain committed and loyal to both their sport and the PWI that recruited them. Black male athletes are not recruited for how well they perform in their academic studies (Singer, 2005). Instead, they are praised for how their

athletic skill sets could potentially contribute to the financial stability and notoriety of the PWI in sports.

## **Methodology**

This research provides an opportunity for Black males to challenge socially constructed representations and attempt to produce their own. From spring 2013-spring 2014, I conducted a preliminary study that focused on learning about the experiences of three Black male athletes at a PWI. The idea for the research evolved from a discussion I had with my student assistant, Ray, who was a walk-on basketball player at the institution. Many times, he shared his triumphs and frustrations of being a Black male student athlete at the PWI and interactions with his White coaches and athletic staff. During his process of self-disclosure, I made mention of his narrative being of interest and a possible topic for my research. He shared he could identify two friends who played sports at the PWI with similar stories; Kenneth a scholarship basketball player from the South and Philip a scholarship basketball player from the Northeast. I saw three themes emerge from the research: (a) the athletes only felt appreciated and valued at their PWI because of their athletic capabilities; (b) they noticed that much attention and value was given to an individuals' race; (c) they believed they could overcome the racialized spaces and meaning given to them by the dominant White culture. An area that I did not capture within the pilot study and seek to explore within this study is how they negotiated their identities away from their

respective sports. Although they considered the spaces of their PWI to be racialized (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007), consideration was not given during the pilot study to their interactions with White faculty, peers or teammates. From the pilot study research and its findings, I was challenged to expand this study to include a discussion on how Black male athletes negotiated their identities as they moved within different spaces at their PWI and its spatial practices.

In this research study, I will be interviewing a minimum of 5 and maximum of 10 athletes across all sports at a PWI in the South. For confidentiality purposes in the study, the institution will be called Be Great University and pseudonyms will be ascribed to each research participant. Within this research study, efforts will be made to understand Black male athletes experiences pertaining to race, space, and their ability to understand the meaning that is created about their identities. It is through the frameworks of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Delgado, 1995) and Lefebvre's (1991) triad of space, this research study will explore how Black male athletes at a PWI in the South negotiate their identities as they move within different spaces at the institution. Additionally, attention will be given to how race influences how meaning is ascribed to their identities within the different spaces of the institution.

### **Significance of the Study**

PWIs are institutions where spaces and spatial practices solidify and enforce Whiteness as a valued property (Harris, 1993). In order to better understand how

Whiteness is the accepted norm at PWIs, it is important to include first-hand accounts of those who are members of marginalized groups and subjected to the White gaze (DuBois 1903; 2003) at the institution. In this study, I argue that Black male athletes live in a state of double consciousness (DuBois 1903; 2003) and must learn to navigate the meaning that exists about their identities within the different spaces of the institution. Additionally, the spatial arrangements and spatial practices are designed to uphold the dominant White culture as sovereign. It is important to explore the many processes (Harvey, 2011; Gershon, 2013) that occur in order to produce meaning within the spaces. Furthermore, such processes function to produce meaning and identities that are based on the athletes' race and constantly depicts them as inferior within spaces; unlike the dominant White culture.

Not only is it important to understand the processes at work to constitute Black male athletes' identities at PWIs, it is also critical to learn how they resist the expected spatial practices within spaces they perceive as racialized (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007). If our understanding of reality and truth is contextual and temporary (Harvey, 2011), then Black male athletes at PWIs can re-imagine their identities in a manner that is more reflective of their lived experiences. They do not have to embrace or accept the meaning that is created about their identities by the dominant White culture. This research can provide understanding into the challenges of a marginalized group

recruited to compete nationally, bring accolades and financial gains to their PWI through the game of sports.

### **Researcher Positionality**

It is imperative for me to acknowledge my position in relation to the research that is being conducted. I am employed at a large PWI in the South in Student Services. In this role, I interact with Black male students regularly, and I have learned first-hand of their struggles and triumphs of being enrolled at a PWI. Moreover, I noticed such challenges also exist for Black male athletes at the PWI as they grapple with constituting a self-identity that is not based upon their respective sport or athletic abilities.

Additionally, they must do this while maintaining a sense of loyalty to the PWI that recruited them. As an administrator and woman of color at a PWI, I feel as if these Black males seek solace and understanding from me as they try to navigate the spaces of their PWI. I do not claim empathy to the histories and struggles Black males encounter as an American citizen or male of color studying at a PWI. However, I hope to offer insight into a bounded research phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 20008) and double consciousness (DuBois, 1903) that I often hear about from Black male athletes as they struggle with understanding their identities at a PWI. Prior to conducting the pilot study or this research study, I developed an interpersonal relationship with many of the research participants. All of the interpersonal relationships with the Black male athletes often included in-depth levels of self-disclosure during our conversations. Although no

familial ties existed between us, the research participants often called me family and referred to me as 'ma,' 'mom,' 'auntie' and 'T' whenever we spoke or when they introduced me to their family and friends. This in-depth relationship with the research participants tasked me with the responsibility of ensuring I accurately captured their personal narratives while trying to maintain the trust and intimacy of our friendships.

Although I had a prior relationship with the research participants, at times I still found it difficult to ask the research participants questions about their experiences. I did not want them to believe that the closeness of our relationship was based upon my own personal research interests. From our previous conversations, I knew the research participants did not easily trust or communicate with people. It was also challenging to conduct the research in a short period of time because of their athletic and personal schedules. Because of their hectic schedules, I knew the interviews would need to be scheduled during the research participants' offseason. Even with this intentional scheduling of the interviews, they had to be rescheduled because the research participants frequently traveled and spent time with close family and friends during their offseason. The rescheduling of the interviews and operating on a shortened timeframe before the start of their seasons affected my ability to conduct follow-up interviews in the research study.

## **Limitations and Transition**

This study is designed to theorize connections between space, race, and identity for Black male athletes within the context of a PWI. Furthermore, exploring the meaning construction process within different spaces at a PWI is important to understand the social relations of the Black male athletes. It is important to acknowledge that choosing the small sample size of Black male athletes at a PWI is purposeful and expands upon a previous research study. As such, data collected and findings within this study may not be generalizable across other populations. In the second chapter, I will review literature around space, race, Critical Race Theory and Education, Whiteness as property and sports.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to discuss how Whiteness is a valued property (Harris, 1993) within US culture, particularly the system of higher education. Blacks are often disenfranchised within institutions of higher education and often treated as if they do not belong by the dominant White culture. Regardless of the spaces they occupied at the institution, students at the University of Missouri and in my pilot study believed race adversely affected how the dominant White culture assigned meaning to their identities within different spaces at their PWI. Furthermore, it seems as if they only mattered to the dominant White culture when their identities could be tied to their athletic skill set.

Therefore in this study, I focused on how the research participants understood the meaning ascribed to their identities beyond the space of sports.

In the next chapter, I will begin a review of the literature that discusses how Whiteness has long been a valued property in US society. Additionally, there will be exploration into how higher education is a racialized political system that has a long history of mistreating Blacks and fostering spaces that perpetuates racist ideologies. The research questions for this study will also be presented as there will be justification and discussion of the conceptual frameworks used within this study. In chapter three, I will discuss the methodology and data analysis for this research study. In chapter four, I will introduce the research participants and share their personal narratives of attending a PWI. In chapter five, there will be a discussion of the research findings and implications for future research practices.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Abstract Space* is space that is emptied of historical meaning and differences are nonexistent. Abstract space is most beneficial for those who are members of a privileged group because it is seen as a space without meaning or boundaries for individuals who live and use space (Lefebvre, 1991).

*Double Consciousness* refers to W.E.B. DuBois' (1903) description of the inner conflict experienced by Blacks in America. They face a 'twoness' about their identities and must learn to understand and properly situate their identities as a US citizen and being Black in America.

*CRT* is the abbreviation for Critical Race Theory and is the conceptual framework used within this study. This theory holds that race is at the center of these Black male athletes' experiences at their PWI (Degaldo 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

*Identity* is understood as a limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one is. Additionally, identity is relational and defined in a relation of difference to what it is not (Weedon, 2009).

*Lived experiences* refers to the set of practices and social relations that influence individuals' understanding of their identities (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

*PWI* is the acronym oftentimes used within higher education research and literature to reference institutions that educate and serve a predominantly White student population (Esposito, 2011).

*Racialized* describes how meaning about individuals and their personal identities are oftentimes established based upon their ethnic and racial background. Individuals' understanding of their reality is based upon or pertaining to race (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Fanon, 1967).

*Representations of space* can be understood in terms of the mental representations that guide how people are to behave and interact within spaces rather than how they are to comprehend their experiences in relation to the space. The physical is conceived through mental imagery and symbolisms to produce the visible environment (Lefebvre, 1991).

*Space* refers to the physical built environment and mental imagery individuals draw upon to create meaning and understanding of the places they occupy. Space is socially produced and understood in terms of occurring social relations (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2001).

*Spaces of representation* or oftentimes called *representational space* is viewed as lived space; the space of everyday experiences. Here lies the material set of practices that shape individuals' realities and identities. Spatial practices structure lived reality through acts of production and reproduction within spaces (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield , 2006).

*Spatial practices* is the perceived space where people try to make sense of their everyday practices and routines that in turn produce their everyday realities (Lefebvre, 1991).

*Subjectivity* refers to a belief that how we see bodies is an effect of the discursive field within which individuals are located. Additionally, such fields are made up of competing discourses that produce different subjective positions and forms of identities about individuals. (Weedon, 2009).

*Whiteness* depicts the privilege and agency that individuals are afforded because they identity and embody ideologies that are associated with being White. Such privileges unearned and they are granted to people in the dominant groups whether they want those privileges or not, and regardless of their stated intent. It is through such privilege, benefits are given to members of the dominant group at the expense of members of target groups (Leaven Center, 2003).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I review the literature related to the social construction of the intersectional concepts of space and race as they relate to Black male athletes within higher education. It is through the exploration of these concepts that I seek to discuss how race and space as social constructs possess contradictory and multiple meanings associated with the identities of Black male athletes. Furthermore, such meaning permeates a multitude of spaces that Black male athletes inhabit within higher education, particularly at a predominantly White university. This analysis is critical in order to understand the process of meaning construction occurring within spaces and constituted by the spatial practices that arise to mediate the subjectivities of the student athletes.

I begin this chapter by drawing upon Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theorization of space as my conceptual framework. I probe how the theorization of space is applicable and necessary within higher education to understand how race, space, and meaning are interconnected. Additionally, I will explore how the athletes understand and navigate the meaning that is produced about them within different spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) at their institution. I argue that it is necessary to examine the personal narratives, counter-

narratives, and spatial practices that constitute the identities of Black athletes. Next, I will discuss how spaces become racialized (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007) within US culture, particularly the spaces of higher education, as there is a fetish with race in order to characterize individuals. Then, I will examine how racism has long-plagued US culture and discuss the tenets of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Delgado, 1995). This will be followed by a discussion of how spaces within higher education, including sports, are created by the dominant White culture in order to maintain “walls of Whiteness” (Brunsma et al, p. 719) to depict Whiteness as the norm and accepted within higher education. The final area of discussion within this chapter will focus on the importance of soliciting narratives from individuals within this research study and invite counter-storytelling to the meaning and spatial practices created by the dominant White culture about the identities of Black male athletes within space of higher education.

### **Creating Space**

In the following section of the literature review, I explore the concept of space and meaning by drawing upon the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) in his book, *The Production of Space*. Henri Lefebvre begins by describing how meaning creation is a process that occurs within spaces. Using the lens of critical geography (Merrifield, 2003; Stark, 2010; Helfenbein, 2010), Lefebvre (1991) explores how mental and physical occurrences, human interactions, and individuals’ histories are used to produce space

(Lefebvre, 1991). It is through these experiences individuals are able to make sense of the world in which they live.

Additionally, this section will discuss the process of meaning creation within space (Lefebvre, 1991) through a critical examination of race as a social construct (Martin, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1994). In this study, I situate higher education in general and the university in particular as a type of social system (Wilkins, 2002) within American society that has historically been an inaccessible space (Lefebvre, 1991; DuBois 1903; 2003; Harper, 2010) for people of color. Examining the interdependent relationship between race and space will further illustrate how Black male student athletes understand their identities within different spaces at a predominantly White institution or PWI (Esposito, 2011).

Lefebvre (1991) explains that as individuals move between different spaces, meaning is created and can evolve as spaces intersect (Merrifield, 2003). As such, meaning that arises within spaces should be viewed as a social product. There are physical, social, and mental processes occurring to produce meaning and the spatial; the actions and practices of people's everyday lives. Space encompasses both mental abstractions (thoughts) and the visible physical (place) or built environment (Lefebvre, 1991). The physical or built environment is also seen as a type of mental space because individuals who live within the physical produce, "...symbolic weight and actions," (Lefebvre, p. 33) that transcend the physical environment. Lefebvre (1991) writes that:

A space that is apparently ‘neutral’, ‘objective’, fixed, transparent, innocent, or indifferent, implies more than the convenient establishment of an inoperative system of knowledge...Rather it is a whole set of errors, complex of illusions, which can even cause us to forget completely that there is a total subject which acts continually to maintain and reproduce its own condition of existence (94).

Space is a “social morphology,” (Lefebvre, p. 94) where the meaning that is created within a given space is intimately tied to its environment. Additionally, spaces are temporal (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield, 2003) and the process of meaning creation is influenced by historical accounts. The relationship between space, history, and meaning creation is useful to explore how the identities of Blacks are historically understood as subordinate and inferior (Bimper 2014; Omi & Winant, 1994; Martin, 2014) in relation to Whiteness; which is often viewed as privileged and normative (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Roediger, 1991) within America.

### **Understanding Space**

This research will draw upon Lefebvre’s (1991) description of the occurring social processes used to produce meaning within spaces. He divides space and the everyday practices that occur within it, or spatial practices, into a triad. Lefebvre (1991) describes space as the point of, “human action and conflict,” (p. 228) as “...subjects are situated in a space in which they either must recognize themselves or lose themselves, a space in which they may both enjoy and modify,” (p. 35). Through this insight, Lefebvre (1991) not only highlights the interrelationship between the spatial and social, but he also calls into examination the processes (Harvey, 2001; Gershon, 2013) which

materialize to produce the social. Helfenbein (2010) describes the concept of space as a set of relational processes between place, power and identity that intersect to produce representations of the conceptual-self. Furthermore, examination into the production process of these constructed representations calls into question how these social spaces can regulate one's perception of self in terms of identity construction. Hence, the meaning within the spatial is socially produced by the processes occurring within spaces. The meaning that develops within the space of conceptualization is very powerful and acts as the "...dominant space in any society," (Taylor and Helfenbein, p. 321) as it is here that ideologies (Woods, 2007; Merrifield, 2003) act as mechanisms to exhibit control and domination over individuals. Lefebvre (1991) describes these mechanisms through three concepts: representations of space, spaces of representation or representational spaces and spatial practices.

### **Representations of Space**

In Lefebvre's triad (1991) of space, he states that space is first conceptualized through representations. It is here that mental representations guide how people behave and interact within spaces. There is mental imagery and symbolisms at work to produce the visible environment and individuals who occupy the space are imbued with meanings associated with the space. Within representations of space, a dominant group possesses agency (Leaven, 2003) and is allowed to mentally create space, physically build space, determine who should occupy the space, and determine the

purpose of the space. For example, the discourses that institutions of higher education use to recruit students to the schools serve as a representation of space. Institutions seek to impose upon the minds of potential students imagery and symbols about the space of higher education that highlights the institution as being first-class amongst all post-secondary institutions.

### **Spaces of Representation or Representational Spaces**

Another make-up of Lefebvre's (1991) triad of space is that of spaces of representation or oftentimes called representational space. This space is viewed as lived space; the space of everyday experiences. The lived experiences that exist in this space speak to the everyday, the material set of practices (Merrifield, 2003), that shape individuals' realities and identities. Within representational space, individuals do not have to create their environments but are instead shaped by those experiences. Here, they must comprehend their place within the environments and how it influences their understanding of reality. For example within the academic classrooms of higher education, there is an expectation from faculty that all students will perform well within the classroom setting. As such, they are all treated as scholars who are capable to do the work and are at the institution to learn.

### **Spatial Practices**

The final element to Lefebvre's (1991) triad relates to spatial practices. Lefebvre (1991) also calls this perceived space because it is here that people try to make sense of

their everyday practices and routines that in turn produce their everyday realities. Furthermore, spatial practices structure lived reality through, "...acts of production and reproduction," (Merrifield, p. 110) within spaces. Individuals' everyday spatial practices reflect the, "spatial competence," (Lefebvre, p. 33) or knowledge they have of the space. Their engagement in the everyday routines ensures continuation and cohesion of a space. Exploring meaning creation through the critical lens of space (Lefebvre, 1991) can allow interrogation into how, "...identities and difference, borders and borderlands, reproduction and resistance, the global and the local, "and, "...the lived experience of subjects," (Helfenbein, p. 305), are fluid and unstable entities. For example within the classroom setting, students are expected to engage in the necessary spatial practices such as reading, studying and outlining in order to perform well in the course. Those who fail to engage in such spatial practices or everyday routines do not possess the necessary competence or knowledge of the space and threaten the space's continuation.

### **The Construction of Blackness**

Much research is available that examines the social construction and representation of Blacks within US society. Scholars in Black studies have described how the complex nature of race is pivotal to developing and maintaining unjust conditions that negatively affect the experiences of Blacks within American society (Feagin, 2006; Omi & Winant, 1994). They argue that race is a social construct (Martin, 2014) that is used as a sorting tool (Farley, 1997; Esposito, 2011) to purposefully

categorize differences <sup>2</sup>between different racial groups and ethnicities (Miller & Wiggins, 2004). Additionally, such categorization is a social occurring process (Harvey, 2001) that produces meaning to position Blacks as targets of oppression (Leaven, 2003) within different spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) in America. Martin (2014) writes:

Race is not simply about biology. Race is considered a social construct because of the meanings we attach to certain groups. In American society, being white has historically come with far more privileges than having membership in any other racial group, thus race has meant access to certain rights and privileges for some and the exclusion from the same for others (3).

It is this exclusion from privileges and rights that W.E.B. DuBois critically analyzes in his insightful piece, "The Souls of Black Folk," (1903; 2003). This historical work seeks understanding and meaning of the *Negro's*<sup>3</sup> identity in US society. DuBois (1903; 2003) outlines both the struggles and progress of the *Negro* since his introduction to the Americas. Additionally, DuBois (1903; 2003) considers future progress and problems the *Negro* will encounter as he seeks to find meaning of his Black identity in America.

In order for the *Negro* to understand his place in American society, the first thing DuBois (1903; 2003) suggests he do is to acknowledge that White people in America, the dominant culture, perceive the *Negro* as different and deplorable although he possesses a desire to be "a co-worker in the kingdom of opportunity," (DuBois, p. 9), that which is the US According to DuBois (1903; 2003), the identity of the *Negro* male is enclosed by a

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<sup>2</sup> See DuBois, W.E.B. (1903; 2003), *The Souls of Black Folk*, particularly chapters 1 and 2, for DuBois' depiction of the history of the American Negro.

rigid wall to separate him from White America, and it would take both groups laboring as co-partners in order to remove the barrier. DuBois (1903; 2003) goes on to describe the existence of the barrier as a heavily cast veil. The veil serves its purpose to demarcate between the accepted, White in America, and the unknown, Blacks in America; furthermore, the heaviness of the veil "...hung between us and Opportunity," (DuBois, p. 53) greatly stymied the growth of the *Negro*. The veil marks the *Negro's* space as problematic, inferior, and different from the dominant culture.

Black males' identities are in flux within spaces (LeFebvre, 1991) in America, and they struggle to negotiate the meanings that are socially produced (Merrifield, 2003) and ascribed to these identities. It is this production of meaning or, "... material representations," (Woods, p.34) that Black males use to understand, "...their real conditions of existence," (Althusser, p. 109) in relation to the diverse White spaces they occupy. According to DuBois (1903; 2003), the *Negro* yearns to locate his self-created identity in a "flood of White Americanism," (DuBois, p. 9) where he seemingly has no place due to the placement of the veil (DuBois, 1903; 2003) and is therefore forced to "...experience his being (self) through Others," (Fanon, 1967, p. 109). DuBois (1903; 2003) declares the *Negro* only wants acknowledgement and validation of his space in America. The veil is intact to separate the *Negro* from the dominant White culture as he experiences "twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warrings ideals in one dark body," (p. 10). Additionally,

this experience of “twoness” keeps the *Negro* in a state of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903; 2003) as much attention is given to his race as he tries to understand his identity.

Researchers Omi and Winant’s (1994) argue that purposeful effort must be made to understand race as, “...unstable and complex social meaning that is constantly being transformed by political struggle,” (p. 55). Race can be understood as a performative state of becoming (Ali, 2003; Esposito, 2011) where multiple meanings are assigned to one’s racial identity (Martin, 2014). While there is no single meaning of race, the ontological experience of being racialized does structure and represent how one constructs his or her reality as a racialized subject. Due to his inability and lack of power to create his own identity, the Black male is positioned into a place of subordination to a race that “...imposed itself on him,” (Fanon, 1967, p. 110) through a representational practice that Hortense Spillers calls “pornotroping,” (Spillers, p. 260) as there is a fetish with his Black skin. His body is marked and recreated in ways to produce political violence. He is dehumanized and viewed as chattel by the dominant White culture. Additionally, his Black skin is embellished with ideologies and satire to distinguish, separate and “create,” (Farley, p. 464) Whiteness from the image of Blackness. The concept of the veil (DuBois, 1903; 2003) acts as a tool of separation between Blacks and Whites in America. Furthermore, the veil (DuBois, 1903; 2003) speaks to how Blacks fail to see themselves outside of what White America ascribes to them (DuBois, 1903; 2003). The trope of the veil (DuBois, 1903; 2003) remains relevant

today as Black males encounter forces of oppression (Leaven, 2003) because of the meaning ascribed to their identities within US society. As such in this study, I will explore the social interactions of Black male student athletes with the dominant White culture at their PWI.

### **Racialized Space**

I have already described using DuBois (1903; 2003) that Black males live as fragmented (Lefebvre, 1991) beings within spaces. Their personal narratives (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) are mediated through representations of space and representational spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) are silenced due to public policies and private actions (Horton & Sykes, 2008) that privilege Whites (Buras, 2011; Harris, 1993). Moreover, spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) are governing tools that serve as, "...means of control, and hence of domination, of power," (Lefebvre, p. 26) that are used to regulate the identities of Blacks males based on their race.

Researcher Craig Wilkins (2002) acknowledges US political systems are purposefully structured to uphold and sustain the privileges of Whites. Wilkins (2002) compares the social order to a group of concentric circles with each successive circle away from the center losing agency (Leaven, 2003) with the members who occupy the circle becoming targets of oppression (Leaven, 2003). With this in mind, at the center of all of the circles lies the space of the White male. He portrays himself as that which is most desirable and valued amongst all of the circles. Furthermore, he occupies a

position that members of the other circles can only hope to obtain. Those within the first circle are able to maintain their positions of dominance through the ability of positioning and labeling members of the succeeding circles in relation to their own space. As a member of this first circle, the White male is able to ascribe to members in the succeeding circles their identities.

In the second circle lies the White woman, who is the White male's counterpart. This circle is ascribed to her because she is the key to the continuation of the White male's power and authority in American culture through her ability to reproduce and continued support of him. Her positioning in relation to the White male is to the right and slightly behind him. Because of the White woman's support, the White male is able to continue to occupy his space and maintain his position at the center of all of the circles. Although she does not seem to have as much power as the White male, she still occupies a better position than those members in the succeeding circles.

Within Wilkins' model, the third circle is given to the Black woman. Here, Black women are portrayed as care-givers, dependent of governmental support, and serve as the surrogate mother to all groups. The fourth circle in Wilkins' cultural and social model of American society is that of the Black male. Since Wilkins believes that power only weakens as each of the succeeding circles move away from the center, those who occupy the fourth circle in the system have very little, if any, value within American society. As such, the Black male is not able to freely position himself outside of the

fourth circle and away from all of the negative labels ascribed to him by members of the first circle. The structure of the circles allows the members of the second, third, and fourth groups to constantly look to the center in order to formalize and naturalize their identities within American culture. They are forced to navigate spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) of oppression and understand identities that are based on what Whites deem appropriate for them.

Although Wilkins (2002) model offers insight into America's social systems, it does not consider the importance of how representational spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) intersect (Crenshaw, 1996; 2006) and acts of oppression and the subjugation of people of color permeates space (Lefebvre, 1991). Space should not be viewed as, "...mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis," (Crenshaw, p. 139). Moreover, an examination of space (Lefebvre, 1991) through the lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1996; 2006) exposes how individuals live with overarching systems of oppression that coexist to create disenfranchising existences for those who embody multiple marginalized (hooks, 1984; 2000) identities. Additionally, they are trying to understand meaning created by the White dominant culture about their identities based on socially constructed processes such as race, class and athletic capabilities.

Moreover, such social constructs about the Black male athletes in this research study negatively affects their self-image of themselves as they negotiate meaning about their identities. At their PWI, it is interesting to explore how Black male athletes grapple

with the different spatial practices and the forms of oppression that arise within their respective sports and across different spaces at their institution. Furthermore, it is important to learn how they create their own authentic self-identities within such spaces as students and athletes of color.

### **Race as a Fetish**

Racism has long plagued America's history (Bell, 1980; DuBois, 1903; 2003; Lipsitz, 2006) and is upheld through the spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) of America's social systems where, "...the Blackman has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations," (Baldwin, p. 294). Whiteness as normative and desirable (Ladson-Billings, 2010) is sustained even today because American social institutions are established to only value the White phenomena (Bell, 1988; Delgado & Stefanic, 2000) while dehumanizing those who are the abject (Kristeva, 1982); Blacks and other people of color. The abject (Kristeva, 1982; Felluga, 2002) serves as the separation between the accepted and the unaccepted; the desirable self from the deplorable Other (Felluga, 2002).

Anything posited against the White phenomena (Bell, 1988; Delgado & Stefanic, 2000) is viewed as a binary opposite (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and considered the abject (Kristeva, 1982). The representation of space and spatial practices created within different spaces of American social systems (Wilkins, 2002) serve to oppress African-

Americans. Although it fails to consider the importance of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1996; 2006) and the various forms of oppression people encounter, Wilkins (2002) description of American society illustrates how Whiteness is a valued property (Harris, 1993) and is accepted as the norm (Roediger, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Davis, 2006).

In his work, "Constructing normalcy: The bell curve, the novel, and the invention of the disabled body in the nineteenth century," Lennard Davis (2006) describes how the desire to seek normalcy is socially constructed and the "...idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society," (Davis, p.3). In short, the traits and characteristics awarded to Whiteness are viewed as what is accepted and normal (Martin, 2014). Another point by Davis (2006) is that normalcy "must be enforced in public venues....bolstering its image by processing, comparing, constructing, deconstructing images of normalcy and the abnormal," (Davis, p.12). As a social construct, normalcy positions objects in a competitive manner as one must prove itself to be normal and desirable while labeling those that are less desirable as different or abnormal.

Harvey (2011) refers to the need to generalize human beings into fixed states of existence as militant particularisms. This type of generality is both dangerous and problematic as these militant particularisms act as seeds planted with the intent of producing universalisms or generalizations within spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) as they are ascribed to individuals. Such militant particularisms are carried out in order to establish

social order and a hierachal structure beneficial to those who possess power. Militant particularisms function as immoveable conservative forces to guarantee the preservation of privilege. Harvey's (2011) militant particularisms or mental abstractions (Lefebvre, 1991); produce meaning that arises within spaces about individuals that point to the, "...local community," (Helfenbein, p. 306) and creates a place identity that ties individuals to the community (Harvey, 2011) in which they live. Furthermore, this place identity (Harvey, 2011) is a material effect (Wood, 2006) of the processes manifesting in the everyday spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991). Because of the militant particularisms (Harvey, 2011) that have existed within the US political systems such as education, it becomes a place that is racialized (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) and oppressive to Blacks due to the meaning that is prevalent within its spaces.

### **Whiteness as Property in America**

Blacks and people of color are the objects that disturb and undermine (Felluga, 2002) the stable position of Whiteness in America. It is not until individuals can identify with the White phenomena (Bell, 1988; Delgado & Stefanic, 2000) through race or proper performance of acting white (Ali, 2003; Esposito, 2011) that meaning ascribed to their bodies can be viewed as possessing value. In her work, "Whiteness as Property," Cheryl Harris (1993) writes how Whiteness and its benefits are upheld not just in ideological beliefs but also in property relations that are reaffirmed structurally within American social institutions such as schools and the legal system. These systems and

their practices serve to only reify and perpetuate the belief of Whiteness as of superior property value. Through her work, Harris describes the historical disenfranchisement for Blacks and people of color is linked oppressively to how possessing a White identity enables its possessors to use and enjoy a host of benefits and assets within White US society. Harris (1993) states:

Becoming white meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore, survival. Becoming white increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one's life rather than being the object of others' domination... the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable asset that whites sought to protect...Whites have come to expect and rely on these benefits, and over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law (1713).

In order to succeed in its subjugation of Blacks and people of color, Harris (1993) goes on to discuss that Whiteness as property functions in four primary ways similar to the acquisition of legal property and includes: (1) rights of disposition; (2) the right to use and enjoyment; (3) reputation and status property; and (4) the absolute right to exclude. Although the rights describe the legal process for the acquisition of property, Harris (1993) uses these steps to describe how Whiteness can be looked upon as acquiring rights and privileges. For example, the rights of disposition refer to how Whites seek to maintain their dominance over people of color through the transferring of the traits and attributes associated with Whiteness to other Whites. Moreover, it is a transfer that occurs socially through means such as generational wealth inheritance or college admittance based on a family's legacy (Patton, Harper, & Harris, 2015). Such

actions are used to sustain Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) and its dominance over people of color. The right to use and enjoyment refers to the ability of Whiteness to be, "...both experienced and deployed as a resource," (Harris, p. 1734). In short, Whites experience a knapsack of privileges (Kimmel, 2006) because of their location in the social hierarchy as owners of property rather than property itself. Harris' explanation of reputation and status property refers to the need to physically locate a White racial identity, such as one's physical appearance, in order to determine who should be deemed as possessing Whiteness. Patton, Harper, and Harris (2015) write:

In essence, being considered White confers individuals with benefits, namely, being perceived as fully human, capable of maintaining one's status in racial hierarchy and garnering the trust and respect of Others without having to prove anything other than one's own status as White (200).

Embodying Whiteness allows one to be easily identified and accepted to exercise the rights and privileges of being White. Those who find affinity with the White phenomena (Bell, 1988; Delgado & Stefanic, 2000) reap the benefits of possessing a place identity (Harvey, 2011). A place identity encompasses the physical and metaphysical (Somerville, 2010) representations that exist within spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). Discussions on place extract how knowledge is socially produced within spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) and there exists a predisposition to rely upon the socially constructed meaning.

Furthermore, space and place are analyzed simultaneously in order to delineate how meaning construction about individuals shapes their lived realities otherwise known as representational space (Lefebvre, 1991). It is through the processes of creating a place

identity (Harvey, 2011) that representations produced within the context of space become solidified within local communities, such as institutions of higher education.

The final component Harris (1993) uses to compare the legal acquisition of property to acquiring Whiteness is that of absolute right to exclude. This right involves the process and ability to decide who should be considered White and be bestowed with the benefits and privileges of being White. While making this determination, the absolute right to exclude inadvertently identifies those who are the abject (Kristeva, 1982) and should lie at the margins (hooks, 1984). Harris' (1993) explanation of Whiteness as property also demonstrates how as a physical property, such as skin color, Whiteness is considered a valued commodity within America's social systems (Wilkins, 2002). In this study, I will explore how Whiteness as a coveted possession at a PWI affects how Black male student athletes are able to constitute their identities.

## **Space and Higher Education**

This research study will further explore the relationship between space (Lefebvre, 1991) and a place identity (Harvey, 2011) within the social system (Wilkins, 2002) of higher education. The place identity is produced because of the meaning that is socially constructed within the spaces individuals occupy. At PWIs, meaning constructed by the dominant White culture locates Black males into a place of subjugation; regardless of the space (Lefebvre, 1991). The meaning construction that arises within the spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) of higher education seeks to naturalize Black males' identities into

places of inferiority and subordination because of the social construct of race (Martin, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1994). With limited ability to construct their own identities, Black males become racialized beings (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). Their worth and value within the spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) of higher education, especially at PWIs, are defined for them. Because of the credence given to the socially produced meaning about Black males, the possibility for them to resist representations of space and spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) at such institutions seems impossible. Moreover, such an identity is a material effect (Harvey, 2001) of the processes occurring within spaces (Lefebvre, 1991).

### **The Racialized Space of Higher Education**

In this section of the literature review, I explore the importance and role of higher education within America. I will also discuss how the spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) of higher education covet Whiteness (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009) as privileged and normative (Martin, 2014). Institutions of higher education are places where discriminatory actions are upheld through everyday spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991). In his work, DuBois (1903; 2003) describes higher education as a place where Blacks should be able to "...furnish the Black world with adequate standards of human culture and lofty ideals of life," (p. 73). However, the historical practices and policies of higher education (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009) did not advocate principles of knowledge obtainment for African-Americans. Higher education served as social system that in its creation meant to exclude the Black male (DuBois, 1903; 2003).

It is through the spatial practices at higher education institutions that the identities and experiences of Black males are constructed to position them into spaces of subordination that seem "...coherent, enclosed, and established," (Schroeder, p. 44). Moreover, those spaces serve to perpetuate the ideal of Whiteness as normal (Esposito, 2011) as the system of higher education is historically structured in a manner to promote the material and symbolic interests of Whites (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005). Additionally, this goal to uphold the interests and positions of Whites is sustained at PWIs through the direct and indirect enactment of spatial practices such as admission policies and administrative policies and programs (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005) that fail to advocate for inclusiveness and embrace difference.

Although obtainment of a higher education is viewed as, "...one of the greatest hopes for intellectual and civic progress in this country," (Boyer, p. 85), people of color encounter oppressive racial meaning or microaggressions (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009) regularly. These microaggressions (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) are "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 60) Experiences of micro-aggressions while seeming inconsequential are also instrumental in constituting their identities within different spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) at PWIs.

## Critical Race Theory in Education

As aforementioned, race is frequently used as a labeling tool to depict one's ethnicity and structure lives (Esposito, 2011). It is used as an identity marker to place people of color in positions of subordination while privileging Whiteness and its laudable characteristics. In order for Black males to assume positions of authority within the social system of higher education, they must welcome the identity given to them by members of the first circle (Wilkins, 2002). Such ideals conceal the socially constructed meanings of race and present it as an mental abstraction (Lefebvre, 1991) instead of addressing how racist ideologies towards people of color advances the self-interests, power, and privileges of Whites (Solórzano, 1998).

In order to better understand how Whiteness as normal and privileged (Marable, 2000) at PWIs influences the identity construction and experiences of Black male students in different spaces (Lefebvre, 1991), it is important to allow for the first-hand accounts of their experiences at the institutions. Critical Race Theory (CRT) incorporates personal reflections and story-telling within its framework to elicit experiential knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and provide personal narratives of one's lived experience and existence as a racialized being (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). In acknowledging the validity of these lived experiences among persons of color, CRT scholars can place racism in a realistic context and actively work to eradicate it.

CRT is used as an analytical framework in this research project to explore, critique, and challenge the manner and methods in which, Whiteness as a coveted property (Harris, 1993), and the construction of racist ideologies shape and undermine the ability for Black male student athletes to constitute a self-identity. Although its ontology lies within the disciplines of critical legal studies, feminism, sociology, history and ethnic studies (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2010), CRT is a framework that is resourceful and applicable across a vast area of academic disciplines; especially education. Solórzano (1998) notes, "A critical race theory in education challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses, and insists on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both a historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods" (p. 123). In fact, CRT is oftentimes used to understand problematic issues within the field such as those pertaining to tracking, school curriculum, standardized testing and how they purposefully disenfranchise people of color within education (Howard, 2008; Roithmayr, 1999). Although no single definition exists for CRT, many scholars agree on the centrality of several key tenets (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delgado & Stafancic, 2000; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Roithmayar, 1999):

1. Racism is endemic and normal to American society and its social structures. Since it such a natural occurrence, it is sometimes difficult to explicitly identify, address, and

- eliminate racist occurrences (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solórzano, 1998). CRT exposes the many forms in which racism can manifest itself.
2. CRT rejects the notion of a “colorblind” society. Harper and Patton (2007) state that a colorblind society can lead to, “...misconceptions concerning racial fairness in institutions; addresses only the most blatant forms of inequality and disadvantage; and hides the commonplace and more covert forms of racism, (p.3). CRT critiques institutional claims of color blindness, liberalism, objectivity, and neutrality (Crenshaw, 1997).
  3. Interest-convergence is another tenet in CRT. It is the process whereby the White power structure, “...will tolerate or encourage racial advances for Blacks only when they also promote White self-interests” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Ladson-Billings (2000) notes that White people are the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation as efforts to eradicate racism produced minimal results.
  4. CRT gives consideration to the lived experiences of people of color. The experiential knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2000) and life narratives of people color is imperative in order to learn, first-hand, of their racial subordination within American society. Along with lived experiences, CRT also welcomes counter-narratives as a way to expose the discrimination encountered by people of color and challenge the meaning produced about their lives.

5. CRT also warrants that America's history be closely scrutinized and reinterpreted as opposed to being accepted at face value and truth. A critical examination of historical events can expose the unjust acts and oppression that people of color encountered within American society. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) state that a, "...revisionist history reexamines America's historical record, replacing comforting majoritarian interpretations of events with ones that square more accurately with minorities' experiences" (p. 20).
6. CRT sees itself as a theory of Racial Realism. Here scholars—even while they recognize race as a social construct – view, "...racism (as) a means by which society allocates privilege and status" (Delgado & Stefancic, p. 17). Racial realists recognize that racism is a permanent fixture in society. As noted by Harper & Patton (2007), racism remains prevalent on college and university campuses in America.
7. Another tenet of CRT is to critique the claim of America's social systems as meritocratic (Harper & Patton, 2007) because such beliefs serve to sustain White supremacy (Bergerson, 2003) and the oppression of people of color. Harper and Patton (2007) note that there are three mainstream beliefs that must be constantly examined and challenged regarding racism in America: (a) racism is a matter of individuals, not systems; (b) blindness to race will eliminate racism; and (c) one can fight racism without paying attention to other forms of discrimination in America society. Moreover, such beliefs are maintained through America's social systems (Wilkins, 2002) such as

education and law. However, people of color and those from low economic backgrounds are silenced.

Higher education functions as a space (Lefebvre, 1991) where the place identity (Harvey, 2011) for Black males and people of color is one of exploitation because of the representational spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) and spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) at work to create individuals' identities. Racial subordination is among the critical factors for the continued production of racialized (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) meaning within the spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) of higher education. Moreover, this production of meaning produces disparities and opportunity gaps that people of color continuously encounter in higher education. CRT is especially useful in this research because it allows exploration into how people of color's accessibility and participation in higher education cannot be taken for granted. In addition, CRT will allow me to explore the spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) and gather the narratives and counter-narratives (Ladson-Billings, 2000) of Black male student athletes and how they constitute their identities within spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) at their PWI.

### **Sports as a Social Construct**

For this study, there will be an examination of Black male athletes' experiences and the different representational spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) they participate in at a PWI. One representational space and its spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) that will be examined is that of sports at their PWI. Sports and athletic competitions are a naturalized part of

American society (Elder, 2008) and exist in many forms. Sports are socially constructed (Martin, 2015) spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) that assign meaning to the actions of individuals. Moreover, the meaning and actions that develop from the social processes occurring in sports (Merrifield, 2003; Harvey, 1972) have the ability to shape individuals' realities and understanding of American society and their roles within it.

### **The Influence of Sports on American Society**

Even for those who are spectators of the game, sports shape individuals' lives and permeate many spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) within American society. As socially produced spaces (Lefebvre, 1991), sports do not exist or act separately from other spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) and greatly influence all of American society; even the cause for equality and fairness. Sports have often been referred to as the great equalizer within American society (Carrington, 2010) where individuals' realities and understanding of themselves is influenced by their ability to participate in and observe in the space. Sports and athletic competitions are often seen as spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) where individuals are perceived to possess an equal opportunity (Lowen, 2007) to compete and win; regardless of their backgrounds. For example long before the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor to integrate schools in 1954 and Jim Crow was the law of the land, Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball in 1947 (Martin, 2010). Additionally before women were granted the right to vote with the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920, they had previously participated in their first

intercollegiate basketball game in 1896 (Bell, 2007). Susan Birrell (1989) in her work, "Racial Relations Theories and Sports: Suggestions for a More Critical Analysis," declares that sports in American society are:

...specifically structured to produce relations of dominance and subordination on a temporary basis. That is, sport is to publicly display the processes of challenge and struggle between two sides alleged to begin on equal terms but determined to produce and sustain relations of dominance and vis-à-vis one another. Moreover, sport as a meritocracy based on skill quietly reaffirms our national common sense: individuals who work hard and possess the right stuff will always prevail (213).

Although many see sports as a space where competitors are officially governed and evaluated based on their physical capabilities and dominance over their opponents (Martin, 2015), their influence on American society is substantial.

### **Race and Sports**

As aforementioned, sports are a type of representational space (Lefebvre, 1991) that has a strong influence on American society. In fact, one can look to sports to learn about social processes (Harvey, 1972) that occur within American society; including types of oppression and discrimination (Regan, Carter-Francique, & Fegin, 2014). It is through a critical examination of sports (McLaren, 2003) that forms of oppression such as sexism, classism, and racism (Sperber, 2000) are revealed. Early scholarly writings such as those by Harry Edwards (1969) provide a depiction of how the playing field of sports is far from equal. In his writings, "The Revolt of the Black Athlete," Edwards (1969) challenged popular assumptions that like other social systems in American

society, sports were not free of racialized (Yosso, 2005) beliefs about people of color; particularly Black athletes. Although they are perceived to level the playing field (Bimper, 2014), sports are socially produced spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) and a type of culture (Hylton, 2009; Singer 2005) where common ideologies (Woods, 2007; Merrifield, 2003) and belief systems exist.

Moreover, Edwards (1969) noted that within sports, there exists purposeful exclusion and exploitation of Blacks (Coakley, 1986; Birrell, 1989). As such, the role of race in sports has paralleled the racial perceptions that manifest in American society (Broom & Selznick, 1963; Singer, 2005; Sperber, 2000) and act as a culture where, "...material, and even nonmaterial objects are passed from one generation to the next," (Martin, 2015, p. 7). For many Black male student-athletes their identities and understanding of the world around is intensely immersed in athletic competition. As noted by Hodge, Burden, Robinson and Bennett (2008) in their work "Theorizing on the Stereotyping of Black Male Student-Athletes: Issues and Implications," there exists a tendency to make generalizations about groups of people often based on race within sports. There is an underlying "...stereotypic belief that Blacks are athletically superior but intellectually inferior to Whites and vice versa (and) other factors such as socioeconomic status and cultural norms," (p. 206) continue to influence them as they participate in selected sport activities. Furthermore, such stereotypic beliefs produce

spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) that serve to accentuate the perceived differences between racial groups within sports.

Billy Hawkins (2010) writes in *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions*, that many Black male student-athletes are recruited to schools where if it were not for sports, they would not be afforded the opportunity to attend the institutions because of their academic under preparedness. Additionally, Hawkins (2010) writes that more attention is given to their physical abilities instead of their intellectual capabilities. As such, the Black male student-athletes' worth is attributed to conventional stereotypes and identities pertaining to athletics. Moreover, this leaves many to struggle with understanding their own individuality outside of their respective sports. This gives way into a critical examination of sports and its spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) that shape their behaviors and actions beyond the playing field.

### **Race, Sports and Higher Education**

The persistence of racism in America is manifested in its many social systems (Reese, 2000; Wilkins, 2002) including sports and education. Some of the most visible perpetrators of racism against Blacks has and continues to occur within higher education (Harper & Patton, 2007). The relationship between Black male athletes and educational institutions is complicated and imbued by America's history of racial discrimination and generalizations. Within higher education, Black male athletes are

among the various groups of college students who continue to struggle to overcome racism in the context of PWIs (Powell, 1992).

Many scholars (Smith & Henderson, 2000; Sellers, 2000; Coakley, 2004) provide insight into racism in college sports and the negative impact it has on Black male athletes. Their findings demonstrate how the system of collegiate sports has and continues to be a vicious cycle that exploits African American student-athletes. They must learn how to develop and strengthen their social and intellectual identities away from their sport. John Singer (2005) writes that since Blacks began participating in collegiate athletics, they are continuously exploited for their athletic prowess much to the detriment of other areas of their development; especially their academic and career success. Singer (2005) declares that within higher education, Black male athletes, "... carry the burden of being African American males in America's educational and other social systems and must cope in a system that was not originally designed to support them," (p. 366). This is especially true on the campuses of PWIs (Esposito, 2011) as there is a longstanding history of marginalized and discriminatory experiences involving Black students. Additionally, they are often left feeling isolated and rejected at their PWI and strive to overcome stereotypic beliefs and ideologies (Samuel R. Hodge et al.) that influence the spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) of their PWI.

Living as the abject (Kristeva, 1982) and existing at the margins (hooks, 1984; 2000) at their PWI is also discussed by researchers Bimper, Harrison, and Clark (2012) in

their work, "Diamonds in the rough: Examining a case of successful Black male student athletes in college sport." Their work exposes how Black male athletes are cognizant of how there exists negative beliefs and ideologies (Woods, 2007) about their race that negatively affects and permeates many spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) at their PWI; including sports. According to Bimper, Harrison, and Clark (2012):

A stereotype of Black male student athletes' focal interests, commonly harbored by academic stakeholders and non athlete peers, are that they only choose to attend college to further their athletic pursuits remaining indifferent to their educational development...stereotypical beliefs of Black male student athletes may lead these athletes to self-stereotype themselves as a dumb jock and thus develop a perilously heightened sense of athletic identity... Black student athletes are essentially channeled toward limited sport opportunities while socialized to develop an ignorance of other opportunities beyond the athlete role (4).

The work of researchers such as Bimper, Harrison, and Clark (2012) and others shows how the material effects (Merrifield, 2006) of the interrelationship between race and sports raises concerns of how Black male student-athletes are exposed to racism and negative stereotyping. Furthermore, such beliefs allows for them to be denied access to leadership positions and an identity away from the playing field. Moreover, they grapple with how to embody identities and reproduce spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) that are authored by others; particularly those who are members of the dominant White culture.

## **Sports: Representational Space, Spatial Practices and Counter-Storytelling**

While there is much research on the relationship between race and sports

(Singer, 2005; Blake & Darling, 1994; Gaston, 1986; White & Cones, 1999), this study will explore race and sports through the writings of Lefebvre (1991) and CRT. As noted by Benson (2000), more research is needed of collegiate sports that serve to adequately represent the voices and lived experiences of Black male athletes. Through this research, I will explore sports as a type of representational space (Lefebvre, 1991) for Black male athletes where its spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) are means of oppression as they seek to constitute their identities at a PWI. Additionally, the study will focus on how these practices permeate and influence other representational spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) they occupy at their PWI. Their personal narratives will provide insight into how they embody the spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991) they encounter within sports. This research study will also explore how Black male athletes create counter-narratives (Ladson-Billings, 2000) at their PWI in order to contest the narratives that are ascribed to their identities by the dominant White culture.

A primary precept of CRT is the belief that the lived experiences of people of color are inherently valuable (Degaldo and Stafancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000). As such, it is through the Black male athletes' counter-storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 2000) one can begin to learn how they understand and deconstruct dominant discourses (Baszille, 2008; Harper, 2006) about their identities. Counter-storytelling engages the

voices of people of color as the primary knowledge sources for understanding the complexities of the social systems (Wilkins, 2002) within American society (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Harper, 2006). It is through the process of counter-storytelling individuals from disenfranchised communities are empowered and encouraged to rewrite the stories of their lives.

Within this approach, people of color critique the master narratives (Harper, 2009) or the dominant accounts, "...that are often generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups– such scripts usually caricature these groups in negative ways," (Harper, p. 701). It is through this mode of counter-storytelling Black male athletes can share their own experiences and perspectives of their identities at the PWI; which are informed by experiences of oppression based on their race and unjust spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991).

## **Conclusion**

Race is used to ascribe meaning and value to individuals. Moreover, this meaning has also been used to revere one race over another. As highlighted by DuBois (1903; 2003) and Harris (1993), Whiteness has long been praised and valued within US culture and done so through a dichotomous relationship that subjugates Blacks and other people of color to a place of subordination. This relationship exists in many US political systems such as higher education. Furthermore, the spaces that are created at institutions of higher education are often racialized (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) and

perpetuate oppressive meaning and actions towards Blacks and other people of color.

As such spaces at institutions of higher education, particularly PWIs, are created to value Whiteness as a property, not difference.

Since spaces within PWIs are most beneficial to the dominant White culture, this leaves Blacks and other people of color evaluating their self-worth through the eyes of the dominant White culture. In the following chapter, the research design will be discussed and analysis to learn how Black male athletes at a PWI understand and constitute their identities as a student of color and Black male athlete. It is through their personal narratives, we will begin to learn of their perceptions of Whiteness as a valued property at their PWI. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodologies used to carry out this research study. I provide more information about the pilot study which helped to inform this research study and the themes that developed from the data. There is also discussion about the demographics of the institution, Be Great University, and justification and limitations of the methods used in the research design.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss my research methodology. I used a qualitative research design that drew upon CRT and Lefebvre's theorization of space as conceptual frameworks that shaped this study. I describe how I acquired the plan for interviewing the research sample, research questions and I discuss the pilot study that helped to inform this research project. It was from the pilot study I captured three main themes from the research participants' narratives of their experiences at their PWI. They perceived racism as being prevalent at their institution as they lived as racialized individuals within the spaces of their PWI. They are only valued for their athletic talents and they transcended the racialized spaces and identities about them at the institution. In this chapter, I also discuss my procedure to collect, analyze and organize the collected data through the methods of interviewing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and focus group (Gibson, 2007). At the end of the chapter, the study's limitations are discussed in addition to its reliability and validity.

#### **Pilot Study**

This study came as the result of a pilot study I conducted from spring 2013-spring 2014. Through this pilot study, I sought to understand how Black male athletes

viewed their identities at their PWI. More specifically, I aimed to learn how the spaces of the PWI fostered racialized meanings about Black male athletes through the meaning created within spaces—such as student organizations and collegiate sports. The pilot study allowed me to gain experience conducting fieldwork and interviewing students. In the study I interviewed a total of three Black male basketball players in order to learn more about their recruitment process to the PWI, interactions with the dominant White culture within their sports and their interactions with White students at their institution. The data supported three themes that emerged from the interviews with the three Black athletes.

The Black male athletes I interviewed believed they lived as racialized individuals at their PWI because race infiltrated and intersected their everyday spatial interactions at the PWI, including academics. During our interview, Ray mentioned his desire to major in a discipline that would help prepare him for a career in movie production. However, his athletic advisor shared he would need to gain hands-on experience through an internship, and his basketball schedule would not accommodate such requirements. Instead, Ray was directed towards a major that he considered “common” for most athletes at the PWI. Ray believed that if he was White athlete at the institution, he would be allowed to pursue his major of choice. The research participants in the pilot study believed the social interactions and history of their PWI influenced meaning creation within different spaces. As Black male athletes at the PWI,

race affected how they constructed mental abstractions and how such constructs dictated their interactions and movement within spaces at the PWI.

You know, sometimes they (the athletic trainers) act like they don't want to touch us...I remember a teammate came in for conditioning one morning and nobody jumped to work on him; a walk-on white guy came in and they all went to check on him...shit...my homeboy just shook his head and walked away.

[Philip, Interviewed on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014]

It does not matter if they close the door in my face because of my skin color...it's their loss...there are still other houses in the neighborhood.

[Kenneth, Interviewed on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013]

Another theme I found within the pilot study was that the research participants believed they mattered at their PWI only because of their athletic contributions to the institution. Philip mentioned during his interview that the White student trainers with his sport acted as if they did not want to attend to his needs or his Black teammates whenever he went in for medical treatment because he was not a starter for the team. However if the athlete was considered a major contributor to the sport, the trainers would make sure he was well-conditioned to compete. Because of such interactions with the training staff, Philip perceived that his worth to his PWI was tied to how well he competed athletically.

From the pilot study's data, I also noticed that the athletes believed they transcended race at their institution. Although their racial identities at their PWI depicted them as aberrant individuals, the interview participants believed they transcended the meaning ascribed to them by the dominant White culture. They did not

see themselves as targets of oppression (Leaven, 2003) within the different spaces at the PWI. The research participants believed they contradicted and rose above the negative thoughts and meanings within racialized spaces designed to demarcate the Black males from the dominant White culture. Because of their collegiate involvement, desire for success and remaining enrolled at the PWI, the research participants believed they redefined meaning about their identities. The Black males at the PWI possessed an attitude of resistance towards the spatial practices they encountered at their PWI. It is through their actions of resistance to the dominant ideologies (Woods, 2006) at the PWI, they had input into the meaning produced about their identities. Furthermore, they possessed the authority to construct meaning about their identities in a way more conducive to their lived experiences and not just those of the dominant White culture.

The pilot study informed this research study in several ways as I wanted to continue to further explore how Black male athletes constituted their identities within the racialized spaces of a PWI. In this study, I decided to interview more Black male athletes across multiple sports—football, basketball and track. I also interviewed the research participants for an extended period of time. In the pilot study, interviews lasted a minimum of 20 minutes to a maximum of 35 minutes. Since much discussion within the pilot study focused on the participants' academic interactions with the dominant White culture, I wanted to learn more about the research participants' experiences within the academic space and develop research questions pertaining to

such. In both the pilot study and research study, the personal narratives of the Black male athletes exemplified their experiences of being an athlete of color at a PWI and how they understood the meaning within the spaces of the institution.

## **Conceptual Framework**

As aforementioned, Lefebvre's (1991) writings on the process of meaning production centers on representations of space, spaces of representation or representational spaces, and spatial practices. It is through representations of space that symbols and imagery are conceived as to how spaces are to appear. Spaces of representation or representational spaces describe the everyday lived experiences of individuals. Additionally, individuals conceive how they are supposed to understand and act within spaces. Spatial practices are the everyday routines and actions individuals engage in that create their lived realities. For this research project, attention was especially given to representational spaces and spatial practices at a PWI that shaped the realities for Black male student athletes. It was interesting to learn of the imagery and symbolism within spaces associated with their racial identity at their PWI. I sought to learn of the spaces at their PWI the participants perceived as welcoming and comfortable; beyond their respective sports. Learning of the interview participants' understanding of the different spatial practices that occurred within spaces at their PWI was also noted. I questioned if they could identify, adhere to or disregard the everyday spatial practices they encountered at the institution.

Another theoretical framework utilized within this research is that of CRT. This theory allowed for examination into how racism is endemic and ordinary within American society; rejects the notion of a colorblind society; discussed the promotion of Whites' self-interests through interest-convergence; and gives attention to the lived experiences and narratives of people of color. As such, this research drew upon the narratives and lived experiences of Black male student athletes in order to learn of their realities at their PWI. Furthermore, I explored how their experiences revealed a pattern of perpetual racism at their PWI. Lefebvre's (1991) work on space and meaning as a social product coupled with Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Delgado, 1995) offered in-depth understanding of meaning and identity formation at BGU and how representational spaces and spatial practices influenced the manner in which they constituted their identities at the institution. Moreover, both frameworks worked well to bring forth understanding of the Black male athletes' experiences at their institution.

### **Research Questions**

The experiences of Black male athletes served as the unit of analysis, and I was seeking insight into how Black male student athletes constituted their identities within different spaces while enrolled in college. While they were tasked with the responsibility of representing the institution in competitive sports, knowledge of how they perceived race relations at their PWI was learned through their personal narratives. As such, this qualitative inquiry provided understanding into how the

athletes experienced a racialized identity at an institution that has a predominantly White student body. Furthermore, the study examined their process of acclimation and sense of belonging at their PWI. The research questions were designed to explore the meanings participants attributed to their identities in the different representational spaces at the PWI.

The following research questions guided the qualitative study:

- What are the experiences of Black male athletes within the different spaces they occupy at the PWI?
- How do these experiences in the different spaces shape their subjectivities?
- What are the implications of these spatialized subjectivities on their academic and athletic experiences at the PWI?

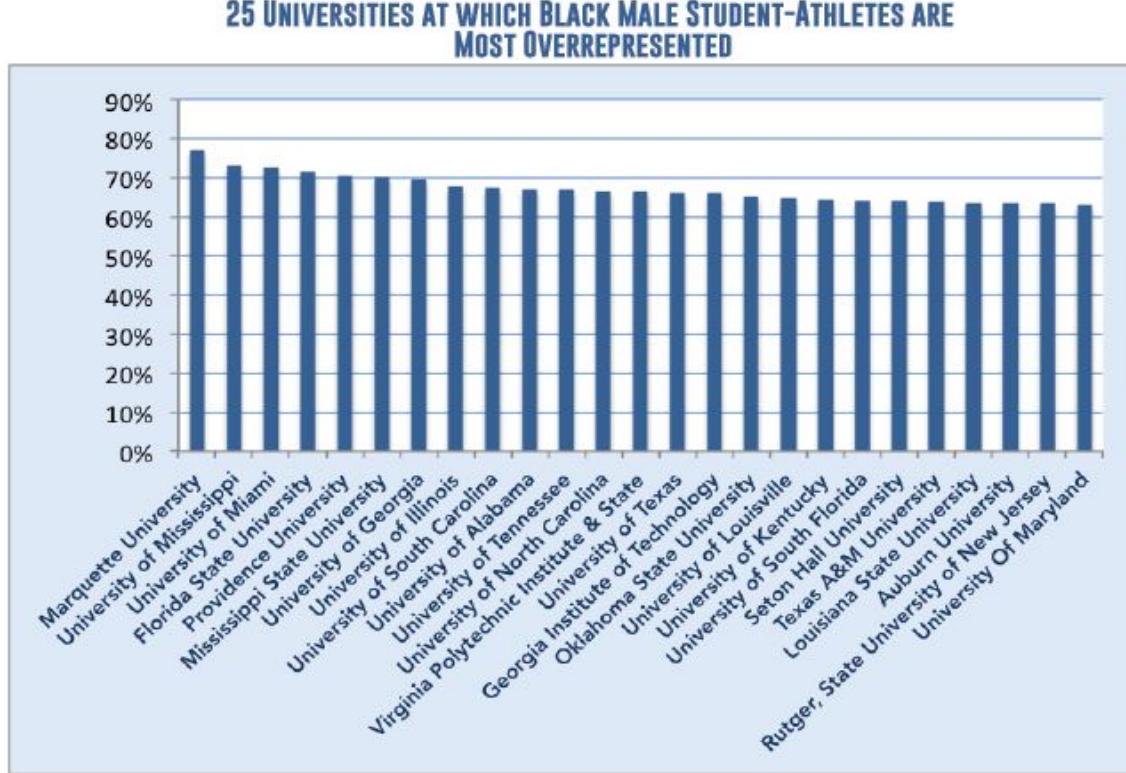
### **Setting**

This research study took place at a large, public research institution in the Southeast United States. For research purposes, I refer to this institution as Be Great University or BGU. This coeducational university has a total undergraduate enrollment of approximately 37,000 and a graduate population of nearly 5,000 students. The women outnumber the men at Be Great University by 10 percent. Additionally, 12 % of the undergraduate student population identifies as Black or African-American and 83 % who identify as White, non-Hispanic. Be Great University consistently achieves rankings in the *US News and World Report* as one of the top 50 public colleges and universities in America. BGU offers more than 300 student clubs and organizations, a plethora of research opportunities with full-time faculty, traditional interpersonal and

distance learning educational opportunities and many tutoring and academic resources are readily available.

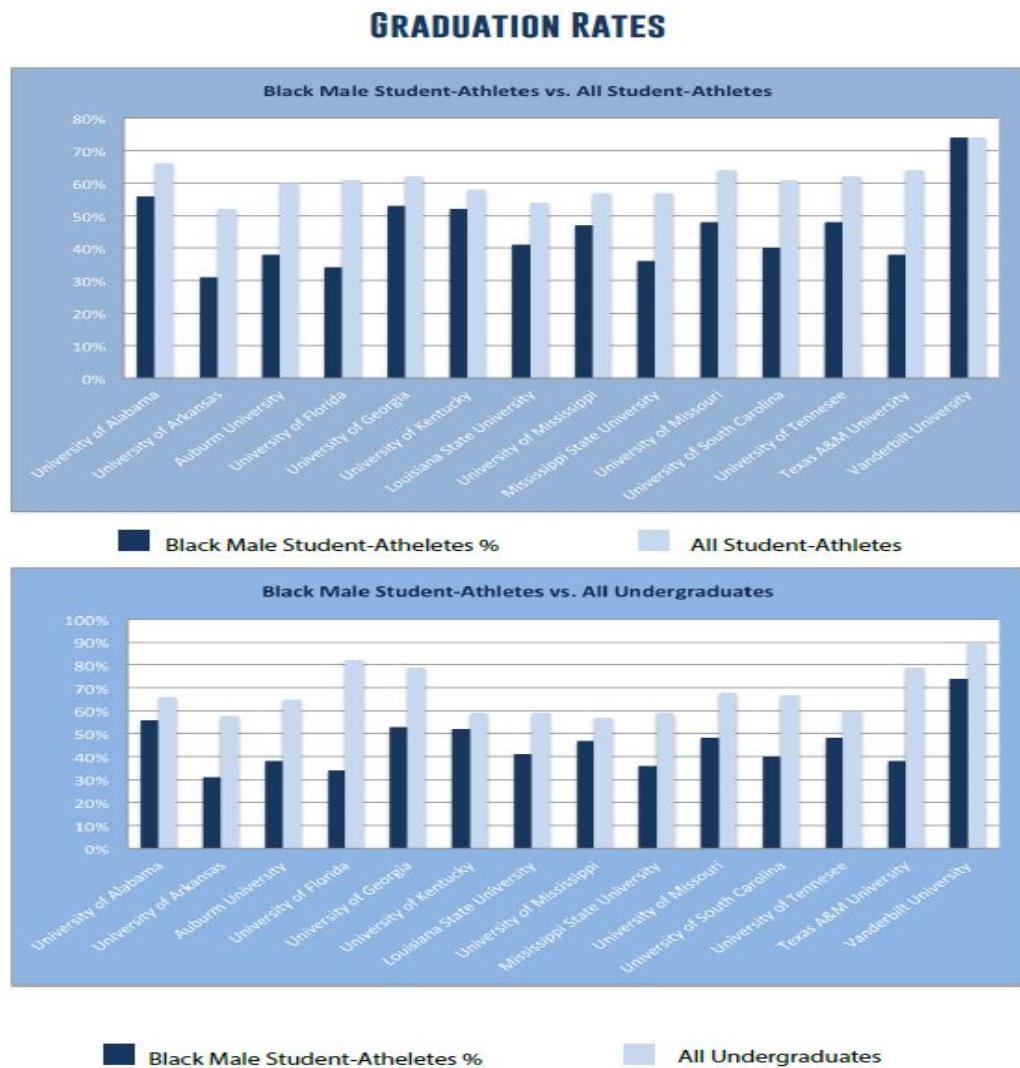
Additionally, Be Great University is frequently recognized and praised within the Southeast and nationally for its reputation of winning and maintaining success within collegiate athletics. It is a Division I-A athletic institution that within the last decade has accounted for more than 10 national championships and 23 conference championships for both men and women's sports. At BGU, 82 student-athletes across all sports recently earned all conference recognition for their academic success. With so much recognition and accolades regarding their athletic capabilities, this institution seemed particularly appropriate for the investigation into the experiences of Black male student athletes as they account for more than 70 percent (Harper, Williams, and Blackman, 2013) of the student-athlete population at their institution.

*Figure 1 Adapted from Harper, Williams, & Blackman (2013): “Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division I College Sports.” Institutions with the highest representation and graduation rates of Black male student athletes across Division I-A athletic conferences.*



**Figure 1** highlights the overrepresentation of Black male student athletes across the collegiate sports of football and basketball. The researchers compiled this chart based on quantitative data from the US Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the NCAA Federal Graduation Rates Database. They used the IPEDS data to calculate Black men’s share of undergraduate student enrollments across four cohort years at each of the 76 colleges and universities in this study.

*Figure 2 Adapted from Harper, Williams, & Blackman (2013): “Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division I College Sports.” Representation and graduation rates of Black male student athletes across the Southern Division I-A institutions.*



**Figure 2** highlights the percentage of Black males in the Southeastern Conference who participate in the sports of football and basketball. The above illustrations show their graduation rates comparative to the institution’s Black undergraduate male student population. Participants in my research study were athletes in one of those sports.

Be Great University also seemed appropriate for the investigation of the experiences of Black male student athletes because of its well-documented history regarding issues of race and racism. BGU prides itself on upholding its tradition, and Blacks did not gain entrance at the institution until 1963; nine years following the Supreme Court separate but unequal ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954. In the past decade, administrators of the institution addressed incidents related to student racism and received much criticism both locally and nationally because of the campus racial climate. With such a highly publicized and controversial history regarding race relations on its campus, one may assume students enrolled at BGU are consciousness of the role of race at the institution. As such, Black students, including male athletes, have lived as racialized individuals while studying at BGU. Their personal experiences and narratives, which are shared and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study, captured the everyday spatial practices that shaped their identities within the spaces of BGU.

### **Sample**

At my institution, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is required for any research projects using human subjects. As such, the first step in completing this research study involved receiving IRB approval and submitting necessary documents (see appendix) for review by the committee. Once IRB approval was granted to conduct the research, recruitment of voluntary research participants to satisfy the eligibility requirements followed. Black male student athletes from all Division I-A sports teams

and who were in good academic standing with the institution were asked to volunteer for the study. All of the research participants self-identified as Black males between the ages of 19-22. Additionally, this population and age group allowed for the participants to provide informed consent to participate in the study, and the selected participants had to have been enrolled at BGU for at least a year. The research participants in the study were identified primarily in two ways. Some of the research participants were referred to me by those who took part in the pilot study. Or, the research participants were previously enrolled in courses I taught and had a pre-existing relationship with me. This allowed me to send a recruitment email (see appendix) asking for their participation in the research study. Because of my prior relationship with some of the research participants, I was anxious asking them to take part in the study as I did not want to compromise our interpersonal relationships. In order to overcome such anxiety, I reassured them of my commitment to ensure no personal identifiers would be used in the research, and the study was completely voluntary. Moreover, their decision not to participate would have no effect on our interpersonal relationships. In all, 8 Black male athletes agreed to participate in the study but due to the constraints of their schedules, only 5 were able to do so.

## **Research Design**

### *Interviewing*

Since I was trying to better understand how race, space and spatial practices affect the identity construction process for Black male student-athletes, the methods of interviewing and a focus group proved necessary to thoroughly explore their experiences. Additionally, such investigative inquiry produced the needed thick description (Gertz, 1973) to provide insight and observation into their lives. As a researcher who embraced the use of counter-storytelling in my study, I sought to create and maintain a welcoming environment for the participants to express their opinions of what I observed within the field. Furthermore, this open approach helped the participants provide further insight and clarification into what I transcribed about their lives. Both in-depth interviews and a focus group helped to probe more into the identity construction process and experiences of Black male student athletes within different spaces at BGU. Additionally, the focus group session allowed for discussion of the emerging themes from the interviewing sessions. It also helped to learn more about their experiences within a group setting and how they interpreted the themes I observed.

During our first in-person meeting, I explained to each of them my research interests and design for the study. I also assured them of the high level of confidentiality that would be maintained and provided them a copy of the Informed

Consent Form (see appendix). From the recruitment process and initial meeting with the research participants, I learned relationship building and honesty are essential when interviewing a highly recognizable and small sample size. The research participants shared very intimate accounts of their personal lives and experiences at BGU. Throughout the interviewing process, I tried to validate their experiences of being racialized individuals. For example, many times they described their experiences of being a Black male in US culture, negative interactions with the dominant White culture at BGU and being under the constant scrutiny of White coaches and teammates. As I listened to the audio recordings, I noticed I often responded with "I can relate as a person of color" to many of their shared narratives. I believe this outward action worked to build solidarity with the research participants and helped in their self-disclosure process.

As noted by Rosaldo (1993), thorough qualitative research should welcome reflexivity and diversity of our research participants' experiences. As such, it was through the qualitative method of interviewing I tried to become an insider (Glesne, 2010) with my research and build solid rapport and trust with my participants. Because my interview sample included Black males who occupied highly regarded and recognizable spaces at BGU, sports, and they were recruited to represent and compete competitively for the institution; it was not my aim to produce damaged-centered research (Tuck, 2009) about the lives of the Black males participating the study. Instead

through my research, my hope was to portray their realities at BGU as accurately as possible and in their own words. As noted by Kim Etherington (2007), qualitative research is composed of "...our anxiety, dread, guilt, and shame," (p. 604) as we try to tell of another person's life experiences.

### *Focus Group*

As mentioned earlier, another qualitative method I used in my study is that of focus groups. It was through this type of interview setting that the research participants self-disclosed their experiences to other research participants in the study. The focus group served as an opportunity to engage the research participants in a group setting and allow for them to collectively and openly dialogue. Additionally, the focus group setting provided an opportunity for me to further elaborate upon my interview questions and follow up with second questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Such interactions in the focus group encouraged reflexive epistemology (Etherington, 2007) as new knowledge and data arose that I failed to capture during my interpersonal interviewing of the participants. The questioning allowed for them to identify and discuss the representational spaces and spatial practices at BGU that affected their experiences as students, athletes and men of color.

The focus group session took place on a weekend afternoon at the apartment community's clubhouse of one of the research participants and refreshments were provided. Only four of the research participants were able to attend the focus group

session, and the research participant who could not attend had an unexpected family engagement. At the beginning of the focus group, I asked each of them to share their majors and career goals beyond the scope of athletics. This opening question helped to build camaraderie amongst the group and to learn of their personal aspirations. I then shared with the research participants the discussions that occurred during the interviewing sessions and asked them to share their reasons for attending BGU as a student athlete and their interactions with the dominant White culture. Sharing their narratives vocally amongst themselves helped me identify areas that needed clarification in my interviewing notes and elicited more discussion about the discussions shared from the interviews. Furthermore, discussion in the focus group setting helped me better understand the preliminary codes and themes I transcribed from the data collected during the interviewing portion of the study.

### **Relationship to the Study**

As aforementioned, the students in the sample were identified from previous courses I taught and through a referral from one of the participants in the pilot study. It is important to note that because of my role as an administrator in a department at BGU, a prior relationship with some of the research participants did exist. There were both advantages and disadvantages to having a preexisting relationship with the research participants. It was advantageous because there was level of respect and self-disclosure that was built before the interview or focus group. Also, I could easily

identify participants for the study. The prior relationship was at times disadvantageous because I was at times anxious as I tried to accurately capture and share the personal narratives of the research participants. I did not want the research participants to believe our interpersonal relationships were based on my own personal research interests and not authentic. Because of the level of respect and trust I had for these prior relationships, I tried to protect the interests of the participants in the study to be best of my ability. Yet, I had to be meticulous and thorough in the manner I captured, analyzed and shared the data.

## **Data Collection**

During the initial meeting with the research participants, I shared the Informed Consent form and explained their rights and responsibilities as participants in the study. I also asked them whether or not they wished to voluntarily proceed in the study and once they verbally agreed, I asked them to sign the Informed Consent form. Once the form was signed, I explained the procedure for the interview and began the formal interviewing process. Throughout each participant's interview, I made notes as he spoke about his experiences at BGU. The notes were a resource to draw upon in order to confirm details during the process of coding, transcribing and analysis of the data that I collected. I used a digital voice recorder to capture a more detailed and accurate record of the interviews. Included on the Informed Consent form was a section that asked for the participants' permission to use an audio-recording device during the

interview. The audio files were maintained on my laptop and used solely for the research study. When not in use, the device remained stored and locked in my home office location. Audio files were reviewed and transcribed within one to two days after the data was collected. After the transcription of the data, the typed transcripts were shared with the participants through email and phone call for their review and purposes of clarification.

I conducted a minimum of one and maximum of two interviews each week. Interviews were held individually with each participant on-campus at BGU in my office or at a location of the participant's choosing. The length of the interviews varied for each participant in the study. The minimum length of each interview was 45 minutes with the maximum length being 90 minutes. To allow for the interview participants to become more comfortable and familiar with me and the study, I encouraged each participant to share as much information about his background, family, friends and experiences at BGU. I then asked follow-up questions as needed to gather concrete examples of his experiences that led to his enrollment and continued stay at BGU. During the data collection process, I challenged the research participants to reconstruct his experiences at BGU and recall his emotions from having the experiences. This helped for the research participants to process the significance of their life events while enrolled at BGU as Black males, students and athletes at the institution.

## **Analysis of the Data**

My first step was transcribing the audio recordings and jottings (Van Maanen, 2011) that I collected during each interview. I replayed the audio file from each session and transcribed those conversations by hand. Maintaining the authenticity of the participants' commentary was priority, and I drew upon my hand-written jottings to properly inform my typed notes from each interview as a cross-reference to the audio. Hand-written jottings provided detailed accounts of the participants' non-verbal communication such as eye contact and facial expressions; which were not distinguishable through the audio recording. I transcribed the audio recordings and jottings at the conclusion of each interview, and I found this routine helpful in guiding forthcoming questions and dialogue for the focus group session.

The goal was to transcribe each of the interviews within 48 hours of the conclusion of the interview. While I transcribed the data throughout the interviews, analysis of the data did not begin until I concluded all of the interviews and the focus group session. By waiting to analyze the data, I tried to remain cognizant of the fact that I had to suspend any preconceived ideas and assumptions about the realities and experiences of the Black male participants in the study. Prolonging my analysis of the data allowed the qualitative research to be more diverse and reflective because I had to approach the data widely (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Moreover, this approach helped foster counter-storytelling within research in order to, "...understand what life is like

for others and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world," (Delgado & Stefanic, p. 41). Moreover, it is through interaction and dialogue with individuals of marginalized identities that researchers can understand the influence of history on their present-day lives, (Vilhauer, 2010). As I transcribed the data, it was imperative for me to tell the stories of the research participants through their own language and lived realities.

I collected, organized and coded (Kaufman, 2006) the data by highlighting and grouping sections of the interview responses that were similar. This helped me condense large information of data collected from the participants into a much more manageable format for analysis. This process of situating the data warranted the construction of interview themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) which helped compose the stories of the Black males' experiences at BGU. From these themes, I tried to learn of their lived experiences and beliefs (Gibbs, 1997) and be provided with insight into how they constituted their identities at the institution. Moreover, I looked for how the Black male athletes lived within the different spaces at BGU and the ways in which they created their own thirdspace (Soja, 1996) to contest the everyday spatial practices at BGU. In the coming chapters of the research study, I will share how race, representational spaces and spatial practices at BGU affected their identity construction and sense of belonging at BGU.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are important and oftentimes contested considerations within qualitative research (Lather, 2007). Validity asks whether the research study is trustworthy (Glesne, 2010; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and accurate in its assertions (Van Maanen, 2011). Reliability centers on the consistency of the results and application of the results (Glesne, 2010; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For this research project, the concepts of validity and reliability incorporated the reasoning of triangulation (Glesne, 2010) as multiple qualitative methods were drawn upon in the research design. A multi-faceted qualitative approach to the study enabled me to cross-check the data collected from the interviews, focus group and the composed transcriptions. It is through this process of triangulation and member checking (Harper & Cole, 2012) mistakes made during interviewing and focus group interrogation were illuminated. Different approaches to the collected data through triangulation can reveal, "...new dimensions of social reality," (Gibbs, 2007, p. 94) as research is a social process occurring between the researcher, participants and the environment.

With a multilayered qualitative approach, neither validity nor reliability were rendered a goal of sameness (Scheurich, 1996) in this study; instead difference. Rosaldo (1993) described validity as complex and not something that can only be reached with scientific and quantitative analysis. Moreover, qualitative analysis in research should allow the study to be seen from many perspectives. Qualitative research can embody

paradigm proliferation (Dillard, 2006) and reflect the mixed worldviews of its research participants. Furthermore, allowing ourselves to fully embody our research can result in the discovery of multiple realities and truths (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) not reflective of one traditional or standard paradigm. In short, validity and reliability in this qualitative design welcomed variability instead of universality (Dillard, 2006; Glesne, 2010; Koro-Ljungberg, 2010). Additionally, the validity and reliability in this qualitative study reflected my research participants' fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2010) as they shared how the meeting of their histories, lives, experiences and stories affected their present-day lives at BGU.

## **Limitations**

Limitations were expected within this study on the identity construction process of Black male student athletes at BGU. I strived to create a strong relationship between the researcher and the participants. When conducting fieldwork, I tried to establish a genuine relationship with those I had the privilege of interviewing and observing in order to accurately tell their stories through my qualitative work (Van Maanen, 2011; Rosaldo, 1993). Although I had a prior relationship with some of the research participants, I did not have the same level of rapport with all of the participants in the study. As such, it was possible some of the research participants did not feel as comfortable self-disclosing their experiences at BGU compared to those who knew me prior. Due to the small sample size of 5 research participants, data was not widely

generalizable outside of those who participated in the study. Because of the research participants' busy schedules, the interviews and focus group were conducted in a relatively short time frame. I was only able to interview one of the research participants, Keith, for a secondary interview because many of the research participants traveled during the time of the study; which was conducted during their offseason.

Seeking to apply these findings to audiences outside of those in the study would not be ethically sound qualitative research (Dillard, 2006; Seidman, 2006) as the assumption should not be made that the experiences of all Black male student athletes at PWIs are the same. This research provided an opportunity for Black male student athletes to discuss the socially constructed representations of space and spatial practices at BGU and how they are able to constitute their identities. Moreover, it served as an opportunity for them to share their own personal narratives and challenge those created by the dominant White culture at BGU.

## **Conclusion**

Considering I utilized CRT, a theoretical framework that encouraged the elicitation of personal narratives and the lived experiences of its research participants (Ladson-Billings, 2009), my transcriptions coupled with the audio recordings were extremely important as I tried to capture their stories in a way that "...reflect(s) the significance of events and experiences to those in the setting," (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, p.151). As suggested by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), I tried to immerse myself into

the research and become the researcher, data collector, participant, and observer within the study.

In this chapter, I described the qualitative design and methods used in this study of Black male student athletes and how they constitute their identities within different spaces at BGU. The history of BGU, conceptual framework and limitations were discussed. The methods of interviewing and focus group served as a means to consider epistemological validity (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008; 2010); knowledge that is not singular but detailed and different to reflect the participants' experiences. In chapter four, I will formally introduce my research participants and the stories they shared which shaped the findings of the study. These narratives produced the data collected from individual interviews, a focus group, interview transcripts; which were reviewed by the research participants in the study.

In Chapter 4, I will also discuss BGU as a representations of space and the discourse used to market the institution to potential students and athletes. Additionally, I will introduce the research participants in the study and begin to share their personal narratives of being a Black male student and athlete at BGU. Their narratives will discuss how they try to understand the identities constructed about them by the dominant White culture as they move within spaces. In their own words, they will describe their experiences within the academic space, the social space and the athletic space and their interactions with the faculty, fellow students and coaches.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR STORIES

This chapter will summarize the data collected from the interviews of the participants in this study and will discuss the meanings gleaned from their personal experiences at Be Great University (BGU). After I introduce the research participants in the study, I will organize their narratives according to the following themes that emerged during our discussion. First, I will show how as an institution BGU publicly touts itself as an inclusive environment for all; even while it also possesses a history as an unwelcoming place for Blacks. Next, I will proceed to share the personal experiences' of the research participants within BGU's academic environment as students and student athletes through their interactions with their White faculty and peers organized according to the themes emerged throughout the data.

Next, they will reflect upon their social interactions with their White and Black peers as students and student athletes. We will then learn of their interpersonal relationships with their White teammates, coaches, and athletic staff. Such experiences are shared in relation to their interactions and dialogue with their Black teammates. The final area of discussion will center on their perceptions of sports operating as a type of

business at BGU. Long before I asked for their consent to participate in this research study, they all shared the common ground of being Black male student athletes at BGU. As such, their personal narratives provide insight into their lives as students of color and athletes of color at a Southern PWI.

### **Beyond the Uniforms: The Faces of the Athletic Empire at BGU**

#### *Participant 1: Keith*

Keith is from a large city in the South and is a scholarship athlete at BGU who plays football. Majoring in education, he turned down many athletic scholarship offers before deciding on BGU. Of all the research participants in the study, I have personally known Keith the longest. Having previously taken a class with me his freshman year at BGU, I came to know Keith really well through his frequent office visits and conversations throughout the semester. Such visits remain constant even today, and it is through these opportunities of personal self-disclosure I learned of his excitement and frustrations of being a student of color and student athlete at BGU. Like all of the other research participants in this design, I often refer to Keith as a gentle giant. Ranked as a top five player in position his senior year in high school, Keith is massive in size. Standing comfortably at a height of 6'5 that is matched by a trim athletic frame of 285 lbs, he prides himself on being very outgoing and “treating everyone the same; it doesn’t matter who they are.” While all of the research participants spoke of the importance of their family and faith during the interviews, I noticed that Keith seemed

to be the most committed and adamant about speaking on the importance of family and faith in his life.

The tone of his voice always remained positive and upbeat as he conversed with me about lessons learned from his family and faith. As he opened up about his immediate family, Keith shared:

My momma is my sweetheart and has to be the strongest Black woman I know. She gave up so much to make sure me and my brothers and sister have what we needed; I love her so much. I am very close with my grandma. She has taught me about life and how to treat people. Ya' know she worked so hard to provide for all her kids as a single mother; cleaning houses for well-off people and working different jobs. She never complained and did what she had to do. I have one older sister, and she works so hard to do better (and) make a better life for her and her kids. She is a single mother of 3 kids and takes no mess. My oldest brother gives me advice on being a man, but I have to ask for it. He does not openly tell me or give me guidance. I have a younger brother that is misunderstood and sometimes misguided by his anger. I tell my momma to just let him be; he is going to do his own thing. He will be alright. He just finding himself.

[Keith, Interviewed on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

When I asked about his relationship with his father, it was interesting to learn that Keith's parents are still married; yet, they "live in two different" worlds. Although he grew up in the same household with his father, he considers him to be an absentee father because he never provided for his mother or siblings in a way that Keith thought a father should. I asked Keith how it makes him feel to know he respects his father because "he's my father, but I have no relationship with him," Keith then began to cry. Through silent tears, he shared:

I did not know I said that; being honest. Everything that I've learned about being a man comes from what I learned from my faith in God and his guidance. He has placed Godly men around me, and they help guide me. Other Black men at BGU, some teammates and even a couple of coaches challenge me to do better. My faith helps me make sense of all of this (he waved his hand around and added) school, football, family, friends, life. Going through the things I've been through, I know I have purpose.

As he further discussed the importance of his family and faith, Keith mentioned the words of advice that his mother shared, and he tries to live by it daily. "She told me that don't ever think that you're better than anybody but always remember that you are somebody," he added. Like the other young Black men in this study, Keith drew upon his family and faith as pillars of support for life-long guidance. He felt both of these pillars would remain constant influences long-after his athletic playing days were over.

*Participant 2: George*

I met George a little over two years ago through an alumna of BGU. The alumna reached out to me in hopes that I could help George develop a network of support beyond his sport of football. She was looking for people who could help George become adjusted to attending the PWI. Before settling in the Midwest with his mother and older brother, George spent much time relocating to various parts of the country due to his father's military obligations. After his parents' divorce, communication and a relationship with his father dissolved as he was raised by his mother. Since our initial meeting, George has always been very forward and open with sharing his personal background. He told me that a week prior to our interview, he came to learn that his

father had four additional children; two older than him. George expressed a desire to meet his newfound siblings and develop a relationship with them. When I asked how this information impacted him, he just said “it’s done now,” and he refused to focus on the past.

Although he majored in education, George arrived at BGU hoping to pursue a career in athletic training. However, he saw that he could not participate in sports and meet the demands of the major. He shared the following:

It's impossible to be in that major (athletic training) and play football. I couldn't get what they called field experience because I played football. For that major, I had to be at football practices and other sports teams' practices learning how to stretch athletes, do ankle tapes, wraps and all type of stuff. I can't be in two places at once, so I switched majors. I started with that major (athletic training), but I didn't finish once I got on the football team. And if I was going to chase that athletic dream here at BGU, I had to do what I had to do. It's a good school. I got to continue my athletic career, and I still got a good education.

As a student here...umm you have a lot of independence and depending on your major and degree program a lot of responsibility; it can be rigorous. You have to have the right attitude about it and be a good time manager. Take care of your business. You can easily get distracted here with all the fun stuff there is to do here. The social distractions are very, very high.

[George, Interviewed on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016]

George also discussed that he had no choice but to “handle his business” and obtain a college degree because he saw the many struggles and sacrifices his mother had to endure as a single mother of two Black boys. “When I was growing up...shit...the streets were always calling,” he said. George went on to discuss that by witnessing the “bad choices of his older brother by being in the streets,” he wanted more for his life. I

asked about his brother's 'bad decisions,' and George told a story of his brother's many stays in jail, being an absentee father to his kids, and a life of financial strain that George knew he did not want for himself. Growing up without his father and seeing the consequences of his brother's choices inspired George to be "a better man to my kids; especially my son one day." It is through his belief that, "God has something in store for my life; all I can do is trust him," and the stern direction of his mother has helped George stay focused and determined to stay at BGU.

*Participant 3: Brandon*

Brandon is a Black male who upon first glance, you would assume he possesses some athletic capabilities. He has a bodily frame that surpasses most individuals; extremely long arms and imposing hands. When he entered the room for our interview, I noticed that he had to turn sideways because of his broad shoulders and bend at the knees as he was too tall for the doorframe. Like Keith and George, Brandon has on athletic gear bearing the university's shortened name: BGU. He mentioned that he is late for our interview because he wanted to get a workout in with the team's head trainer and an ice bath. Pursuing an undergraduate degree in communication, Brandon is the oldest of two brothers and has a very strong bond with his family; especially his mother. I also met Brandon through a prior class two years ago, and we have maintained a relationship since then.

Coming to BGU and choosing to play sports was a decision he made with his family and through his faith. Additionally in order to succeed at BGU, Brandon mentioned that he had to learn how to manage his time and deal with the challenges of being identified as an athlete. He shared the following:

Ya' know time management was the biggest factor for me. I was young and came in a (an) early enrollee. It was a big adjustment from high school to college with no parents waking me up; I had to do it myself. Being a student athlete (you) got workouts in the morning, shower, then get to class on-time, then practice, study hall, go home and do it over again. Time management was the biggest thing being a student athlete here.

A challenge I would say is...umm...your face. Everybody looks at you like as a student athlete you're always given things...umm...it kinda stereotypes you; that's the hardest thing. Everyone has such high standards for you. Basically what I'm trying to say is that as a student athlete sometimes people think everything is always given to a student athlete; like we don't work hard. Like, they think we don't put in the work in the classroom like normal students do and we got it easy; that's not true. People kinda judge you off that and you don't want to be judged off of that. You hear those things but you gotta learn how to shake it off. Do your own thing.

[Brandon, Interviewed on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Brandon also shared that his family was his greatest support system, and they constantly reminded him that, "they are only a phone call or short drive away" from the school if he ever needed him. He also referenced several times during his interview that his parents told him to "get that paper (degree) while you are there (at BGU); you aren't there just to play sports." He added the following:

They told me to be smart and don't get into any trouble. And, that there are a lot of temptations; stay away from the temptations and stay away from the negativity. Being at BGU was a great experience. I came in young, gained a lot of

knowledge, developed great relationships, showed great character and always tried to treat people the right way the way; the way I wanted to be treated.

Being here is actually one of the best places for you to be to get an education. People come here to learn. I learned about life in general you know and to make decisions on your own. Character is what you do when nobody is watching. I couldn't make dumb decisions and had to make the right decisions. I had to be my own man.

Additionally, Brandon believes that by working hard and maintaining a strong relationship with God, he will achieve his goals and added that "... God will lead me to where I am supposed to be," he said. In addition to his relationship with God and his family, each day Brandon reminds himself of his short-term and long-term goals in order to overcome the adversity and moments of disappointment he encountered on and off the field during his time at BGU.

*Participant 4: Michael*

Michael and I met through a student who once worked in my department. A track athlete majoring in business, Michael does not have an intimidating stature as the other athletes in the study. However, one cannot help but notice his above average height and very lean and muscular frame. Since he just finished with a class presentation, Michael was dressed in business casual attire during the interview. Born and raised in the South, Michael has a certain southern charm and respectfulness to him that is present in his interview responses and presence. He smiled a lot and included ma'am in many of his interview responses. At one point, he asked if he needed to get

me something to drink as I had to repetitively clear my throat. Michael helped raise his siblings and is very protective of those who matter the most to him.

When I asked him to reflect upon his decision to attend BGU as a student and student athlete he shared the following:

You know, I came here to run track and did so for two years. During that time, I noticed people treated me differently cause' I was an athlete. I was not an athlete like one of the other major sports here at BGU—like football or basketball—it was track. When you put that uniform on and people know you are an athlete here, people treat you differently.

I gave it up my junior year because I wanted to do something more and be known as something more than an athlete. And the hours that we had to dedicate to the sport was too much. I did not have time to do anything else but my sport. Don't get me wrong, I know this is a great place for sports. But I wanted to be my own man and make my mark in something other than sports.

[Michael, Interviewed on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

As the oldest of three kids, Michael knew that he had to leave a positive legacy for his brother and sister to follow. Attributing everything that he has ever accomplished academically and athletically to, "God and my folks," he is on a mission to make his parents and siblings proud. Michael states that through his many personal conversations with his father, he has learned the value of hard work and how the importance of remaining constant during the triumphs and struggles. "All I know is that I've got to make something of myself; for them (his family) because they are the reason that I grind so hard now," he said. Furthermore, Michael knows that "God called me to be somebody," and he does not want to miss his opportunity for greatness.

*Participant 5: David*

Before I formed a personal relationship with David, I actually had one with his older brother. I taught David's brother during his freshman year at BGU, and he introduced me to David during his graduation dinner at BGU. Like Brandon, David had to enter the interviewing space with a bend at the knees because of his height. At first glance, David seemed taller than all of the other research participants. I made a quick reference to his height being an asset to his game of basketball, and David told me that being tall has its disadvantages. Growing up, he would have recurring pain in his joints because he would have random growth spurts beginning at the age of thirteen. He believed that such moments of growth just recently stopped when he had his measurements taken before the start of the basketball season.

Majoring in psychology at BGU, David is the youngest of three and has lived in various parts of the world because of his mother's military service. Such experiences allowed David to develop an "appreciation for different cultures and people's ways of life," he said. When he decided to attend college in the South, David knew he would have an opportunity to be exposed to a new culture. He shared the following:

I'm still kind like low-key and wouldn't say I'm a very well-known person, but I've met a lot of different people here. Being here, I try to keep like a balance. Like you have to have your White friends, you have to have your Black friends, and you have to have your Hispanic friends or Asian friends. You know you get a little piece of their life and their culture and their experiences and connections.

People wondered why I wanted to come to school in the South. Nobody I knew wanted to come down here for school; they stayed on the East Coast. Some thought that BGU was easy to get into and wasn't a good school but technically it is a good school. You don't have to go to some Ivy League to be a doctor or lawyer or something; you can be just as successful here.

[David, Interviewed on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Growing up, David shared that faith was not often talked about or discussed within his immediate family; however, a belief in a supernatural power greater than oneself was implied by his parents. It was not until David relocated to BGU that his belief and dependence on God flourished. "You asked why I don't let a lot of stuff get to me and that's the reason (faith)," he said. "Me and my parents, my brother and sister talk openly about anything and all of that helps me keep my head on straight." When academic and athletic challenges arise for David at BGU, he tries to remember that everything in his life has a "reason and purpose from God" and he tries to "learn the lessons" from the hard times he faces at BGU.

While some college students bring wealth and academic lineage to the university, the research participants in the study bring with them a different asset. All of them possess hopefulness about their futures and potential for success. It is interesting to hear all of them make reference to the importance of their families' belief in their success and their faith in God. They are overcome with pride about themselves, their athletic skills, and academic capabilities. Moreover, they have a desire to be independent and successful Black men long after they leave BGU. The research participants seem to rely upon such beliefs to help them survive the tough times they

encounter at the institution. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will provide additional background and personal information about the participants as they invite us in to their lives and experiences at BGU.

### **Be Great University:** The Institution's Self-Image

Situated in a Southern medium-size metropolitan city of nearly 100,000 people (US Census Bureau, 2015), BGU prides itself on academic excellence and inclusiveness for all who choose to enroll at the institution. As a place of higher education, BGU fosters the characteristics one would expect a college campus to have. Walking across the grounds of the institution, one cannot help but be drawn into the beauty of the campus. The landscaping is done in such a meticulous and intricate manner throughout the grounds. The naked eye would have to search tirelessly for misplaced or discolored floral arrangements or shrubbery.

Additionally, the academic buildings located on the campus of BGU are what one would expect on a college campus. They are all large in stature and proudly tout a historical name as point of reference to a person who had some influence on the institution. Like the rest of the campus, the buildings are bounded with beautiful landscaping. The towering academic buildings are matched only by the colossal fraternity and sorority houses. Also in view are the statuesque football stadium and other athletic facilities. The perfectly drawn to scale architecture speaks to the mental, financial, and human labor utilized to build the institution. In short, BGU is a well-

conceived and produced space. Moreover, it depicts an institution of higher learning that seems to pride itself on quality and distinction in its physical layout and academic offerings. During the interviewing process, participants often made reference to the physical environment of BGU. Many of them referred to the campus as “beautiful” and one said that he “hasn’t seen anything like it” prior to visiting the institution. Their responses to the overall environment of BGU also capture their experiences in the academic, social, and expectations about the institution. When asked to describe their reasoning behind choosing to attend the school, all of those interviewed shared a personal belief that they would receive a high quality education.

### **Southern PWIs: Pursuing Excellence, Becoming a Legend and Being All In**

In an effort to maintain the anonymity of the research participants in this study, I compiled a composite of recruitment and marketing materials from several Southern PWIs. By combing through their Universities’ admissions and athletic websites, they seem to offer many opportunities to prospective students and athletes who choose to enroll at the institutions and have a desire for greatness academically and athletically. For example, one large Southern PWI located in Gainesville, the University of Florida (“Welcome to UF”, n.d.) tells prospective students on its website that “Your Best is Just Beginning” once they choose to enroll there. Furthermore, the University of Florida is full of “people with a purpose” as they are all members of institution that is “...an unstoppable force for the Gator Good.” And according to its overall mission statement,

it is an institution that “...has a history of excellence” as it seeks to be “...among the nation’s most academically diverse public universities.” Much of same promises of excellence are found on its athletic website (“A Championship Experience with Integrity”, n.d.) as well. By choosing to attend “UF” as a collegiate athlete, he or she will have a “Championship Experience with Excellence” because the University of Florida aims to be the “model collegiate athletics program” in the South and nation. Student athletes at “UF” have the opportunity to experience the “Passion, Integrity, Excellence, Respect, Innovation and Teamwork” that makes “UF” athletics renowned.

Another large Southern PWI, Auburn University (“This Is Auburn,” n.d.) located in Alabama boasts of the same promises for prospective students and athletes at its institution. Constituents of this institution are not simply students or athlete, but they are members of the “Auburn Family.” Academically, Auburn shares with prospective students that by enrolling at the school, they learn “this is Auburn” means to “...emerge as one of the nation’s preeminent comprehensive land-grant universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Moreover, it’s the “Auburn Spirit” that makes this institution unlike any other university in the state of Alabama, the South or nation. Athletically, Auburn athletics (“Auburn Tradition,” n.d.) is “steeped in tradition” and there is a “passion and spirit” that exists within the schools’ athletic programs that cannot be found elsewhere. Auburn athletics are very important to the institution. In fact, the University’s creed (“This is Auburn,” n.d.) mentions that members of the institution believe in “...a sound

mind, in a sound body and a spirit that is not afraid, and in clean sports that develop these qualities." According to its website, those who choose to bring their athletic talents to Auburn University should know:

Attending Auburn and playing for the Tigers is an honor that comes with great opportunity and responsibility. If your talent and dedication match our passion for excellence, Auburn is exactly the place you can achieve your highest academic and athletics goals.

By learning of such "passion and spirit" about Auburn's academic and athletic programs, it is difficult for prospective students or athletes to not desire to be "All In" with Auburn University. During a recent tour of the university, there is much signage that highlights the University's integrity and boasts of "Tiger Pride." Even the storefronts of the commercial shops and vendors adjacent to the campus have the words "family" and "All In" painted on their windows. The Auburn family is inclusive of all individuals and gives no regard to a person's race, socioeconomic status, gender or sexual orientation. At Auburn University, everyone is invited and welcomed to be a part of great legacy.

Although Auburn University may be its collegiate rival, The University of Alabama shares some of the pillars of excellence as "AU." The University of Alabama prides itself on the same academic and athletic dominance as other large Southern PWIs. Both academically and athletically, The University of Alabama is "Where Legends are Made" ("Legends," n.d.) because as a student at the institution, one should be prepared to "...go anywhere in the nation." Once a student makes the choice to

enroll at the university, they should remember that “At UA, you can choose the path that takes you to the pinnacle of success!” Moreover, The University of Alabama is the “capstone” of academic excellence for all students. When looking at its vision statement online, prospective students and athletes learn they have the opportunity to be catalysts for change because: “...The University of Alabama will be a student-centered research university and an academic community united in its commitment to enhance the quality of life for all Alabamians and the citizens of the nation and the world.” There seems to be no other institution of higher learning that is seeking to be the trailblazer for excellence and make a global impact like The University of Alabama (“Our Mission,” n.d.).

The academic excellence at The University can only be matched by its success in athletics. Student athletes at “UA” are like no other as they are “Built By BAMA” and have opportunities afforded to them they will not experience within another intercollegiate athletic program. The athletic program has an “...ongoing tradition of excellence” and has created a “legacy of champions.” One of the first things one will notice within the institution’s annual athletic report is the number of championships and awards the athletic department has earned over the years; including 16 national championships in football. Furthermore, they earned these championships in a plethora of sports, beyond football, with such “honor and integrity.” It is also mentioned on the department’s website that in order to win these championships and earn much

notoriety nationally and internationally for its athletic talents, there are “no shortcuts to building a championship program.” For prospective student athletes who want to be the best in their intercollegiate sport and have success after graduation, the only choice is The University of Alabama (“Athletics Annual Report,” n.d.).

BGU touts mantras similar to those schools and mentions that everyone is accepted and welcomed regardless of their race, creed, or color. Like other Southern PWIs, BGU wants students to become one with the institution, to go places, build their professional brands and become champions on and off the field. BGU and other large Southern PWIs petition prospective students and athletes to become members of their “family” and be a part of a “winning tradition.” Additionally, some Southern PWIs such as Mississippi State University appeal to the offspring of its alumni through marketing campaigns called “Who’s Next” and licensed retail apparel that refers to them as “Future Bulldogs” of the school (“Mississippi State Bulldogs Shop,” n.d.).

In my composite of Southern PWIs for this research study, I also noticed that all of these institutions have a dedicated marketing and licensing department that is included on their athletic websites. Such departments are tasked with ensuring the proper use of the athletics’ intellectual property and to properly manage relations with vendors. Additionally, all of the athletic sites also have a section dedicated on their website to highlight the athletic departments’ first-class training and game-day facilities. Additionally within this composite of Southern PWIs, one would assume that

their commitment to diversity and inclusiveness is strong due to the strategically placed pictures on the Universities' homepages and athletic sites that include students of color and other elements of diversity such as gender. Like the aforementioned slogans and mantras the universities uphold, their marketing campaigns both academically and athletically are strategically and intentionally developed. In their efforts of outreach, all of the large PWIs include discourse that they are welcoming and non-discriminatory institutions. All of these tradition-filled large Southern PWIs, including BGU, are available to everyone. As long as the students value family, success, winning and possess a strong work ethic, they have an opportunity to succeed both academically and athletically. The dubious veil (DuBois; 1903; 2003) that plagued Southern PWIs like BGU and prohibited Blacks from obtaining a higher education has been replaced with hope. Times have changed as Blacks and other marginalized groups have equal opportunity to be optimistic about their futures by attending these reformed and re-imagined institutions.

There is also another side of BGU's history and other Southern PWIs that exists; however, it is not as the eye-catching as the physical beauty that one easily notice in the photo galleries that market these institutions to prospective parents and students. While these institutions now boast of their efforts of embracing diversity and being welcoming to all, they once stood for exclusion. In fact PWIs in the South, like BGU, have a racialized (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2007) past that cannot be ignored. The

same prestigious academic buildings across these PWIs that boast the names of historical figures are those who once stood in favor of Jim Crow and segregation (Miller and Wiggins, 2004). These academic buildings are named in honor of governors, state politicians, and other academicians who fought to disenfranchise Blacks from educational opportunities at the institutions and supported violent marches and protests in support of White supremacy. In the hallowed halls of the academic buildings, the science of eugenics and other inhumane research was carried out to depict Blacks as inferior beings to Whites. This grotesque history of Southern PWIs is juxtaposed against a modern-day belief that by enrolling at one of these institutions, everyone will be treated fairly and has equal opportunities for success.

#### **BGU: Buying into the Mantra of Hope**

I knew that coming here; I would get a good education. That's all that matters.  
[Brandon, Interviewed on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Before coming here, my parents warned me that BGU did not always want Black people here.

[Michael, Interviewed on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

As an institution of higher learning, BGU has multiple narratives. There is the narrative that publicizes it as a premier place to obtain a college education, which is a narrative that those interviewed in this research study seem to give credence. However, there is also a narrative that is not as publicized and exposes the unjust treatment towards people of color. It is a narrative that captures the experiences of the participants in this study. Their narratives describe how they seek to acclimate,

understand and at times challenge subjectivities about their identities within different spaces at BGU. They yearn to remain hopeful about future opportunities for success that will arise by attending the institution. The dominant discourse about BGU is deeply embedded into the institution's everyday spatial practices and cannot be ignored. Through their personal narratives, we learn how they live in a state of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903; 2003) as they move within the spaces of BGU and are always cognizant of the watchful gaze of the dominant White culture.

Growing up in the South and the state in which BGU is located, Keith described his ability to acclimate to the rigorous demands of his academic studies as "challenging, but also expected." He further describes his expectancy of toughness attitude about academics at BGU in the following manner:

It's tough at times, but it's a good school. Each year I've been here, I've gotten an award for having a GPA above a 3.3. I am getting it again next year. I've gotten invited to honor societies too. I don't play about my studies...my grades. I will be somebody and am somebody beyond football. I've also made the all-conference academic honor roll each year that I've been here and received our team's highest GPA award. I know that getting a degree here would carry me places too. That's important because I have goals of going into the medical field when football is over. I don't play about my academics, unlike some of my teammates. I put my studies first...I have to remember why I'm here.

[Keith, Interviewed on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

As a first-generation college student, Keith makes mention that two of his siblings have decided to pursue a college education since the time of his enrollment at BGU. His sister was a teenage mother and is a single-parent of two who recently enrolled in a nursing program. And, his younger brother recently signed an athletic

scholarship at a Division-I school on the East Coast. With a bit of pride that lies on the cusp of cockiness he proudly boasts, “I believe their decision to go to college has to do with me, and I encourage them and tell them about the things I’ve learned and experienced by being here.” He mentions that he constantly shares with them that it takes the hard-work and discipline to attend and stay in college. He also tells them it will all be worth it once they obtain a degree.

Keith is not the only one who believed in the stringent demands of academia as a student at BGU, so did George. Growing up in a large and predominantly Black suburb in the mid-west, George describes the academic environment of BGU as one that “will provide you with a good education if you apply yourself.” He notes that his final decision to attend BGU did not rest solely on the possibility for him to have athletic success at the school. Although athletics was “a factor” in his enrollment decision, he chose the institution based on his desired academic major of choice coupled with the hopes of one day obtaining an athletic scholarship for football.

I ended up using my dad’s G.I. Bill benefit to come here. I mean there were other schools that I wanted to attend, but my mom and I were struggling financially when I applied to colleges. I applied to BGU first and they were the first one (school) that accepted me; so I came. I knew they had a top athletic training program and that really helped me make my decision. And since I was a pretty good football player in high school, I believed that I could walk-on to play here, and I would be getting a really good education.

[George, Interviewed on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016]

During the interviewing process, it is interesting to note that George mentions with pride in his voice that he will be the first in his family to graduate from a four-year

institution; a triumph he will experience in the coming year. He has already been accepted and will enroll in graduate school at BGU the following year. These are accomplishments that he sees as being especially important because he did so at a PWI and prior to enrolling at the school, he had “very little interactions or dealings with White people.” In fact, George told me that “I grew up in an all Black neighborhood, attended all Black public schools, and all of my friends are Black.” When asked how his previous rearing environment of a predominantly Black setting influenced his college experiences, he expressed that it made him realize that he needed “the change and exposure to White people and BGU would be the best place for such experiences.” As excited as he sounds about his potential for academic achievement at BGU, George will later recount how his negative social interactions with White peers made it challenging to continue his studies at the school.

Raised in a small and rural town in the South that has publicly been plagued by racial tensions, discussions about race and the interactions between Blacks and Whites is a conversation that Brandon frequently engaged in with his parents. “The only other thing that we talked about as much as race was the importance of getting an education,” he said. So when the opportunity presented itself for Brandon to sign an athletic scholarship to BGU, the decision was not difficult to make.

I knew that if I worked hard and put in the work on and off the field, I would succeed. Coming here, I knew I would be coming to a PWI, and I had already attended a predominantly White high school. Since I grew up in the state and already had friends come here (BGU), I knew about the reputation of the school.

I always try to do what my folks told me and my brother and stay focused on what I came here to do; get an education.

[Brandon, Interviewed on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

By maintaining a positive attitude and determined to adhere to his parents' advice, Brandon believes that earning a degree from BGU will "count for something" long after his athletic playing days are over. In order to succeed here, Brandon shares that he must "ignore the outside noise" as he cannot focus on the everyday challenges that arise while studying at the institution.

Before he agreed to sign a letter of intent to participate in collegiate sports at BGU, Michael's parents prepared him for possible difficulties he could encounter by choosing to enroll at the school. Growing up in a community not too far away from the school, he knew of the past racial struggles that long-plagued BGU's history. Although he heard from his parents that "BGU did not always want Black people here," they still supported his decision to attend the institution and hoped many opportunities would arise once he graduated. Michael shared that his dad, "always encouraged me to get something in my head, and do better than him." He noted:

Neither of my parents went to college. For me to attend here on scholarship; I knew this opportunity was bigger than me. I had friends who were already here. I knew I had to be my own man and make my own decision. This is a good place to get a good education.

[Michael, Interviewed on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Much like Michael, the major offerings and emphasis on academic success made BGU a top-choice for David to seek admission in hopes of pursuing a higher education.

Born and raised on the East Coast, David could not pass up on the opportunity to enroll at the school with the hopes of academic and athletic success in track. Knowing that by enrolling at the institution he would be exposed to an environment that was “different from what he is used to,” David saw BGU as offering such an experience. When I probed further to learn more about what he believed would be different at the institution than what he is used to, David told me that he was prepared to be exposed to mostly White people and their culture. He graduated from a high school with an enrollment of more than 3,500 students and had exposure to “so many different cultures until race couldn’t be something that you focused on there.” He offered the following:

I knew this was a PWI, and you know my brother went here. It was a big decision to come to the South for school. But my brother told me about the opportunities that he had by coming to school here and when he graduated, he got a good job. His experiences really opened my eyes to the school and everything. I knew I would be getting a really good education.

[David, Interviewed on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Regardless of the native geographic regions of the participants in this study, all of those who participated in the study expressed a belief that the environment of BGU is one that is racialized (Woods, 2007; Taylor, 2009) and has a historicity plagued by deeply-rooted issues of unjust racial practices towards people of color. Additionally, they all anticipated facing some form of discrimination during their time of study at the institution. Yet, such anticipation about the mistreatment of students of color at BGU is truncated by their belief for potential success and career opportunities by attending the institution. The participants seem to believe that in order to succeed at BGU and achieve

their desired career outcomes, they needed to access White culture. For them to do so, they would have to espouse a jovial optimism and a strong determination to succeed in spaces that would be unfair and unequal; yet embrace Whiteness as the norm.

### **Life at Be Great University: White Faculty and Student Interactions**

I'm not saying that I hate all white people; I just don't trust most of them.  
[Keith, Interviewed on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Anytime I fell behind... they (White faculty) always worked with me.  
[Brandon, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Much literature exists that examines how the social interactions with the dominant White culture at PWIs lead to the creation of racialized environments that (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2007) can negatively affect the experiences of Black students and other minorities (Esposito, 2011). Additionally, such environments hinder their ability to successfully acclimate to the institution. As one might anticipate, being a collegiate athlete on the Division-I level can be both time consuming and overwhelming, regardless of the institution. However, such demands intensify when coupled with direct and covert racial microaggressions (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000) faced by students of color at a PWI like BGU. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yossa refer to microaggressions as "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously,"(p. 60). Furthermore, microaggressions only further complicate their ability to be successful at BGU. They will share examples of microaggressions that challenge their racial and academic identities.

At times, such microaggressions cause them to question their belonging within the spaces of BGU. As they interact with White faculty and students, they begin to describe the difficulty of being taken seriously as a scholar. Their aforementioned attitudes of optimism and hope are now confronted with doubts about their aptitude levels and ability to succeed within their majors and classes. This section will center on the participants' interactions with White faculty and peers within the academic setting of BGU and the direct and covert microaggressions they face as they pursue an education at a PWI.

When pressed about his experiences of being a student and athlete at a PWI like Be Great University. Keith described it as a "blessing and a curse and depending on the day, I can't tell the two apart," he said. As an athlete at BGU, Keith believes that people only want to get to know him because he plays a sport. He feels this to be true when interacting with the dominant White culture at BGU because "the only reason most of them (White people) speak to me anyway is because I am an athlete; that's it," he said. He feels as if his White professors do not take him seriously because he is "an athlete, a Black man, and I want to go into the medical field." As such, Keith always makes an extra effort to ensure all of his professors know him by name and he does that by faithfully attending their office hours. He shared:

I won't let them (White people) ever see me break. I will even try to study with someone if I need to. Like, most people already think I don't know anything because I am an athlete. Like I'm looking for someone to do my work for me or something; nah, I work for my grades. People don't know that we go

through...we are like other students and on top of that, we are athletes. We don't have it easy.

[Keith, Interviewed on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

I asked him to explain what he meant when he said they "go through" like other students of color at BGU. Keith pointed to the financial constraints of being in college and not having a lot of monetary support from family; some of his teammates have kids and struggle to provide for their families; the personal struggle to adjust at BGU as a student of color; and he mentioned remaining cognizant to how Black people (men) are treated in America. Keith added:

People may think that we don't see it or don't care, but we do. I started updating my social media with stories about Black men being killed by the police. When we tweet about happenings in the world or even politics or express our opinions, we've had fans respond and say just focus on playing—we have opinions. This (sports) ain't our life.

In order to be successful at BGU as a Black student, Keith said that one could not "wait for them (White faculty) to tell you what you need to do to succeed; you better find out for yourself." When I asked Keith about the factors that motivate him to study and remain enrolled at a PWI such as Be Great University, he said that having a strong inner circle of family, connection to his faith, proving "them (White people) wrong" about him helps him to endure the obstacles he faces as a student of color and athlete at BGU. During the interview, Keith said that although he "doesn't hate all White people, I just don't trust most of them and know they have some type of agenda; especially with me being an athlete." He also believes that if he did not participate in collegiate sports

at BGU, most of his White peers would not engage him in conversation. As such, he feels that it works best for him to limit his conversations with his White peers. He tries not to let his limited interactions with his White peers affect the way that he engages with White faculty and staff at BGU. Keith mentioned:

I work for mine (good grades), and maybe that's why they (faculty) take me seriously. I go to tutoring, study hall and don't mind asking them (faculty) for help when I need it. My academic advisor is good, and she encourages me to do my best. But, there are some over there in athletics and my major that don't really care for us (Black students). They do it because it's their jobs.

With much national attention and recognition for its athletic accomplishments, being an athlete at an institution like BGU has its benefits. Athletes are thrust into the spotlight and become easily recognizable at BGU amongst their professors and peers. George made mention of how he knows in years past some "teachers went out of their way," to ensure some of his teammates remained eligible to play; especially the well-known ones. George shared:

At the end of the day all that matters is they were out there playing for BGU. Didn't matter what it took to get them out there to play. I've never had problems with my teachers. They always helped me stay on top of things. If I needed extra help, they would help and I would work. Unlike some of my teammates, I did not want them to think I wanted something special from them because I was an athlete.

Brandon and David shared stories similar to George as they described their interactions with White faculty members in their respective academic disciplines. Both shared positive and supportive encounters with White faculty who challenged them to succeed academically. David discussed occurrences where his faculty always made sure he

could, "make-up his assignments and get help," whenever he needed it. Such offerings were greatly appreciated since his practice, playing, and travel schedule were always "crazy." Additionally, Brandon said that White faculty and instructors in his major always made sure that he knew what was missed or covered during the classes that he would have to miss because of the demands of his sport. He mentioned:

Anytime I fell behind or didn't do as good as I could on an assignment or something or missed one because I didn't prepare they (White faculty) always made sure I could make-up the work. They worked with me. I've hurt myself at times because I didn't work as hard as I should have. When I know I have an away game but I don't prepare for the project or test like I should have beforehand. I've placed some of the adversity on myself.

[Brandon, Interviewed on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Brandon also noted that since he has the "athlete-tag" attached to him, he doesn't want his professors to think that he does not intend to work. In fact, he shared they are "just as hard" on him as they are other students in class.

While most of the participants characterized their interactions with White faculty at BGU as supportive, Michael did not have the same experiences within his major. In fact, he felt as if White faculty within his major often disconfirmed his academic ability and provided the following depiction:

When I made the decision to go to graduate school, you think these White professors I knew took me seriously? I knew they did not take me seriously when I was an athlete, but that was behind me. I wanted to do more than that (sports). I felt they (White faculty) weren't taking me seriously as a student of color. As a Black man; but it's all good.

[Michael, Interviewed on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Additionally, Michael also had difficulty interacting with his fellow White peers in the classroom. He recalls one specific example of being the only person of color in a group project. Michael recalled the following:

This white girl would always say that something is so ghetto or so ratchet and look at me like I'm going to agree with what she said. In my mind, I would wonder—why is she saying that? Does she even know where that comes from? Or how it's disrespectful if you ain't ever seen a ghetto? I got family in real ghettos; like us, they trying to survive, eat, and live.

I probed further and asked Michael why he did not say anything to his group member about her 'ghetto' or 'ratchet' comments; which I shared seemed to be examples of subtle microaggressions being used in a form of discrimination against Blacks and other minorities who live within the spaces of the ghetto. He shrugged it off to say that he did not want to risk causing tension in the group because he wanted to "earn a good grade" on the project. Additionally, Michael added:

You know, I did not feel like educating or entertaing an ignorant comment from a White girl who does not know or care about the ghetto; it's like trying to educate them about Kim Kardashian wearing cornrows and then people saying it's a new trend or style; Black girls been wearing braids since slavery.

Because of these types of social interactions at BGU, I asked Michael how these experiences made him feel as both a person and Black male. In a reassuring tone, he told me that such lived experiences are preparing him for life once he leaves BGU because as a professional, he must always "work harder and better than the average White person at my job." Despite the negative experiences at the institution, Michael

also added that he would still choose to enroll at the school knowing the adversity he would face interacting with the dominant White culture.

With aspirations to one day enter graduate school and become a licensed psychologist, David expressed that a motivating factor for him to succeed lies within his fear of failure. Since his sister is a traveling nurse and brother is an account executive with a large technology company, David says that “learning to ignore how White people view you and pay attention to how you view yourself” is a philosophy that he has learned to live by since enrolling at BGU. He finds his faculty and instructors to always be supportive and open whenever he seeks assistance; however, he does not share the same sentiments regarding his interactions with his White peers in the classroom. During one of his biology labs, he said it was interesting to watch how the White students assigned to his table disregarded his input and knowledge when it came to solving a problem. He mentioned how they “looked over me and talked amongst themselves; like I didn’t know what I was doing or even had anything to say.” As with the other participants, I probed and asked David why he chose to stay silent and failed to say anything when they overlooked him during the assignment.

He interjected that he began to solve the problem on his own and once the rest of the group members saw that he knew what he was doing, they made sure to include him and ask for his feedback on the remainder of their group assignments that semester. David said, “It’s like I had to prove myself; I did not want to talk or ask them

to include me; I just had to show them that I belong here and know what I am doing."

He goes on to say that having to prove himself to his White peers was not surprising or upsetting because he "assumed they had their own beliefs about me as Black male, and they knew I was an athlete." The experiences David mentioned regarding his interactions with his White peers are not limited to the classroom, and he will later depict his engagement with his White peers at social events.

Although Michael said earlier that he did not receive the needed help from White faculty in his major when he expressed an interest in graduate school, he did find guidance and direction about the graduate school process from a White faculty member in another discipline. Michael had previously taken a class from the professor and found common ground with him because of Michael's athletic involvement.

He liked sports and mainly college sports. We would talk about the season and the team. That helped cause with our schedule and travel. I needed that extra day to make-up work. I missed due date and classes because I was tired. When I decided to go to graduate school and needed help, and I went to him. He was there and offered advice.

[Michael, Focus Group July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

His bond with his professor grew as Michael found himself conversing with his professor about more than sports. Their conversations eventually progressed to them discussing Michael's future career goals, and the professor offered advice on how Michael could achieve his goals. The research participants all shared some uneasiness about trying to build authentic relationships with the dominant White culture at BGU. Many times, they seemed to live in a state of anxiety. They were anxious as to how

White faculty and students would treat them as students of color and athletes within the classroom. Additionally, the research participants were anxious to see if they would be perceived as being knowledgeable and capable of doing the required coursework. In short, the research participants' interactions with White faculty and staff at BGU within the academic setting seemed to be overall positive; however, their interactions with their fellow White peers were more varied. The arduous task they faced to overcome negative perceptions from the dominant White culture at BGU occurred beyond the academic buildings and existed within their everyday social interactions with White students.

### **Negotiating Spaces at BGU: Social Interactions with White Students**

When people act like that, I know they are fans of the sport and school...not me.  
[Brandon, Focus Group, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Shit, I used being an athlete to my advantage when I could; I ain't even going to lie.

[David, Focus Group, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

As the research participants move in and out of different spaces at BGU, they soon realize they have do not have complete control over how their identities are constructed at BGU. Their identities are often ascribed by the dominant White culture; including White peers. Within any given space at BGU, value is either added or diminished about the research participants' identities. Although they are often dehumanized as students of color, they are often exalted by their White peers as athletes representing BGU in sports. Their identities being in a state of flux and spatially

based is captured in the participants' narratives within this section. Although he knew that attending the PWI would afford him academic and career success post-graduation, his experiences of living in a predominantly Black neighborhood and attending majority Black public schools did not adequately prepare George for his daily interactions with White students. He came with hopes of the institution being a type of "melting pot" that would open him up to "people different from me, and I would see in the real-world," he said. Unfortunately, George quickly learned that socializing with his White peers at BGU would be onerous. With a bit of a chuckle, he shared the following stories regarding his experiences interacting with his White peers:

I've been on the bus before and there's only one seat open, and it's between two white girls. When I sat down (between them) you know one of them got up and stood up for the entire bus ride, and I got off before her. I mean if she didn't want to sit by a Black boy, there's nothing I could do about that. She didn't want to be beside me, and that's cool. And I've been out walking late at night with a group of my friends and we had White boys ride by and yell out the n-word to us. What were we supposed to do? They were riding in a car and we were walking. And, we've (he and his friends) been out to the bar on college night and been the only Black people in there; they (White peers) would look at us funny. Of course you feel uncomfortable; you can feel the tension in the room like we don't belong.

[George, Interviewed on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016]

Such negative social interactions with his fellow White peers quickly changed George's attitude toward his ability and willingness to view BGU as the "melting pot" he hoped to experience. Instead, he describes BGU as a place that is designed for "White folks to succeed" and continued with:

Actions speak louder than words and 85% of communication is nonverbal and if they (White peers) don't want to be around you or interact with you then they will find ways not to do it. Not saying that I'm racist or prejudice towards anybody; I just feel more comfortable being around people of the same color here who look like me.

When I further pressed George to describe his relationship with his fellow Black peers at BGU, he described those interactions as "great, even if I don't get along with all Black people here because we are all still trying to get an education at a PWI that really doesn't want us here and we kinda know each other's struggle." Although he labors with his social interactions with his fellow White peers and prefers to limit his interactions with them, he actually feels more at ease interacting with White faculty instead of his White peers. As an undergraduate student, George feels that his faculty "never disregard him as a human being" when in the classroom.

George discussing his difficulty socializing with his White peers at BGU is similar to those expressed by Michael. Now enrolled at the institution as a graduate student, Michael shared during the interview that he could not help but notice the difference between how White students adjust to college-life at BGU versus that of Black students. In his role as an on-campus student advisor at the institution, Michael recounted to me a time when Black students were reprimanded for a student disciplinary issue within his area that he believed to be "very harsh and unnecessary" by his direct supervisor. However when two White students committed the same violation, he said they received nothing more than, "a slap on the wrist and verbal

warning they should not commit the violation again" by the same supervisor. Michael said observing and knowing about these types of negative experiences Black students are subjugated to at BGU produces a personal attitude that causes him not to "interact with them (White people)" until he feels as if it is necessary. Additionally, Michael said that he often questions the intentions, values, and perceptions of his White peers.

When speaking of his own interactions with his fellow White peers at BGU, Brandon recognizes that, "it can be hard to know if they (White peers) want to know you for you or because they think you play some sport," he said. Brandon opens up and tells the story of his Black male friends' adversity of interacting with his fellow White students at BGU. Brandon expressed the following:

Before coming here, I knew about the school's history and how Blacks have been treated here. My buddy here who is Black and doesn't play sports always told me how hard it is (to be Black at BGU) because he doesn't have that student-athlete tag tied to his name like me. He tries hard to go out and meet people. He goes out to different events and shakes hand wanting people to know him. I always respected him for that because he goes out and does it in slacks; always dressed nicely. People recognize me as an athlete, but he has to go about doing it (meeting people) dressed up as a young professional.

When asked if his friend dresses in the same manner when interacting with his Black peers or attending predominantly Black functions and events at BGU, Brandon replied that, "now he does, but he used to just dress like that when he was going to something where there would be mostly White people." Furthermore, Brandon believes that such actions by his friend are done so that he can present himself as an "alright Black guy." Brandon then talks about a time that regardless of his friends' attire or ability to present

himself as a young professional, he was still not accepted by his White peers. His friend tried to attend an all-White fraternity party where a rap artist was set to perform, but he could not get in. I suggested to Brandon that maybe he could not get in due to his professional dress attire or not having the necessary wristband to enter the party.

However, Brandon shared that when his friend returned to the party with him, dressed in the same professional attire and without a wristband; they both entered the party. "I know it's cause of my athlete-tag; that's why we both got in," Brandon shared. Like other participants in the study, I noticed Brandon mentioned that Black students assumed that because they are athletes; they do not experience discrimination or adversity because of their race at BGU. "Yeah, I know racism is here; you don't have to play sports to know that, but I just can't focus on it." I asked Brandon to explain to me the athlete-tag and its benefits, and he provided the following:

Many times, people don't even ask if I am an athlete here. I'm tall, big, and Black. They assume that I am one (athlete). When they do that (assume), I know how they will treat me, and they want to get to know the athlete, not the person. That's cool. I know how to treat them and what to expect from them.

When I asked Brandon how it makes him feel when is recognized as an athlete first, he added that he wants people to "see me and get to know me cause' I am more than that (athlete)," he said. "When people act like that, I know they are fans of the sport and the school; that's what they are cheering for; not me." Brandon added that because he is an athlete, he is "guarded and unsure" of people's intentions when he meets them. When I

asked Brandon if he is guarded in his meeting with all of his peers at BGU or just certain individuals, and he added:

There is definitely a difference between how the Black female students treat you and the White female students. The Black female students talk/act like we aren't anybody famous—just another student/person who is an athlete. It's like, hey how you doing; where yo' friend at; or I haven't seen you in awhile. They don't really mention sports even if they recognize me. They don't wanna talk about sports. It's like they respect me from that standpoint (as a person).

The white girls run up to you and treat you special/give me attention because you are an athlete. 'Oh hey, you're that athlete' or what do you play or you look like an athlete or they already know who I am. All they mention is sports; like they go crazy for you. It's wild. When they know you wear a number, it's a new level with how they treat you. I always ask a girl (White girl) if she is with me because she knows I'm athlete; she says it doesn't matter to her, but I know it does.

[Brandon, Focus Group, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

George also shared there are differences in how he is treated as an athlete at BGU in contrast to being a student of color at the institution. Beforehand, he spoke of his negative interactions with his White peers on the bus and when visiting a local bar with friends. However, he describes his interactions with his White peers as more pleasant and favorable once they learned of his involvement in sports at BGU. He talked about the difference in treatment below:

When they (White females) found out I played, they talked to me, wanted to have sex, be around me. But if they didn't know that or didn't see me with my teammates, they wouldn't speak. I know it's fake. I guess I liked the attention. Even some of the Black girls who wouldn't talk to me before wanted to talk to me because they knew I was an athlete.

[George, Interviewed on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016]

When I asked about their interactions with White male students at BGU, both Brandon and George implied they had “White dudes I’m cool with,” but most of their communication with White males was limited to surface-level discussions about their sport and season during class. They also spoke of engaging in casual conversation with their White teammates.

When I sought to learn from Michael of his interactions with his White peers as an athlete at BGU, he opted not to share. He responded that it was something he didn’t want to discuss or “have to speak on” during the interview. I found David and Keith to be more open and forthcoming about their experiences with their White peers as athletes at BGU. Keith took the opportunity to admit that he only takes the time to develop a possible friendship or conversation with his White peers if he believes it to be “beneficial to my future career or academic goals.” The few relationships that he has with his White peers developed as a result of being in a study group for class, with his teammates, or involvement in on-campus church ministries. On the other hand, David admits to drawing upon his label as an athlete to gain acceptance from his White peers:

As an athlete, you don’t have to prove yourself around them (White peers) it’s like they know you are ok. Me and my friends have been let into parties because I play. They saw me and even if they didn’t know the sport I played, they let me in. Shit, I used being an athlete to my advantage when I could. I ain’t even going to lie.

David also added that when he attended predominantly White social events, he “didn’t even need a wristband, know anybody, or pay anything” as they allowed him in

because he was an athlete. He believes that such incentives are the reason why many athletes can be found wearing their athletic gear on a regular basis. According to David, such identifiers made it easier to distinguish between the Black males who are athletes and the “regular Black dudes” who are not athletes at BGU.

Like Brandon, David and Keith also described their interactions as athletes with their fellow Black peers at BGU as “good” and “ok.” Keith again referenced how they all share similar challenges and difficulties as students of color at BGU; regardless if someone is an athlete. David captured his experiences with Black peers as an athlete this way:

When I go to a predominantly Black party, everything is green. I have to pay just like the other Black dudes who are there. I know to get there early because their party will probably get shut down unlike the white frat parties I go to. I know to have \$5-\$10 ready cause you’re going to pay. Athlete or not. They (Black peers) know I play, but they don’t treat me any differently.

David mentioned that “Black girls don’t treat me any differently because I play, and sometimes they are harder on me thinking I am going to act funny because I am an athlete.” At the predominantly Black events, David believes that it is easier to feel accepted as a person compared to attending a predominantly White event as an athlete. All of those interviewed shared a common belief that when interacting with their White peers, they do so apprehensively until they learn if they want to know the athlete or the person.

Through their narratives, the research participants described living in a state of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903; 2003) and negotiating multiple identities within the space of BGU. As the research participants moved within the different spaces at BGU and interacted with the dominant White culture, meaning about their identities shifted. As they moved into the spaces of academia, they felt like empowered scholars who were capable of doing the required work. Yet within the same space, they described being made to feel like nescient individuals by their White peers who believed the research participants were only enrolled because of their athletic skills, not academic talents. Within the social spaces, they felt at ease around their Black peers; however, their White peers validated their existence and sense of belonging only if it pertained to sports and their contributions to BGU. In the next section, we learn that as they moved within the athletic spaces, the research participants believed they were valued only for what their bodies produced athletically and economically within the space of sports.

### **The Space of Sports at BGU: Mapping Athletic Space**

If it does not pertain to sports, we (White teammates) go our separate ways and live in different worlds.

[George, Interviewed on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016]

It's a brotherhood and those (White teammates) are my brothers out there; who we go to battle with.

[Keith, Focus Group July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

The difficulty of understanding their realities within different spaces at BGU is not limited to their academic or social environments. In fact, some of those interviewed offered much insight into the undertaking of comprehending their identities and interactions with the dominant White culture in a seemingly comfortable space for them: sports. The research participants share a common goal with their White teammates, coaches and athletic staff: to develop and maintain a legacy of winning each time they compete. Yet within the space of sports at BGU, the research participants realize that race also matters. All of them spoke to the amount of time spent conditioning and practicing for their sport. Separate from actual game days, each shared they would spend anywhere from 10-25 hours a week preparing for the next game (see tables below). Furthermore, those who have leadership roles or serve as starters for their sport would easily spend more time at their sport's athletic facility. They cited unexpected required events such coaches' meetings, team meetings, position meetings, and media interviews as obligations that are common during the season and off-season. By spending this much time in their athletic settings, they are constantly surrounded by their teammates, coaches, and athletic staff.

*Table 1* Highlights the research participants' routine daily schedule. It is important to note their schedule can vary depending on time of the year and other athletic obligations.

| Sport                     | Time          | Activity                                     |
|---------------------------|---------------|--|
| Track<br><i>(Michael)</i> | 6:00am-7:30am | Morning workouts                             |
|                           | 7:30am-8:00am | Breakfast at dining hall<br>(if they choose) |
|                           | 8:00am-1:50pm | Classes                                      |
|                           | 2:30pm-4:00pm | Practice                                     |
|                           | 5:00pm-6:15pm | Study Hall                                   |
|                           | 6:30pm-7:30pm | Dinner at dining hall<br>(if they choose)    |

| Sport                        | Time          | Activity                                     |
|------------------------------|---------------|--|
| Basketball<br><i>(David)</i> | 6:00am-7:30am | Morning conditioning                         |
|                              | 7:30am-8:00am | Breakfast at dining hall<br>(if they choose) |
|                              | 8:00am-1:50pm | Classes                                      |
|                              | 2:00pm-3:30pm | Study Hall                                   |
|                              | 3:30pm-4:15   | Coaches meeting                              |
|                              | 4:30pm-6:15pm | Practice                                     |
|                              | 6:30pm-7:30pm | Dinner at dining hall<br>(if they choose)    |

| <b>Sport</b>                                    | <b>Time</b>   | <b>Activity</b>                              |
|---|---------------|--|
| Football<br><i>(Keith, Brandon, and George)</i> | 6:00am-7:30am | Morning workouts                             |
|   | 7:30am-8:00am | Breakfast at dining hall<br>(if they choose) |
|   | 8:00am-1:50pm | Classes                                      |
|   | 2:00pm-3:15pm | Team and position meetings                   |
|   | 3:30pm-6:15   | Practice                                     |
|   | 6:30pm-7:15pm | Dinner at dining hall<br>(if they choose)    |
|   | 7:30pm-8:45pm | Study Hall                                   |

**Table 1** captures the time spent within different spaces at BGU. During the course of their season, the participants mentioned they often spend more time within space of sport. Most athletes' schedules require them to be on-campus at BGU during the fall, spring, and summer months.

As a college athlete at BGU, players quickly come to the realization that "there is no time off," David said. The offseason serves as a time to condition and prepare for the upcoming season. Even as a walk-on, the hours spent dedicated to one's sport can mirror the hours given by those on scholarship. For walk-on players, David voiced there is an expectation for them to work harder than scholarship players with hope to one day play in an actual game. He revealed:

You don't think the players are the ones you see playing do you? There are walk-on players who work harder, have better grades, and are overall better players than those you see out on game day. I know that as a walk-on, you pretty much have to sit and wait and hope for your moment to get in the game. There's nothing you can really do; keep grinding it out. It's really up to the coaches if you get in or not.

[David, Focus Group, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Learning this, I asked about David about his relationship with his coaches, and he characterized it as “foul.” He believes his coaches have constantly “looked over him” and denied him the opportunity to play in an actual game. His tireless work ethic, commitment, and good grades are often verbally rewarded with remarks by the coaches such as “good job” or “your time is coming.” Many times, he finds himself wondering if the coaches’ decisions are best for the team or to appease those on scholarships.

I asked David if he has met with his position coach or head coach to discuss possible playing time. He assured me that he has already done so “many times” and is only told that he just needs to keep working hard because his time is coming. Some of his teammates have even noticed the amount of time and work David puts into the sport. He recalled how they often pull him to the side and share that “it’s not right how they (coaches) are doing you; you should be out there playing with us.” Even with their words of encouragement, David remains doubtful about his chances of playing knowing the decision still rests with the coaches. At some point, David is sure that he will grow tired of waiting and will have to make a decision to walk away from a sport that he has played since he was a child.

George’s experiences as a walk-on player in his sport have also been unstable. More than once, he has found himself in arguments with his former position coach or teammates mainly due to his frustrations with his lack of game-day playing time. Some arguments also arise when he feels as if they attack his character. George said:

Yeah I may not be on scholarship, but you ain't going to talk to me any kind of way. Man to man. I go through the same shit they do drills, practice, sweat, blood, tears. It's all the same as them (scholarship players). Some of them shouldn't be on scholarship either. They don't work for it. I love the sport.

By not working for it, George is referring to how some scholarship players think they will be treated differently or in a special manner because many were considered elite athletes during their recruitment process. He knows there is only so much that his position coach can do in order to make sure that he has playing time during games because the ultimate decision lies with the head coach.

Since he spends so much time around his sport, one could assume that George has formed bonds or friendships with his teammates. Away from the sport, he regularly goes out to different social events with his Black teammates or hanging with them during their leisure time. With them, George said he has a sense of "belonging" and feels at ease around them. With his White teammates, he said that "if it does not pertain to sports, we (White teammates) go our separate ways and live in different worlds," he said. George goes on to say that he doesn't believe they really want to hang out with him outside of the sport, and he really doesn't want to hang out with them either.

Holding positions of leadership in their respective sports, Michael and Brandon described the relationship with their teammates, both Black and White, as a type of brotherhood. In this brotherhood, there are arguments and competitiveness amongst them; however, they all share a common goal: to win.

We all go out there and play the game to win. You put in all this time to be the best and to succeed at your sport. It's study hall, workouts, practice, classes and then you go to sleep and get up and do it all over again the next day. You go through things to win. That's why we all here.

[Brandon, Focus Group, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

I asked Brandon if he has ever given the required time and dedication to his sport but those efforts are overlooked to which he responded "all the time." Like David, he also finds himself questioning the decision-making of his coaches. Brandon feels as if their decisions have often left him not being utilized when he knows that if "given the opportunity, I will make the play." Moreover, this is also why Brandon decides to focus on "what he can control" such as his attitude and time spent towards his sport. He told me that he always strives to give his best when he plays because he does it for his family, teammates, and because he loves the game.

Now entering his third-year of eligibility as a student-athlete at BGU, Keith comes off as very thoughtful as he reflects upon his playing days now compared to when he first enrolled at the institution. Though he is appreciative of the opportunity to play a sport he loves at a Division-I school, he admits that many times he is left frustrated, discouraged, and sometimes questioning his athletic capabilities. After being redshirted his first year at BGU, he had to forego a season of eligibility because of an injury. Keith revealed that players cannot allow themselves to get consumed by their emotions or take things personally when interacting with their teammates or coaches. I

questioned Keith about how his experiences as a student- athlete at BGU have shaped his interactions with his White coaches, and he provided the following:

You gotta have a tough skin playing here. They (coaches) ain't right. And a lot of times you don't get the why (they do something) even if you ask. I stay focused on the fact that it's a sport and is an extension of who I am. But it (sports) doesn't' make me and it's not who I am; especially here. I'm thankful for my opportunity to play, but my eyes are open to who people truly are.

[Keith, Focus Group, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

He also spoke at length about how he regularly questions the character of his coaches.

At times, he has caught his position coach talking about him to other players; some coaches providing encouragement to their “favorite” players while overlooking him and other Black players in the same position; and he feels as if the coaches purposely overlook him for opportunities to play and showcase his talent. “I don’t understand it for real,” he said. “They are the ones who recruited us here to play and now you don’t want to give me shot and be a dirty person?” These negative interactions with coaches have made Keith contemplate whether to remain at BGU or transfer to another institution to finish his collegiate career in sports.

Keith is very guarded with his teammates and shares some of the same reservations as George. He declares that he does not really like being around either his Black teammates or his White teammates but if he had to choose, he would prefer to be around his Black teammates. It is with them that he is most comfortable and can “relate to their struggle.” Furthermore, Keith feels that “most of my White teammates do not want to be around us (Black teammates) for real and only do it because they have to.” It

is interesting to hear that although he possesses a level of distrust for his White teammates and is not very outgoing with his Black teammates, he still refers to all of them as his brothers.

Keith has adopted a personal mantra that although he may not like all of his teammates, they are the ones whom he “goes to battle with.” Furthermore, he has a level of respect for them because he knows the physical and mental regime they go through in order to be a student-athlete at BGU. From the stories shared of interacting with their White teammates and coaches, it seems as if the research participants interact with them in a manner similar to other White peers at BGU; restrained. However, the interactions with their White teammates and coaches within the space of sports seem to be more tolerable by the participants. Although they still feel as if they are racialized individuals within the space, the research participants still consider their White teammates “brothers” and can maintain a level of respect towards them and their coaches. Moreover, such regard for their White teammates exists because the laborious demands of conditioning, practicing, and playing sports at BGU respects no color.

### **BGU: The Business of Sports**

Playing sports at BGU is a type of business; it's really like a dictatorship.  
[Brandon, Focus Group, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

The players are the workers who make the coaches and school look good.  
[George, Interviewed on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016]

As athletes at BGU, the research participants know they are important playmakers to the success of BGU's athletic empire. In fact, the space of sports at the institution is built on their athletic talents and skills. Not only must they negotiate identities as students of color and athletes within the racialized spaces of BGU, they also have to recognize an identity of being seen as an employee laboring for the institution's athletic prominence with no pay. As referenced earlier in this research study, sports have proven to be a lucrative investment for colleges and universities across the country. During my composite of research when looking at Southern PWIs, many institutions located in the southern region generate revenue of more than \$110 million dollars (Gaines, 2016) annually from its athletic programs. This includes BGU. With this in mind, one can begin to view collegiate sports and athletic programs as a type of business. Moreover, this idea is voiced and shared among many of the participants in the study. The head coaches serve as the presidents or chief executive officers for the sports, and the position coaches are the managers of the talent; the players.

When listening to the personal narratives of those in the study, some described a hierarchy within their sport that is based on perceived values and expectations of the players. Those who are on scholarships are awarded more value by the coaches at the disadvantage of those who are walk-on players. However when the scholarship and non-scholarship players begin to share their interpretations of their coaches' decision-making capabilities and playing time, they all share the common emotion of frustration.

David captured their beliefs in the following manner:

Nobody comes here to sit or just get athletic gear. Why do you think guys transfer from all sports? I know it's (sports) a business. The coaches aren't trying to get fired and they gotta make their workers (scholarship players) happy. I get that. But we are the ones (walk-on players) going against those players to make them great. And we do outwork them; we just aren't rewarded with playing time.

The belief that collegiate athletics at BGU operates as a type of business helps to clarify George's aforementioned frustrations with scholarship players and his coaches. Because of the success of sports at BGU and the capitalist gains the athletic skills and bodies of the research participants provide to the institution, George says that "the players are the workers who make the coaches and school look good." Within this business of sports, George also concludes that there is exploitation of their talents and contributions by the coaches because those who are the greatest contributors are often overlooked.

A business-type approach to sports is the reason why Keith learned not to get emotional or develop a deep connection with many of his coaches or athletic staff. He believes that like most businesses, sports at BGU are not run fairly and mentioned:

At the end of the day, those coaches are going to do what's best for them; not the players. They are building their legacy and making themselves look good. You (players) better learn how to look out for yourself because they sure won't do it. Use them like they use us; get your education. Don't depend on them to do anything for you.

[Keith, Focus Group, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016]

Brandon has also endured his own broken promises and neglect from his coaches. As his playing days for BGU will soon come to an end because of graduation, I asked him

to capture his attitude towards the culture of sports at the institution: "it's a dictatorship," he said. For him, being a student athlete at the institution is to operate within a system where players have very little, if any, influence on how the program is ran. Their job is to perform when called upon and win games. Although sports at BGU operate as a type of business where the athletes' worth is based upon the subjective perceptions of their coaches, many talented athletes still choose to sign with hopes to one day play for the institution. Unfortunately, it is not until later in their athletic tenure they come to the realization that the corporate culture of sports at BGU is a system not befitting to them or their athletic talents.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented the narratives of the research participants and their lived experiences of attending a PWI such as Be Great University. Such exploration of their lives centered on their interactions with the dominant White culture within the academic, social, and athletic spaces. From these stories, we learned of their resiliency and determination to stay enrolled at BGU is influenced by their family and faith. The research participants are trying to find a sense of self and understand their realities within the different spaces of the institution. This also requires them to adhere to or disregard microaggressions they encounter from the dominant White culture. It is through their narratives insight is provided into how they believe Whiteness is a valued property at BGU. Many times, they expressed noticeable differences in how they were

perceived and treated by the dominant White culture as students of color and as athletes.

As students of color, they can identify how they are treated as targets of oppression by White culture. Many times, they are treated as if they do not belong at the institution, in the classroom, or at social gatherings. However as student athletes, they possess agency and are valued by White culture. It is not surprising the research participants are in a state of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903) and possess conflicting views of their identities and worth as students, students of color, and athletes within different spaces at BGU. With such confusion about their identities and living as targets of oppression by the White culture at BGU, it is interesting to learn of the participants' belief they need to experience, exist, and act as complacent individuals who need Whiteness in order to succeed. In the next chapter, I will revisit my research questions and offer insight into how the aforementioned interactions with the dominant White culture at BGU leaves them in a complicated state of double consciousness (DuBois 1903; 2003) as they try to understand their identities. Additionally, I will discuss how the participants perpetuate Whiteness as a valued property that is needed in order for them to be successful at BGU.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research study was to examine how Black male student athletes who attend Be Great University negotiate their identities within the academic, social and athletic spaces at the institution. I argue that Black male student athletes operate within racialized (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007) spaces academically, socially, and athletically. Because of these racialized spaces, the research participants are constantly negotiating, justifying and challenging the perceived identities constructed about them at BGU. At times, those in the study describe occurrences where they are viewed as aberrant individuals by the dominant White culture at BGU. Although they often feel unwelcomed as Black male students, they have more amiable experiences of interacting with the dominant White culture as athletes.

Through the process of conducting interpersonal hour-long interviews with Black male student athletes and a focus group with four of the research participants, I learned of their daily struggles and resistances at BGU as Black male students of color and as Black male student athletes. From the interview questions posed and their shared narratives, themes from the data centered on the following: (a) how the research participants engaged White faculty, staff, and peers within the academic setting; (b)

how the research participants interacted with their White peers within social spaces in relation to how they connect with their Black peers at the same-type events; (c) their everyday involvement with their White teammates, coaching staff and Black teammates within the space of sports; and (d) the research participants viewed sports at BGU as a type of business. In this chapter, I will show how the data discussed in the previous chapter answers the key questions in the study. The three research questions were as follows: (a) what are the experiences of Black male athletes within the different spaces they occupy at the PWI; (b) how the experiences in the different spaces shape their identities; (c) the implications of these spatialized subjectivities on their academic and athletic success at the PWI. Then drawing on the conceptual frameworks of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Delgado, 1995) and Lefebvre's (1991) triad of space, I will discuss how the research participants' experiences at BGU as student athletes of color will align with the tenets of both frameworks.

### **Research Questions**

*What are the experiences of Black male athletes within the different spaces they occupy at the PWI?*

At the beginning of the study, the research participants shared their initial perceptions about enrolling at BGU. They are full of optimism and hope as they look forward to attending the PWI and share their personal narratives with much pride. The research participants are so enamored with the institution and its offerings, and they even describe the physical beauty of the campus. Many of them are also first-

generation college students who possess a strong desire to succeed at the institution, and they are very optimistic about their future success academically and athletically. Once they move past the outward attractiveness of BGU and their own subjective thoughts about personal success at the institution, their euphoria is short-lived once they begin to interact with the dominant White culture within different spaces at the institution. As students of color, they are learning to contend with feelings of being unwelcomed within the classroom by White peers at BGU. As both students of color and athletes, they feel as if their White peers do not perceive them as being academically sound or gifted. As such, there is a self-ascribed attitude of the participants that is mentioned by Keith to “prove them wrong” of their perceptions about their inept academic abilities.

It is through their personal narratives we learn that the experiences of the research participants are varied and complex depending upon the spaces they occupy at BGU. Additionally, the plurality of their experiences is contingent upon who they interact with. As they interact with their White peers in different social spaces at BGU, the feelings of being an outsider remain. They talked about how White students did not want to acknowledge their presence or engage them in conversation. In fact, many White students purposefully made social spaces contentious for the research participants to enter. Yet when they access the same social spaces and can be recognized as a student athlete at BGU, the research participants are welcomed and praised by their

White peers. As noted by Brandon, it is the “athlete-tag” that moves them from a state of otherness to that of being accepted by their White peers. Although they still have the identity of being a student of color at BGU, the label of athlete brings high regards and recognition from their White peers within the social spaces. As mentioned by David, being a Black male and having the status of athlete at BGU allows White students at BGU to perceive they are “different from other Black male students” at the institution. As such, the research participants are ascribed privileges and are accepted by their White peers.

Their identities as students of color and athletes collide within the space of sports. Even as athletes, it is not removed from their minds of how they are treated by the dominant White culture within the academic and social spaces of BGU. Within the space of sports, there exists a strained relationship between the research participants, their White teammates and coaches. They believe their White teammates share the same beliefs as White faculty and students at BGU. Because they feel as if they are treated differently because of their skin color, the research participants mentioned they rarely engage with their White teammates or coaches if it does not pertain to sports. Yet even with such limited interactions with their White teammates and coaches, the participants still believe winning within the business of sports truncates their identity negotiation process and lessens any ill feelings towards the dominant White culture in the space of sports. Regardless of the space or if they are identified as a student, student of color or

athlete, the research participants all agree they feel most comfortable and relaxed when they are amongst other Black peers at BGU.

*How do these experiences in the different spaces shape their subjectivities?*

When discussing their decision-making process to enroll at BGU, it is evident through their narratives that the research participants were very hopeful about their future success. They know receiving a college education is valuable and needed in order to obtain their career goals. Prior to coming to BGU, many of the research participants conducted the necessary research to learn more about the academic majors, took a tour of the campus and had individual meetings with faculty. Such hopefulness is diminished by the belief of BGU being an unwelcoming institution for Blacks. As they moved through the aforementioned spaces of academia, social interactions and sports, the research participants experienced an identity crisis. They learned the dominant White culture saw their identities as being contextually based upon the spaces they occupied. For example when they occupied a social space and were perceived as a Black male or student of color by their White peers, they had feelings of being uncomfortable and an outsider to the space. However if they could be identified as an athlete within a social space, they had a sense of belonging. Many of those interviewed had prior knowledge of the historical racial tensions and practices that occurred at BGU. Because of this, they came to the institution with an attitude of expectancy believing that at some point they would encounter some form of discrimination or oppression by the

dominant White culture. By having an awareness of BGU's historical treatment of Blacks and their own personal experiences with the dominant White faculty and peers, the research participants developed an attitude of distrust and apprehension about the dominant White culture.

Within the academic setting, the research participants mentioned the supportiveness of their White faculty and even as athletes, they did not feel as if their capabilities to adhere to the rigorous academic demands of BGU were overlooked. However, White peers within the academic setting often discredited their academic talents as both students of color and as athletes. At times, they even overlooked the presence of the research participants in group projects and within the classroom. As captured by David, White peers within the academic spaces of BGU assumed they were at the institution to only "play a sport" and had no desire for academic or career success outside the space of sports.

As they moved beyond spaces relevant to academics, the participants' experiences with their White peers at BGU varied. If they frequented predominantly White social events as Black males such as bars, parties or even walked on campus; they often felt uncomfortable. Regardless if it was a glaring stare or their outward attempts to not engage them in dialogue; their White peers created unwelcoming social spaces for the research participants. However, if the research participants could be easily recognized or had on any visible marker, such as clothing, to distinguish themselves as

an athlete at BGU, their White peers became more open and pleasant within the same social settings. Many times, they did not have to pay to enter or wear the usually required wristband at White social gatherings. The participants mentioned their White male peers welcomed conversations and handshakes, and their White female peers welcomed dates and the possibility to engage in a sexual encounter with them. Whenever they attended a predominantly Black social event and regardless if they had on any identifiable athletic gear, the participants shared they feel more comfortable and at ease. Within the academic and social spaces, many of the participants felt devalued by White faculty and students as both students of color and athletes. However when they could be identified as an athlete within the same social spaces, they were treated as if they belonged by their White peers.

Their experiences within the space of sports mirrored those of the social spaces at BGU. Although they saw themselves as Black male students who played sports for BGU, their White teammates, coaches and peers only saw their athletic value. They had an appreciation for the research participants because their athletic capabilities and talents greatly aided in the institution's athletic empire. As such, the dominant White culture based the research participants' worth on their athletic labor and performance of their bodies. However, the research participants wanted to be acknowledged as normal students who were attending BGU to get an education; liked to meet new people; and enjoyed playing sports but were not consumed by them. As referenced by Michael,

sports were merely an “extension” of what the research participants could do. The varying interactions with the dominant White culture within the spaces of academia, social events and sports only added to the difficulty of the research participants negotiating their identities. Since most of the interactions with the dominant White culture were negative, their perceptions of BGU being a racialized institution remained.

*What are the implications of these spatialized subjectivities on their academic and athletic success at PWI?*

Through their narratives, we learned the research participants had subtle and direct microaggressions directed towards them by the dominant White culture at BGU. By having negative experiences within the different spaces of BGU, the research participants are trying to negotiate and understand fragmented identities. Such identities warrant them to understand themselves in terms of the meaning created within the spaces they occupy at a given time. They are trying to understand meaning constructed by the dominant White culture and react accordingly by either accepting or challenging the perceptions about them. These varying perceptions of the research participants create racialized and unwelcoming spaces at BGU. A fragmented identity assumes that as the research participants move in and out of the different spaces at BGU, only certain identities are socially occurring at a given time. For example within the space of academics, White peers only seem to perceive thoughts pertaining to race. They see a person of color, a Black male and student athlete, who is not academically competent. Yet as described earlier in the study, the research participants perceive

themselves as academically ambitious Black male students at BGU who happen to play a sport for the institution.

As they move into the space of sports, the fragmented identities of the research participants continue. They feel as if their White teammates and coaches have perceptions about their identities that are contrary to those of the research participants. Much like the academic spaces, the research participants believe their White teammates and coaches perceive thoughts about them being Black males first; not thoughts that view them as their teammates or brother. The desire to not interact with their White teammates beyond the space of sports and distrust for their coaches speaks to the distrust they have about the dominant White culture at BGU, regardless of the space. Additionally, the research participants mentioned their belief that sports at BGU is a type of business, and they are only valued for their produced labor; which helped build the institution's sports legacy. Much like the interactions with the dominant White culture in the academic and social spaces of BGU, their White teammates and coaches fail to perceive the research participants having talents beyond their athletic skill set. In short, the research participants are not understood in a holistic manner within BGU's different spaces. They are only perceived in ways that are most beneficial to the dominant White culture.

## **Conceptual Frameworks**

The conceptual frameworks for this research design included Lefebvre's (1991) writings on space and meaning creation and Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Delgado, 1995). In Lefebvre's (1991) triad of space, representation of space is where mental representations guide how people behave and act in relation to the spaces they occupy. The physical environment of the space is actually produced because of conceived mental imagery and symbolisms at work. It is important to remember that those who produce such mental imagery and the visible environment are those who possess agency (Leaven, 2003) within the space. Representational space describes the everyday lived experiences of individuals. Furthermore, individuals are trying to fathom how they are supposed to act within a space. Another element to Lefebvre's (1991) theory on space is spatial practices. This idea explores how the everyday routines and practices within a space work to actually sustain a space. By engaging in such practices, individuals are trying to create their realities.

The other conceptual framework drawn upon in this research study is Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Delgado, 1995). Additionally, CRT examines how racism can be found in all forms of oppression and discrimination within America society and is never absent within social structures (Ladson-Billings, 2009) such as education. This theory recognizes that racism is normal within American culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Delgado, 1995) and is a part of the everyday practices. CRT

allows for personal narratives and experiences of individuals to be heard. It is through lived experiences that the voices of an oppressed group can be heard and used to analyze social conditions of their everyday lives. Another tenet of CRT is that racism is deeply embedded within American political systems and cannot be ignored. Exploring the relationship between CRT and space allows inquiry into how the identities for people of color are created, validated, and negotiated through the meaning and spatial practices that occur at BGU.

### **Space, Race and BGU**

According to Peake & Kobayashi (2002), the racialization of spaces accounts for the importance of Whiteness being a valued property (Harris, 1993) and is a way to differentiate racial groups, assign stereotypes upon the groups and create segregated conditions in order to produce and uphold racist ideologies about the groups. In this study, the research participants knew racism infiltrated the spaces of BGU; furthermore, the spatial practices they observed and were subjugated to positioned them into a state of subordination in relation to the dominant White culture. They recognized that racism was endemic to BGU's identity, even if it was displayed by the dominant White culture as a subtle microaggression. The racist ideologies and microaggression encountered by the research participants reflect Delaney's (2002) argument that race does not exist separately from space. In fact, Vélez & Solorzano (2017) argue that race should be viewed as an extension of space.

For example before coming to BGU, Michael and Brandon were reminded by their parents and friends that Blacks were purposefully not allowed to attend the institution in the past. As such, Michael and Brandon mentioned how they were constantly advised to “be careful,” “treat everyone with respect” and “stay out of trouble” while attending the institution because they did not need to draw any attention to themselves. Additionally, George perceived the actions of the White student who chose to stand and not sit next to him on the bus as a type of microaggression. He felt as if her actions displayed her belief that she did not want to “sit by a Black boy,” even if that meant standing until she reached her desired location on campus. As the research participants moved between spaces at BGU, they felt as if they were seen only as a person of color. For example within the different social spaces they occupied at BGU, they had feelings of awkwardness and felt as if they did not belong as they were subjugated to the watchful gaze of their White peers. Spaces work to reinforce and constitute race because of the meaning and spatial practices at work to oppress groups with no agency (Leaven, 2003). At BGU and other PWIs, race acts a type of militant particularism (Harvey, 2011) at work to maintain order at BGU and produce universal thoughts and actions to uphold Whiteness as a valued property (Harris, 1993); the norm.

Additionally, the meaning ascribed to an individual’s racial identity upholds racism at PWIs and continues endemic racialized spatial practices. As a militant

particularism, race works to depict meaning and ideologies within spaces as immovable forces benefitting the dominant White culture. The reinforcement of racism within spaces is experienced by the research participants as they moved within the academic, social and athletic spaces of BGU. They are in a state of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903; 2003) and are trying to negotiate their identities. They must realize such confusion about their identities exists because the spaces of BGU and their purposes were created by the dominant White culture. In short, the spaces of BGU were designed to value Whiteness (Harris, 1993) and foster spatial practices that would work to maintain it as the norm. This is why regardless of the spaces the research participants move within, they will always be an outsider because race, and its racialized meanings and ideologies, is a spatial expression (Delaney, 2002) of the PWI.

### **Representations of Space: Just Be Great**

BGU is an example of Lefebvre's (1991) representations of space about an institution of higher education. The institution personifies the abstract imagery; thoughts, ideals and perceptions one would have about the role and physical environment of an institution of higher education. Furthermore, institutions of higher education have long been perceived as places for individuals to grow, explore, and develop personally en route to desired career achievement (Chickering, 1969; 1993). As an institution, BGU tries to foster many of the same laurels as other Southern PWIs. Academic excellence, athletic excellence and career success are all lofty offerings the

institutions offer in their recruitment of potential students. It is important to remember that BGU is a PWI, and Whiteness is a valued property (Harris, 1993) at the institution. As such, the decision-making process of administration that occurs at the institution favors the dominant White culture. Representations of space at BGU are created by the dominant White culture and those who are not members of the culture, such as the research participants, are left trying to understand spaces at BGU that were never created for them.

### **Representational Spaces at BGU: Insider or Outsider**

Another make-up of Lefebvre's triad of space is spaces of representation or representational spaces. This idea proposes that individuals are trying to understand and shape their realities based on their everyday experiences and interactions within space. Moreover, this is done in relation to those who possess agency (Leaven, 2003). Because of the occurring social practices (Merrifield, 2003) that are at work, individuals within the space grapple with how to comprehend their lived experiences and affinity with the dominant White culture. In short, they are left trying to perceive their roles and questioning what is being perceived about them. This contention with their perceived self and what is perceived about them is experienced by the participants in this study. They often find themselves trying to find their accepted place within the different representations of space at BGU.

As the research participants moved within the different spaces of BGU, we learn through their personal narratives they are constantly negotiating their identities and are in a state of double consciousness (Dubois, 1903). For example at the beginning of the research study, they shared empowering perceptions about themselves such as scholar, outgoing, goal-driven individuals, trailblazers and men of faith; yet, they feel as if the dominant White culture perceives them only as students of color or athletes. When they occupy different social spaces at BGU, they perceive themselves as traditional 19-23 year-old college students enjoying the night life; yet, other White students perceive them as outsiders who are not welcome and do not belong at the venue. Having to experience such varied personal and outward perceptions about their identities leaves the research participants uncertain about their affinity to BGU and negotiating their sense of belonging. Because the dominant White culture at BGU possesses agency (Leaven, 2003), their perceptions often supersede those of the research participants. Regardless if it's in the classroom or in their respective sports, the research participants are trying to understand their value within the spaces.

### **Spatial Practices: To Critique or Sustain Space**

The final element to Lefebvre's (1991) theory on space is that of spatial practices. While representational spaces centers on how individuals come to understand their realities within the representations of space they occupy, spatial practices examine the everyday routines and actions that occur within a space. Additionally, spatial practices

are used in order to sustain a space or can be used to challenge a space. If those who occupy a space choose to believe the identities created by those who possess agency (Leaven, 2003) and adhere to their ascribed expectations of performance, then the space and the meaning will remain. However if those who are the targets of oppression (Leaven, 2003) within a space choose to challenge or critique the meaning is constructed, then it is possible for the space to be eradicated. Moreover, there is a chance for the spatial practices to be more favorable for those who are oppressed. As noted by Lefebvre (1991):

Socio-political contradictions are realized spatially. The contradictions of space thus make the contradictions of social relations operative. In other words, spatial contradictions 'express' conflicts between socio-political interests and forces: it is only in space that such conflicts come effectively into play, and in so doing they become contradictions of space (365, *italics in original*).

At times, the research participants either upheld or challenged the spatial practices they encountered within the spaces of BGU.

For example, Michael upheld the identity his group member had about the ghetto, which personally affected him because of his family members who live in a poverty-stricken area in a large metropolitan city; when he chose not to question his group member when she referenced the ghetto in a negative manner. Instead, he remained silent. When his White peers decided not to acknowledge or ask for his input when working on their group biology project, David remained silent and solved the problem on his own. He helped to uphold the identity the research participants felt the

dominant White culture felt about them within the space of academics; neither students of color nor athletes are academically gifted. Or in the space of sports where they research participants feel as if they are underappreciated, overworked and valued for only their athletic labor, the research participants still chose to participate in sports at BGU. Many times throughout their personal narratives of describing their experiences at BGU, the research participants could identify the negative meaning ascribed to their identities; yet, they failed to recognize their own spatial practices which helped uphold the meaning about their identities. Furthermore, they did not verbally distinguish how their silence helped permeate such meaning about their identities within the spaces at BGU. It seems as if they perceived Whiteness as beneficial and needed for their own personal achievements.

There were also times in their narratives that the research participants felt as if they challenged the negative identities and meaning occurring within spaces at BGU. For example by remaining silent in his group project and not arguing with his White group member within the space of academics, Michael felt as if he challenged her perceptions about Blacks in the ghetto because he remained silent and did not agree with her. And by solving the biology problem on his own, David felt as if he challenged the perceptions about him as a person of color and athlete by solving the problem independently from the group. Additionally, all of the research participants felt as if they challenged the identities about them within the space of sports at BGU. As

mentioned by Brandon, their ability to stay enrolled and choosing to succeed academically and athletically meant they were able to “block out all the noise” and remain committed to their own personal goals of obtaining an education, playing sports and winning. Whether they choose to remain silent or challenge the meaning about their identities within the spaces of BGU, the continuation or eradication of a space is actually contingent upon the research participants and their spatial practices.

The other framework used in the study is Critical Race Theory. For this study, it helped to elicit the personal narratives of the research participants in order to understand their experiences at BGU. As an analytical framework, CRT also challenges and critiques how Whiteness is a coveted property (Harris, 1993) at BGU. This theory helps to explain how BGU is a racialized political system that has a history of being unwelcoming to students of color. Throughout their narratives, the research participants described how they experience feelings of otherness in relation to the dominant White culture. As captured in the tenets of CRT, racism is historicized and endemic to society, and it is prevalent within the spaces of BGU. Furthermore, CRT helps to better understand the research participants and even their parents' belief that racism is common at the institution.

The research participants and their families knew they were entering into a racialized institution with a past full of discriminatory spatial practices. As such, this belief helped them temper their responses and reactions to the racialized

microaggressions they experienced at BGU. For example, when George and his friend were called the n-word or when Keith caught his White teammates and coaches talking about him, they understood such treatment to be the normalized culture at BGU and did not challenge the spatial practices they deemed racialized. Their responses are troubling and problematic because if they fail to push for change and challenge the endemic racial practices at BGU, the racism and racial practices will continue within the institution's spaces. Furthermore, CRT calls for racism to be eradicated and not tempered. Even Brandon's response of saying he chose to "block out all the noise," including racialized microaggressions, allows for the continuation of racialized practices within the spaces of BGU. Much to my personal dismay during this research study, I found the research participants expected, experienced and knew of racialized spatial practices at BGU. However, they often failed to vocally question those who engaged in such acts against them.

### **Implications for Practice and Recommendations for Research**

This study sheds light on the importance of conducting qualitative research that focuses on the experiences of Black male athletes attending a PWI. Since the time of integration of public schools, there have been great strides made for Blacks to obtain a higher education. However, there are still issues for institutions to consider about the experiences of Blacks and other minorities who choose to enroll at the schools, especially PWIs. At these institutions, race matters to the overall culture of the school.

In fact, PWIs must recognize that race is the central axis (Brunsma et al., 2013) of these institutions because Whiteness was a valued property (Harris, 1993) in the schools' founding principles. As shown in the data, such value awarded to Whiteness is still prevalent in the spaces of PWIs today and exist to uphold racialized ideologies.

It is time for PWIs like BGU, the University of Missouri and those mentioned in the composite of research to genuinely seek answers as to why race remains problematic within their spaces. They must take a more vocal stance against racialized practices and ideologies at their campuses and admit everyone is not treated fairly or equally. These institutions can begin by examining the racialized spatial practices occurring at the schools and how they maintain the representations of space. Although Blacks and other students of color have access to the PWIs, they still feel disenfranchised and such feelings are expressed in the narratives of the research participants in this study. Even within the space where they were chosen to represent the school, sports, the research participants felt like outsiders to BGU. Since race is an extension of the spaces (Vélez & Solorzano, 2017) at BGU and other PWIs, the only identity ascribed by the dominant White culture that makes them feel as if they belong is that of an athlete. By choosing to acknowledge only this identity of the research participants, their White faculty, peers, coaches and teammates are interacting with a fragmented identity about a group of individuals. Moreover, it is a fragmented identity the dominant White culture at BGU helped create.

After collecting and analyzing the data for this research, there are areas of consideration I would incorporate in future research designs. I would include more research participants to increase my sample size. After conducting interviews during the pilot study and this research study, I know that building rapport and trust with the research participants is imperative before engaging in this type of research. Since building those relationships with the research participants occurred over an extended period of time, I did not develop a relationship with additional research participants for this study. And from my interactions with the research participants both prior and during the interviews, I observed that athletes are very guarded with individuals whom they did not know. If I did not have a prior relationship with the Black male athletes in this study, I do not believe I would have the needed data to properly capture their narratives nor share their spatial experiences at BGU. Furthermore, I do not believe they would have been as forthcoming or comfortable sharing their experiences with me. On a larger scale, I would open up the study to include another PWI and Black male research participants across all sports and learn if their experiences mirror those of the Black male athletes at BGU.

Another recommendation for future research is to open the study up to Black female athletes at a PWI. It would be interesting to learn of their experiences at the institution and how they: (a) perceive their identities within the spaces at the PWI; (b) interactions with the dominant White culture; (c) interactions with fellow Black male

athletes at the PWI; (d) their perceptions of beauty and sexuality within the space of sports. I admit learning about the latter is of particular personal interest to me. As a mother whose daughter is active in sports, we have had discussions about the appropriate body image, weight, attire and beauty image for 'girls' who participate in sports. Through our dialogue I noticed that girls her age who participate in sports seem to have binary thoughts about their participation in sports. If they are competitive in their sports; then they are perceived as being 'boyish'. Furthermore, this means that no 'boy' at the school will like them. If they fail to compete, they are not athletic like 'boys' and considered weak. These experiences during elementary and secondary years could possibly inform future research about the struggles and experiences of collegiate female athletes.

During the interviews, the research participants shared they spend a vast majority of their time at the athletic facilities dedicated to their sports. For future research purposes, I would seek to understand the research participants' perceptions of themselves within the physical spaces they occupy. I would incorporate physical maps into the study of different campus landmarks and physical places to ask them about their personal experiences of occupying those spaces. I would be interested in learning: what the physical spaces represent to the research participants; what words they use to describe these physical spaces; and how they utilize these spaces. This approach to understanding the research participants' experiences at a PWI like BGU would be

combined with the design of the study to understand how they spatially constitute their identities at BGU.

## **Conclusion**

Both space and Critical Race Theory are used to explore the research participants' experiences as students of color and athletes at BGU. CRT helps to understand how the institution of education within American society has a past filled with racism from its creation and throughout its practices. Even today, institutions of higher education such as BGU still allow racism to exist. Racialized acts and practices permeate the spaces of the institution to favor one particular group of individuals while suppressing another group. At a PWI such as BGU, it is the dominant White culture that is normal while other groups are considered abnormal; like the research participants. Regardless of the spaces they occupy at BGU, their identities have to be negotiated; seemingly validated by the dominant White culture. The perceptions about the research participants from the dominant White culture only values them for what they can produce or if the production is also beneficial to the dominant White culture. It is only through the research participants' actions, their spatial practices, and their responses to the meaning within spaces will the change they see needed occur within the racialized spaces of BGU. The research participants have a commanding platform at BGU. They are both students of color and student athletes. As student athletes, they uphold BGU's lucrative empire of sports and its national notoriety. Once the research

participants realize they possess this agency and have a voice for change, such racialized spaces they discussed in their narratives can be eradicated.

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## **APPENDIX A**

Institutional Review Board Approval Pilot Study

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS  
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

**I. Identifying Information**

|             | Principal Investigator | Second Investigator | Third Investigator |
|-------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Names:      | Lentasha Smith         |                     |                    |
| Department: | ELPTS                  |                     |                    |
| College:    | Education              |                     |                    |
| University: | University of Alabama  |                     |                    |
| Address:    | Box 320293             |                     |                    |
| Telephone:  | 205-348-3848           |                     |                    |
| FAX:        | 205-348-3852           |                     |                    |
| E-mail:     | lentashasmith@ua.edu   |                     |                    |

Title of Research Project: Playing for Keeps: Understanding the Experiences of African-American Male Athletes at The University of Alabama

Date Submitted:

Funding Source: None

|   |                              |                                   |   |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Type of Proposal  | <input type="checkbox"/> New | <input type="checkbox"/> Revision | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Renewal<br><small>Please attach a renewal application</small> |
|   |                              |                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Completed  |
|   |                              |                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Exempt   |
| <small>Please attach a continuing review of studies form</small><br><small>Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page</small> |                              |                                   |   |

UA faculty or staff member signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):**

Type of Review:  Full board  Expedited

**IRB Action:**

Rejected Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Tabled Pending Revisions Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved Pending Revisions Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved - this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 11-16-48

Items approved:  Research protocol (dated \_\_\_\_\_)

Informed consent (dated \_\_\_\_\_)

Recruitment materials (dated \_\_\_\_\_)

Other (dated \_\_\_\_\_)

## **APPENDIX B**

Institutional Review Board Dissertation Study Approval



August 16, 2016

LaTasha Smith, M.A.  
ELPTS  
College of Education  
University of Alabama  
Box 870118

Re: IRB # 13-OR-288-R3 "Playing for Keeps: Understanding the Experiences of African-American Male Athletes at The University of Alabama"

Dear Ms. Smith:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application.

Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

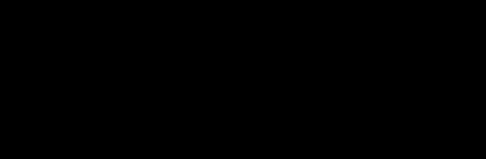
*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on August 15, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.



158 Rose Administration Building  
Box 870127  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127  
(205) 348-8461  
fax (205) 348-7189  
TOLL FREE (877) 829-3066

IRB Project #: 13-DR-288-R3

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS  
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

I. Identifying information

|             | Principal Investigator | Second Investigator | Third Investigator |
|-------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Names:      | Latasha Smith          |                     |                    |
| Department: | ELPTS                  |                     |                    |
| College:    | Education              |                     |                    |
| University: | University of Alabama  |                     |                    |
| Address:    | Box 870293             |                     |                    |
| Telephone:  | 205-348-5848           |                     |                    |
| FAX:        | 205-348-5852           |                     |                    |
| E-mail:     | tashasmith@ua.ua.edu   |                     |                    |

Title of Research Project: Playing for Keeps: Understanding the Experiences of African-American Male Athletes at The University of Alabama

Date Submitted:

Funding Source: None

|  |                              |                                   |  |                                    |                                 |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Type of Proposal                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> New | <input type="checkbox"/> Revision | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Renewal<br>Please attach a renewal application | <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | <input type="checkbox"/> Exempt |
| Please attach a continuing review of studies form      |                              |                                   |  |                                    |                                 |
| Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page |                              |                                   |  |                                    |                                 |

UA faculty or staff member signature: \_\_\_\_\_

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review: Full board Expedited

IRB Action:

Rejected Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Tabled Pending Revisions Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved Pending Revisions Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved-This proposal complies with University and Federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 8/15/17

Items approved:  Research protocol (dated \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Informed consent (dated \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Recruitment materials (dated \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Other (dated \_\_\_\_\_)

## **APPENDIX C**

Recruitment Email

**Email Subject Line:** Invitation to Participate in Research on Black Male Athletes' Experiences at Be Great University.

Hello (participant's name here):

This is Ms. Tasha, your instructor from (course name) in which you were enrolled during my time at Be Great University.

I am conducting research on the experiences of Black male student athletes at Be Great University who are at least 19 years of age. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary and if you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

As a participant of this study, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview with me. The interview will take place at a location of your choice and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only. All participants will receive a copy of the transcribed interview and have the opportunity to discuss the interpretation of the interview. If you would like to know more information about this study, please contact me at the information listed below.

Sincerely,

Tasha Smith  
The University of Alabama, doctoral student

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Informed Consent Form**

**Participants:** Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

**Title of Project** – “More Than A Game: Understanding the Subjectivities of Black Male Athletes Through Space and Race at a PWI.”

**Primary Investigator**

Tasha Smith, doctoral student

College of Education

**Area:** Social and Cultural Studies

**Secondary Investigator**

Dr. Nirmala Erevelles

College of Education

Department of Educational

Leadership, Policy, and

Technology Studies Leadership,

Policy, and Tech Studies

**Area:** Multicultural Education,

Disability Studies; Sociology of

Education

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[nerevell@bamaed.ua.edu](mailto:nerevell@bamaed.ua.edu)

Please read this document and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by a doctoral student in social and cultural studies of Education at The University of Alabama. This study is part of a larger research project and will be overseen by the secondary investigator.

**Background Information:**

This study explores the experiences of Black male student athletes at Be Great University. In this study, Black male athletes will be interviewed about student life at Be Great University campus.

**Procedure:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in an audio-recorded interview in which you will be asked questions about your experiences as Black male student athletes at Be Great University. Each interview should take between 45-60 minutes. Your audio-recorded interview will be transcribed in full.

During the course of the study, all audio-recorded interviews will be in a locked safe at the residence of the primary researcher. A follow-up interview may be needed to address additional questions or concerns by the primary researcher or research participants.

**What is this study about?**

The purpose of this study is to understand how Black male student athletes at Be Great University adjust to campus as both full-time students and athletes.

**Why is this study important—What good will the results do?**

The findings can help the campus environment (staff, faculty, fellow students, etc.) understand the challenges of Black male athletes and help them as they adjust.

**Why have I been asked to take part in this study?**

You have been identified and contacted by the researcher based on previous contact with the principal investigator and referrals only. You are a Black male student athlete at Be Great University.

**How many other people will be in this study?**

There will be a minimum of 3 and maximum of 10 Black male student athletes participating in the study.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will interview you in a place of your own choosing about your experiences as a Black male student athlete at Be Great University. The interview will be conversational with questions about your life on campus as a student and an athlete. I would like to audiotape the interview to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be taped, simply tell me, and I will take handwritten notes.

**How much time will I spend being in this study?**

The initial interview should last about 45-60 minutes, depending on how much information about your experiences you choose to share. If needed, we may have a second interview that will last about 40 minutes.

**Will being in this study cost me anything?**

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

**Will I be compensated for being in this study?**

No.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

You are free to decide where the researcher will visit you so we can talk without being overheard. I will visit you in the privacy of a location that is most convenient for you. During the interview, you may refuse to answer a particular question or not share information as you see fit.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study?**

The only alternative is not to participate.

**What are my rights as a participant?**

Being in this study is totally voluntary. It is your free choice. You may choose not to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. All audio recordings and written text will be destroyed. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationship with The University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Risks of Being in the Study:**

There is minimal to no risk if you are involved in this study. If you had a difficult experience that you share during the interview, you may experience heightened anxiety, stress, or sadness when sharing that experience with the interviewer. If this occurs, you will be given time to collect yourself before continuing, if you desire to do so. You can also control this possibility by not being in the study, by refusing to answer a particular question, or by not telling us things you find to be sad or stressful. In addition if you inquire about mental health services, I will refer you to campus counselors which are available for Be Great University students should you desire to take advantage of them. Seeing the counselor would be at your own expense.

**Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study may have the following benefit: While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, you may find it encouraging that the research may have the opportunity to help members of Be Great University community understand the experiences that you have on campus. Your participation in this study provides you

with the opportunity to share your experiences in a way to assist in policy and program changes for a more inclusive, culturally aware campus life for all students at Be Great University.

**Confidentiality:**

The transcripts of your interview will have all personally identifiable information removed. Your transcript will be assigned a number and a pseudonym of your choice as a way to separate it from other transcripts. Additional measures of confidentiality will include reasonable steps to ensure the only persons with access to research records are the primary researchers, Institutional Review Board (IRB) professionals and other persons or agencies required by law. Such steps include using pseudonyms chosen by each participant in place of participant names and storing all research material in a locked safe at the residence of the primary researcher. Upon completion of the primary researcher's study, all research material will remain in a locked safe for six months, at which time it will be shredded and discarded by the primary researcher. Audio-taped interviews will also be destroyed one month after transcription. This information may be published, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researchers conducting this study are: Tasha Smith, a doctoral student in social and cultural studies at The University of Alabama and Dr. Nirmala Erevelles, Professor of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Technology Studies at The University of Alabama.

You may ask any questions you have now by contacting the researchers.

If you have questions about this study, you may contact the primary researcher at [tashasmith@sa.ua.edu](mailto:tashasmith@sa.ua.edu). You may also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Nirmala Erevelles, at (205)-348-1179, or by email at [nerevell@bamaed.ua.edu](mailto:nerevell@bamaed.ua.edu).

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer at the University of Alabama, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Tasha Smith for a copy of it. You may also e-mail the IRB Outreach Office at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

**Statement of Consent:**

Please check the statements below to indicate your consent to participate in this study:

- I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
  - I understand that I must be at least 19 years of age to participate in this study.
  - I have received a copy of this document to save for my records.
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Signature of Participant

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Signature of Primary Researcher

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**Audio Taping Consent**

As mentioned above, the individual qualitative interview will be audio recorded for research purposes to describe the experiences as a Black male student athlete at The University of Alabama. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and only available to Tasha Smith (the primary investigator). We will only keep these tapes for no more than twelve months and will destroy them after they have been transcribed.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audio-taped and I give my permission to the research team to record the interview.

- Yes, my participation in this interview can be audio recorded.

- No, I do not want my participation in this interview to be audio recorded.
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#### **Permission to Re-Contact Study Participants**

Once study participants complete their interviews, the primary researcher will transcribe all interviews into text. Should the researcher need clarification on statements made by study participants, it may be necessary for the researcher to re-contact you for clarification purposes. Your permission is necessary before the primary researcher can contact you. Please indicate below whether or not you give the researcher permission to re-contact you.

- Yes, I give permission to the researcher to contact me should she needs me to clarify any statements made during my interview.
- No, I do not give permission to the researcher to contact me again after I have completed my interview.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Interview Protocol (Research Participants)**

## **Interview Method and Protocol**

### **Method: Interviews**

- Start each interview with an introduction of the interviewer, an introduction to the study, and a review of the informed consent form. Allow time for study participants to ask questions. Ask again if recording the interview is acceptable to the study participant before beginning the interview.
- Each interview is planned to be 60 minutes long and will take place at a location of the study participant's choosing. The location chosen by the study participant will be a private room that is conducive for a confidential one-on-one interview with the primary investigator. Schedule 2 hour blocks for each interview to allow for a review of the informed consent and for participants who speak at greater lengths about their experiences.
- All interview questions will be general and open-ended in nature.
- The same interview questions will be used for every interview.
- Use probe questions to clarify participant responses (Ex. Would you give me an example? In what ways? What do you mean by that? Would you explain that further?)
- Upon completion of the interview, that the study participant for their participation, ask them if they have any questions and reassure them again of their confidentiality.

## **Interview Questions**

### **Topic: Lived experiences of Black Male Student Athletes at BGU?**

- Why did you volunteer to participate in this study?
- Share with me how you were recruited to BGU to be a student athlete?
- What was the recruitment process like?
- What type of feelings and emotions did you possess during this process?
- Describe your experiences as a student athlete at BGU?
- Tell me about a typical day on campus for you.
- What are some challenges you face as an athlete?
- What would you most like classmates, professors, administrators, family to know about your experiences as a student athlete at BGU?
- Do you consider yourself different? Why?

### **Topic: Black Male Student Athletes experiences at BGU**

- Have you experienced barriers to your goals due to being identified as a student athlete? If so, how did you overcome these barriers?
- How would you describe your experiences being here at BGU?

- What kind of advice did you get about coming here as a student athlete? Who did you get it from?
- Describe your relationship with faculty here.
- Describe your relationship with other BGU students?
- How would you describe your interactions and relationships with students of color?
- How would you describe your interactions with Black female students? White female students? Or there noticeable differences between these two groups?
- To what do you attribute your motivation towards your continual stay at BGU?
- What support systems do you utilize (on and off campus)?
- Are there any organizations or activities on campus that you are involved in? Do you believe that your involvement helps you? How?
- Who do you talk to for advice on a campus?
- Who do you socialize with on campus?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Thank you for your participation.**